

POLK COUNTY URBAN HORTICULTURER NEWSLETTER

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EXTENSION PROGRAMS

I will be giving a talk at Spring Obsession on the status of new lawn cultivars for central Florida. This program will be at Munn Park in Lakeland on March 11th. On the following Saturday, March 25th, at the Extension Office in Bartow, I will be giving a program on “Diagnosing Lawn Problems”.



Anne Yasalonis, our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Coordinator, will also be at Munn Park for Spring Obsession. She is inviting the public to come and purchase a rain barrel which was painted by Polk County school children (\$40.00 for one or \$75.00 for two) or you may buy an unpainted barrel (\$20.00 for one or \$35.00 for two).

Anne has several other programs in March and April: March 14th, 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. “Florida-Friendly Landscape Design” at the Winter Haven Public Library (\$10.00 fee); March 21st, 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., “Butterfly Gardening” at the Larry Jackson Library in Lakeland (free); and April 10th, 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., “Creating a

Rain Barrel” at the Magnolia Building in Lakeland (fee is \$15.00).

TURF

Grassy weed control - Three of the most common grassy weed problems in St. Augustinegrass are crabgrass, basketgrass and Alexandergrass. The control of crabgrass is the same as it has been in previous years. There still is not a post-emergence product on the market which will kill crabgrass plants without damaging the turfgrass. If you have small patches of crabgrass, they can be treated with baking soda or a commercial product called Agralawn Crabgrass Killer which has baking soda and a few other additives including cinnamon. I don't have any information concerning the relative effectiveness of these two products, except that they both will kill crabgrass and a few other grassy weeds excluding Bermudagrass. The cinnamon in the Agralawn product reportedly has something to do with its effectiveness.

Other than baking soda type products or a non-selective product like Roundup which will kill everything, the only alternative is a preemergence type product. These products kill the grassy

weed seed before it germinates, which in central Florida is around February 15th. So, an application would be made in February, early or late depending on the weather, and then again according to label directions - usually about mid-April. Typical preemergence products include Halts and Pre-Em which contain the chemical pendimethalin. Another preemergence product is called Hi-Yield Crabgrass Killer which contains Treflan and Balan. These preemergence products are generally available at retail garden centers. The Hi-Yield is available at Peterson's Nursery in Lakeland.

Due to the warmer than usual weather this year, I believe crabgrass has already started to germinate as I have seen small plants in my home lawn. However, the freeze we had on February 14th should have killed these young crabgrass plants allowing the preemergence products to work on viable seed.

Broadleaf weed control - You may have noticed that the 41% liquid form of the product Atrazine, commonly used to spot treat broadleaf weeds in St. Augustinegrass was taken off the homeowner market in 2005. However, there still are a few small bottles of this product at some retail garden centers. This brings up the question of what a homeowner should use to control broadleaf weeds in his St. Augustine lawn.



There are few options for the homeowner to use to control broadleaf weeds in St. Augustinegrass. The product Image will control a few broadleaf weeds, plus a few nutsedges. The herbicide Manor is available, but is out of reach for the homeowner because of cost. Last year, I did see a 4% Atrazine granule in a 5 pound bag for sale in a few retail garden centers for spot treating St. Augustine lawns - this is an option, if available.

Nutsedge control - More bad news on this subject. The product Manage (halosulfuron) which controls most all of the nutsedges (including Kyllinga) and is safe on St. Augustinegrass, will no longer be available in the small packs selling for \$10.00 and covering 1,000 square feet. Image, which controls purple nutsedge, sandspur, and some broadleaves is the next best choice. Another product, named Certainty (sulfosulfuron), has become available for general nutsedge control. It appears to be better than Manage for control of nutsedge, but is not available in small inexpensive packages like Manage.

What's the answer - Unfortunately there is not a cure-all solution. Hiring a commercial pest control operator to spray your St. Augustine lawn for weeds is certainly an option, but is expensive. Another option would be to carefully use the above mentioned products. However, following University of Florida Best Management Practices (BMP) for home lawns certainly will go a long way towards reducing weed growth. The Master Gardeners have an excellent University of Florida book for sale entitled "The Florida Lawn Handbook - Best Management Practices for Your Home Lawn in Florida". These are available here at the Extension Office for \$20.00. This is the latest edition - 2005.

Here are a few BMP recommendations: don't try to grow turf under trees, don't over-fertilize with nitrogen, use a sharp mower blade, don't mow the turf too low, don't remove more than 30% of the leaf blades at a time, use fertilizers with equal amounts of nitrogen and potassium and low phosphorous, do not use "weed and feed" products unless the lawn is evenly covered with weeds, conduct maintenance checkups on your irrigation system, calibrate your irrigation system and follow irrigation recommendations. Circulars with details of these recommendations are available here at the Extension Office or on-line

at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

Florida-friendly Flowers

by Anne Yasalonis
FYN Coordinator

There are many choices at the nurseries and garden centers when it comes to Florida-friendly flowers. When choosing a plant for your landscape it is always important to follow the “right plant, right place” principle. Be aware of your site conditions so that you know what to look for in a plant (light requirements, soil type, etc.). The following Florida-friendly plants are available at local nurseries and garden centers and will be great additions to your low-maintenance landscape.

1. Scarlet Sage (*Salvia coccinea*) Scarlet sage is a perennial that grows 2-3 feet tall. It produces beautiful red flowers all summer long in the full sun. Scarlet sage is very drought tolerant and is also an adult butterfly nectar plant.
2. Blanketflower (*Gaillardia pulchella*) Blanket flower is a perennial that matures at 18-36 inches. It has beautiful daisy-like flowers in yellow, orange and red all summer long. It is an extremely drought tolerant native plant and likes full sun. Gaillardia also serves as an adult nectar plant for butterflies. It will re-seed itself each year.
3. African Iris (*Dietes* spp.) African Iris is a 2-3 foot tall evergreen flowering perennial. Most varieties produce white flowers all year long. They are very drought tolerant and like sandy soil.
4. Scrub Mint (*Conradina* spp.) Scrub Mint is an evergreen flowering perennial that grows to 3 feet tall and wide. It is covered with small pink flowers from spring until fall. The foliage is fragrant on this native plant.
5. Beach Sunflower (*Helianthus debilis*) Beach Sunflower is a low-growing evergreen flowering

perennial. It will grow about 1 ½ feet high and 3-4 feet wide. It is a native plant that is covered with showy yellow flowers year-round.

For more information on Florida-friendly plants contact the Polk County Extension Service and ask for a copy of “Waterwise Florida Landscapes”.

MISC. FEBRUARY GARDENING

Vegetables to plant through mid-February - beet, broccoli, cauliflower, celery, collards, endive, kohlrabi, lettuce, mustard, pea, potato, radish and turnip. After mid-month: bean, cantaloupe, corn, cucumber, eggplant, luffa, pepper, pumpkin, squash, tomato and watermelon.

Flowers to plant - Alyssum, baby’s breath, bacopa, begonia, candytuft carnation, calendula, coneflower, coreopsis, cosmos, dahlia, delphinium, dianthus, diascia, dusty miller, false heather, four o’clock, gaillardia, gaura, gazania, geranium, gerbera, godetia, Johnny-jump-up, licorice plant, lobelia, million bells, nasturtium, pansy, petunia, rose, salvia, snapdragon, Stokes aster, sweet pea, veronica and yarrow.



Herbs to plant - anise, basil, borage, chives, dill, fennel, lemon balm, mint, oregano, parsley, rosemary, sage, sweet marjoram, tarragon and thyme.

Roses - Give the plants a major pruning during the month of February while they are semi-dormant. Remove all dead or diseased parts, then cut the plants back 1/3 to ½. Eliminate all but three to seven canes and remove small

nonproductive shoots.

Citrus pruning - Citrus pruning is best done in mid-February just before spring growth. However, citrus can be pruned any time of the year. Citrus trees have a natural rounded shape so there is not a lot of necessary pruning to be done like in deciduous fruits, other than removing some vigorous shoots within the canopy and also any suckers growing below the graft line. Sometimes homeowners like to keep the trees pruned to a certain height to make picking easy, but heavy pruning will reduce production. I like to remove some of the lowest branches close to the ground to encourage better air circulation which reduces the possibility of fungus attack.



Crape myrtle pruning - It is important to keep in mind that if a cultivar with the desired height was planted in the first place, then little to no pruning would be necessary. However, if a 40 foot crape myrtle was planted in the wrong place, like under utilities wires or under a soffit, now is the time of the year for pruning.

The general pruning recommendations are to remove small stems at the base of the plant, remove all but 3 to 7 main trunks, remove seed pods, and make pruning cuts back to a point along the stem up to an inch in diameter.

The University of Florida is still experimenting with the pruning technique called pollarding in which taller cultivars are cut back to the same place each year. An enlarged knob forms at this point. Researchers are finding that these knobs are very disease resistant. In addition, making these cuts every year at six or seven feet from the ground makes it easier and safer for homeowner pruning. I think it is a look you have to get used to.

Deciduous fruit - now is a good time to plant a deciduous fruit tree. Maybe try one of the new plum cultivars, such as 'Gulfbeauty', 'Gulfblaze' or 'Gulfrose'. From 1998 to 2001, plum cultivars have been released from the University of Florida's breeding program that adapt to our mild winters and high disease pressures. The names of all University of Florida plum cultivars begin with the prefix 'Gulf'. These cultivars are Japanese type plums and have resistance to plum leaf scald and bacterial spot. Fruit size is satisfactory about 1 ½ to 2 inches and fruit quality is good. They ripen in early to late May or about two week before California plums.

Termites - This is the time of the year for subterranean termite swarming. if you find winged termites in your home, then you probably have an infestation inside your home somewhere. For a good discussion of termites refer to my newsletter of February 2005, if you have retained a copy. This newsletter is also on my web site listed below. If you want a copy mailed to you, call my office.

Have a good gardening day,

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For Polk County Gardening Information:
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