

POLK COUNTY URBAN HORTICULTURER NEWSLETTER

November 2006

Volume 06 Number 05

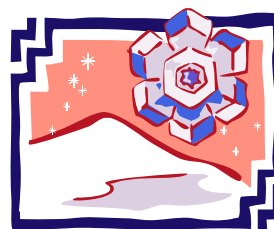
Dear Reader, I have enclosed another order form as I did last month for the 2007 Master Gardener Calendar. Just make sure you don't mistakenly order twice. As you probably know, the calendar is filled with monthly gardening tips, insect advice, and hints on what you should be doing in your garden month-by-month. It makes a great Christmas gift for a newcomer to Florida or an avid gardener. The cost is \$6.00 plus a \$2.00 postage fee. To save on postage, they can also be picked up here at the Extension Office in Bartow.

If you come by the office, make sure you take a few minutes and visit our demonstration gardens. Some of our more recent additions include several species of cold tolerant palms – Pindo palm, Chinese fan palm, European fan palm, Wax palm and Australian fan palm for full sun and Needle palm, Hardy bamboo palm and Radicalis palm for shady areas. I will discuss these beautiful palms next month in more detail.

The Master Gardeners also have just received a new shipment of Melaleuca mulch, which is for sale here at the Extension Office for \$2.50 per bag.

COLD PROTECTION

We are quickly moving toward colder weather. Make sure you have enough sheets, freeze cloth, blankets, etc. to cover all the cold sensitive



plants which you want to protect. When a hard freeze is predicted, water your plants the morning before the predicted freeze. However, you don't want your plants to be wet going into the evening hours. The reason for watering the soil is that moist soil retains heat more readily than dry soil.

Cover plants so that the material goes all the way to the ground. The idea is to trap enough heat under the cover to protect the plant from cold during the night. Place weights on the material on the ground so that it doesn't blow. To further retain heat, the sheets, freeze cloth, etc. can be covered with plastic, however do not cover the plants with just plastic as the plant parts may be frozen where they come in contact with the plastic.

The effectiveness of covering plants depends to some extent on the wind. During freezes with windy weather, the covers tend to be less effective because the wind blows the heat away. During windy freezes, the

addition of plastic sheeting over the cloth may be worth the effort on valuable plants. A light bulb may also be placed under the sheet to give additional heat. Make sure to remove the plastic and the light bulb the next morning.

Valuable potted plants, which you are unable to adequately cover because of their height and/or predicted conditions, may be carefully laid on their side on the ground and then covered with one or two layers of protective material. Several of these plants may be grouped together and placed under an oak tree which will give them addition protection from the cold.

We don't recommend that you use water to protect your landscape from cold weather as do commercial growers. A substantial and constant flow of water will protect many plants from freezing temperatures. However, residential landscape sprinkler systems do not have the needed flow to protect tender plants. It is true that as water freezes heat is released, thus a continuous coating of ice will keep plant cells at a temperature of about 33 degrees F. The problem occurs when the water is not applied at a fast enough rate to keep the leaf temperature above freezing. As a result, cold damage to plants may be more severe than if nothing was done. Also, running the sprinkler all night wastes a large amount of water which would be quite expensive.

FALL ANNUALS

Garden centers are full of cold season annuals including pansies, snapdragons and petunias. They can be used in many ways – old flower beds, hanging baskets, planters and dish gardens. These plants like cold weather and can even withstand light freezes.

Before planting, remove all the older planting from the soil. Add lots of organic matter such as peat moss and composted manure (2-3 inches). Also, add two pounds of a garden fertilizer such as 6-6-6 per 100 square feet of soil. Try to find fertilizers which are low in phosphorous and contain slow release nitrogen. Till the fertilizer and the organic matter into the soil to a depth of six inches. Be careful not to set the plants too deep. Moisten the soil when it becomes dry to the touch and fertilize monthly.



Snapdragons are one of my favorites. Small, medium and large cultivars are available to fit most gardening needs. They come in most colors except blue. Snapdragons should be grown in full sun to

lightly shaded areas. Make sure to stake taller varieties to prevent wind damage. They should be fertilized once a month with a good garden fertilizer. Remove old flower heads to encourage new blooms. Control caterpillars with B.t. and aphids with a spray of Ivory soap and water.

Annuals can be damaged by nematodes. These are small microscopic worms present in most Florida soils and can be very damaging to many plants including annuals. It is best not to grow the same plant in the same place every year. The addition of compost each year will help suppress nematode injury to plants by encouraging the plants to be healthy and subsequently more tolerant to nematodes. High organic matter in soils also encourages the growth of predaceous nematodes – nematodes which feed on plant parasitic nematodes. Soil solarization will help control nematodes and is about the only other option for the homeowner.

TURF

Sod renovation - Now is a good time to replace those voids in your St. Augustine turfgrass. This is a time of the year when drought stress is minimal. Spray the area with a non-specific herbicide like Roundup to kill unwanted weeds. Wait 7-10 days and then remove all dead grass and weeds. If you have a typical droughty soil, it is a good idea to amend the area with organic matter such as peat moss and composted manure. A water soluble nitrogen fertilizer, such as Milorganite, could be added to the soil. Till the area to a depth of 6-8 inches.

It is a good idea to check the pH at this time and add lime or sulfur if necessary. St. Augustinegrass does best at a pH of 6.5 and Bahiagrass does best at a pH of 5.5. The Master Gardeners conduct soil pH tests once a week on Thursdays at the Extension Office in Bartow for the general public. There is a small \$3.00 fee per sample. You may send or bring in the sample to the Extension Office any time, Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Results of the soil test, with recommendations, will be mailed to you. Or, you can directly send a soil sample to the University of Florida Soils Laboratory in Gainesville. Results from the UF Soil Laboratory will be sent directly to you within 2-3 weeks. Check with me for more details.

Before laying sod or planting plugs, wet the soil well. Make sure you buy good quality sod. Look for weeds such as Bermudagrass which is next to impossible to get rid of after it becomes well established. Keep the soil moist, but not over-watered. In 2-3 weeks apply a slow release fertilizer at the rate of ½ pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet. Watch for chinch bugs and sod web worms as they still may be active.

FALL VEGETABLE GARDENING

Double cropping - I expect some of you gardeners are harvesting snap beans, cucumbers and summer squash that were planted in August and September. After harvest, don't let the ground stand idle. There are more vegetables to be planted in the fall than any other time of the year which will survive cold weather such as cabbage, lettuce, broccoli, Brussels' sprouts, beets, carrots, onions and more. This is called double-cropping.



Remember to follow the first crop with a crop from a different family (beans followed by cabbage). Call the Extension Office and request a copy of the “Vegetable Planting Guide”.

Thinning seedlings – This is one of the most important garden operations. It is difficult to sow small seeds far enough apart to permit the plants to make the best development. Carrots for instance should be thinned when they are 2-3 inches tall, so that they are about 1 inch apart. They may be left until they are ready to be eaten, when alternate plants may be pulled out leaving room for others to grow. Pull surplus turnips when they are 4-5 inches tall and use for greens. Turnips, rutabagas and other root crops should be thinned when the tap root becomes fleshy. Onion from seed and radishes may be left in the ground until those that are thinned are large enough to eat. Plants thinned from beet rows may be used for greens.

Mulching – Add a small amount of mulch to keep new seeds and plants moist. There are a number of readily available mulches



such as hay, pine straw, leaves, saw dust, wood shavings, pine bark, newspapers and black or colored plastic.

Fertilizing – Fertilize monthly with organic matter or garden fertilizer. It is sometimes a good idea to use a garden fertilizer with micro-nutrients because organic matter usually does not contain essential plant micro-nutrients.

Pests – There are several worms which attack Cole crops (cabbage, broccoli, etc.) which may need to be controlled. B.t. or Thuricide works quite well. Stay alert for other pests which may be present after planting. Pick off these pests or use natural controls. Safer soap or dish soap works well for aphids and white flies. Baking soda mixed with horticultural oil works well for control of powdery mildew and black spot of roses (4 teaspoons baking soda mixed with one ounce of horticultural oil per gallon water).

MISC. NOVEMBER GARDENING

Vegetables to plant – Beets, broccoli, Brussels' sprouts, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, Chinese cabbage, collards, endive, kale, kohlrabi, lettuce, mustard, onions, peas, radicchio, radishes, rutabagas, spinach, Swiss chard and turnips.

Herbs to plant – Anise, arugula, basil, borage, chive, cardamom, chervil, cilantro, coriander, dill, fennel, garlic, ginger, lemon balm, lovage, Mexican tarragon, mint, nasturtium, oregano, parsley, rosemary, sage, sweet marjoram, thyme and water cress.

Flowers to plant – Ageratum, alyssum, baby's breath, black-eyed Susan, bush daisy, calendula, California poppy, carnation, cat's whiskers, chrysanthemum, cleome, cornflower, delphinium, dianthus, dusty miller, foxglove, gaillardia, geranium, goldenrod, heliotrope, hollyhocks, Iceland poppy, impatiens, larkspur, lobelia, ornamental cabbage, kale, pansy, phlox, salvia, Shasta daisy, snapdragon, stock, sweet pea, verbena, viola and wax begonia.

Citrus greening – The situation is pretty much the same as a few months ago. The citrus psyllid, the insect which carries citrus greening bacterium, is here in Polk County. I have not heard of any citrus trees having been positively diagnosed with the citrus greening disease, yet.

As I have previously mentioned, this disease ruins the fruit only after a couple of years and kills the tree within 6 years. At this time, the possibility of homeowners controlling this pest on their trees is not good. If you want more information, give me a call at the Extension Office.

Have a good gardening day,

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For gardening information:
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