

Polk County Urban Horticulturer Newsletter

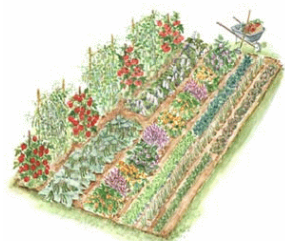
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Dear Reader,

The Master Gardeners have potted pond cypress and slash pines for sale at the Extension Office. The price is \$3.00 per tree.

FALL GARDENING



Garden design - The summer is passing by rapidly and it is already time to start thinking about the fall garden. If you do not already have a garden spot, select an area that receives at least 6 hours of direct sunlight per day. You then need to make a garden design. Group crops by similar planting and harvest dates in order to keep the entire garden in production as long as possible. Arrange low growing vegetables such as radish, turnips, mustard, and lettuce along one side of the garden, place the medium to tall-growing plants such as peppers, bush beans, and squash in the middle of the garden, and the tall-growing vegetables such as pole beans, sweet corn, and stake tomatoes along the other side. These arrangements minimize

the effects of shading.

More than one crop, each requiring about the same spacing, may be planted in one row. For example, you could have bush beans, lima beans, and Southern peas all planted one after the other in the same row. Run rows north and south so that exposure to sunlight is even for all rows and plants. Interplant quick growing crops like radish among the slower ones. The fast growing radishes are out of the way before the longer-growing crops need the space. Allow ample space between rows for convenient cultivation with the tool you plan to use.

Design your garden using crop rotation. This practice prevents diseases from living over from season to season. Try to avoid growing the same vegetable in the same location more often than once every three years.

Use stakes, string, and a tape measure to lay out straight rows. Follow your previously prepared plan. Place a garden label at the head of each row. Information on the label should include crop, variety, and planting date. Utilize the fence around the garden to trellis vining crops such as cucumbers and pole beans. Don't plant too much of one

crop at a time. To have fresh produce over a long period of time, plant smaller amounts of the same crop at 10-14 day intervals. It is even possible to double crop. This is when one crop is followed by another crop in the same place. However, when doing this the second crop should be of a different family, such as beans followed by broccoli.

Soil preparation - The first thing to do is have the soil tested. These tests will determine the level of available phosphorous, potassium, calcium and magnesium as well as pH. The pH reflects the acidity and alkalinity of the soil. It is evaluated on a scale of 1-14 (1 being the most acid, 7 being neutral, and 14 being the most alkaline). Vegetables need the soil to have a pH of from 5.8 to 6.5 (slight acidic). If the soil test indicates that the pH is below 5.5, then you should add 2-3 pounds of lime or dolomite per 100 square feet. Don't just add lime because it seems reasonable to do so, it may make the situation worse. **Don't Guess - Soil Test.**

About three weeks before planting time, broadcast a complete fertilizer such as 8-8-8 with micronutrients (2-3 lbs per 100 sq feet) over the soil surface, along with dolomite to raise pH if needed. Composted manure is a good organic material to also incorporate into the soil (25 pounds per 100 sq feet). The manure improves the soils capacity to hold water and nutrients around plant roots, it helps maintain a stable pH, and it supports beneficial bacteria and other necessary micro-organisms. The garden area should then be rototilled or spaded to a depth of 6-8 inches and leveled.

For those of you who have just about given up on raising tomatoes in the garden because of root knot nematodes, I suggest trying container gardening. A five gallon bucket can be used or perhaps a commercial Earth

Box. However, I have found a five gallon bucket to work quite well. Drill several holes in the bottom of the bucket for drainage and fill 3/4 full of a good potting soil. Place one tomato transplant in each bucket. Plant one or two plants in September, October, November and December. Keep the soil moist, but not too wet. Fertilize every 10-14 days with a good soluble fertilizer for tomatoes. The plants need to be staked with a substantial rod. I use a narrow gauge re-enforcing bar. The bar needs to be inserted into the soil as far as possible and wired to the upper rim at four points. As the plants grow, they need to be carefully tied to the bar with a gardening tie. The buckets can easily be picked up and moved inside during cold weather. With this technique, tomatoes can be enjoyed all winter.

TREES IN THE LANDSCAPE



Retaining trees in the landscape is very important to the homeowner for numerous reasons. Trees improve the quality of the landscape, they reduce electrical bills, they give off oxygen, they absorb particulate matter (50 lbs. per year - dust), they absorb carbon dioxide, they can protect cold sensitive plants in the landscape during winter and they increase property values just to name a few benefits.

We receive many calls from homeowners concerning the health of their landscape trees. There are a number of reasons why many oak trees, as well as other trees in Polk County die, such as from lightning strikes, flooding, drought, herbicide injury, insects, diseases and probably the worst one - construction. Improper pruning can also lead

to serious tree problems over a period of years.

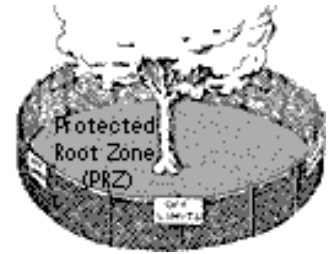
Lightning strikes - As you know, we do have hundreds of lightning strikes in Polk County every summer and sometimes trees are struck. The damage can be very obvious with long splits in the bark exposing the inner wood and there also may be burn marks on the tree. The trees tend to die very quickly and the dead leaves usually remain on the branches for a short period of time after the lightning strike.

Water Issues - Flooding and drought lead to the death of many trees. Last year numerous trees in Polk County were in areas with high water tables, so the roots were in soil saturated with water, which makes the tree more vulnerable to diseases and less able absorb oxygen in the soil. This year we have found ourselves back in a drought situation. Drought can cause the inner wood to shrink and pull away from the outer bark which may leave a split, similar to a split from a lightning strike. This cycle of too much water and too little water can be very stressful to the tree and lead to the tree's decline and death over a period of years.

Construction - In a developing area like Florida, construction can be a leading killer of trees. Many homeowners and contractors do not realize the damage that can be caused to trees by ditching within the drip line for utilities, driving across the drip line with heavy equipment (just walking can compact the soil), storing soil under the drip line which causes compaction, making grade changes of more than a few inches, and spilling chemicals and paints. These are just a few construction activities affecting trees.

The single most important thing that can be done to save a tree in a construction area is to determine which tree(s) are to be saved

and then construct a tree protection zone around each tree with a substantial fence just outside the drip line. Nothing is allowed inside of that fence during the construction phase. In many cases, just protecting the root zone will save the tree from a slow death 5-10 years later.



If you are constructing a new house or having construction on an old house i.e. swimming pools, sidewalks, room additions, new utilities etc., make sure the contractor is aware of tree saving methods before construction begins.

Insect and diseases - Insect infestations do impact the health of trees, but usually the tree is already stressed before the tree is attacked. Most insects do not attack healthy trees with the exception of the Southern Pine beetle which does not occur in Polk County, so far. Two common diseases of ornamental trees, slime flux and Hypoxylon canker, also usually infect trees that are already weakened.

I receive a number of calls from residents who have trees dying on or near their property. They often make the assumption that some fatal tree disease, like sudden oak death, is killing their tree(s) and will spread to other surrounding trees. This has not been the case in Florida so far. Most of the problem has been environmental stress.

Sudden oak death (SOD) has been a problem on oak trees in California. Many fear that this disease will or has already spread to Florida and will decimate our oak trees. The disease organism does infect some shrubby plants like camellias. Some infected plants were accidentally shipped to

Florida from a nursery in California, but upon detection of the disease were immediately destroyed.

I understand this disease will infect Florida live oaks in the laboratory. However, we don't have field research data indicating that this disease will infect oak trees growing out in the environment.

MISC. SEPTEMBER GARDENING

Flowers to plant – Ageratum, angelonia, begonia, blue daze, butterfly weed, cat's



whiskers, celosia, cleome, coleus, coreopsis, cosmos, garden mums, gaura, gazania, gerbera, goldenrod, gomphrena, heliconia,

impatiens, jacobinia, lantana, marigold, melampodium nicotiana, pentas, periwinkle, ruellia, salvia, sunflower, sweet alyssum, torenia, verbena and zinnia.

Herbs to plant - Anise, basil, bay laurel, borage, chive, coriander, dill, lemon balm, lavender, lemon balm, Mexican tarragon, mint, parsley, rosemary, sage, sweet fennel sweet marjoram and thyme.

Vegetables to plant – For the first week or two, plant lima beans, snap beans, corn, cucumber, eggplant, pepper, Southern peas, rhubarb, squash and tomatoes. Toward the end of the month, plant broccoli, cabbage, celery, collards, endives, lettuce, mustard, onions, radishes, strawberries and turnips.

Crape myrtle - Force out another bloom from your crape myrtles by trimming off seed pods that have formed at the end of branches. Prune the seed pods back to a

point about the size of your finger. Crape myrtles often respond with a flush of new growth tipped with flowers.

Shade plants – With all of the hot weather during the last few weeks, I'm sure most of you know the location of the cool shady spots in your landscape. Often times these areas, mostly under trees, have few plants. This is unfortunate, because many plants, excluding turf grass, will grow well in shady locations.

Some plants will give you different shades of green, often with different textures, such as Asiatic jasmine (green and tricolor form), cast iron plant, split leaf philodendrons, ivies and shade loving ginger.

Color can be added to the above greenery with caladiums, bromeliads, coleus, crotons, spider plants and polka dot plants. More color can be added with flowers such as impatiens, begonias, crossandra, achimenes, jacobinia and peace lilies.

Have a good gardening day,

David Shibles
Residential Horticulturist
Polk County Extension Service
P.O. Box 9005, Drawer HS03
Bartow, Florida 33831
(863) 519-8677 Ext. 109

For Polk County Gardening Information:
<http://polkhort.ifas.ufl.edu>

Polk County Web Site:
<http://polk.ifas.ufl.edu>