

POLK COUNTY URBAN HORTICULTURER NEWSLETTER

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Dear Reader, the next time you visit my web site, <http://polkhort.ifas.ufl.edu>, you will notice that I have added a new item to the menu – a to z publications. I have copied the most frequently asked for EDIS circulars by homeowners and saved them on my web site for your convenience. It is often difficult to sort through the hundreds of EDIS circulars to find a specific one. I hope this will enable you to more quickly find answers to your landscaping questions.

EXTENSION PROGRAM

Monday, February 19th, 2:00 - 3:00 p.m. – Workshop.

This workshop will focus on the two principles of Florida Yards and Neighborhoods: Right Plant, Right Place and Watering Efficiently. This is the first in a series of workshops that will provide more focus on the individual principles and how they can be integrated into your yard. The workshop will be held at the Bartow Public Library (2150 S. Broadway Ave.). This workshop is free and no registration is required.

Saturday, March 10th, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. - Spring Obsession.

Attend this annual garden, art and music event to support Common Ground Playground in Lakeland. This event features plant vendors, garden art, educational seminars by local professionals, children's activities and music. Painted and unpainted rain barrels will be for sale again this year! Support local schools by purchasing a barrel painted by kids! There will be a limited supply this year, so come early!

Spring Obsession is held in Munn Park in downtown Lakeland. Call Brooke Pottery at (863) 688-6844 for more information.

BROWN RECLUSE SPIDERS

What do brown recluse spiders look like? The males and females are about the same size. The body, including the legs, is a little wider than a quarter dollar coin. They have a series of markings on the



head and thorax, which look like a violin with the base pointing toward the head. The brown recluse has six eyes arranged in pairs. The male Southern house spider is often confused with the brown recluse, as it has the violin coloration on the head and thorax; however, it has eight eyes all clumped together in the middle of the head rather than six. Another common spider found around the home is the brown widow, which is quite venomous. However, it is not aggressive and seldom bites. They are easily differentiated from the brown recluse because they have a yellow-red hourglass on the bottom side of the abdomen and the egg masses have spines sort of like those of a sand spur.

The brown recluse spider, *Loxosceles* recluse, is frequently reported in Florida as a cause of necrotic lesions in humans. For example, in the year 2000 alone, the Florida Poison Control Center reported nearly 300 alleged brown recluse bites in the state. Ninety-five of these bites were reported in Central Florida under the jurisdiction of the regional poison control center in Tampa. As a matter of fact, a large number of brown recluse bites are reported every year in the Tampa area. In addition, every year I have numerous clients here at the Polk County Extension Office who report to me that they have been bitten by brown recluse spiders.

In spite of all these reports of bites, not one brown recluse spider has been recovered in the Tampa Bay area, including Polk County, other than the Chilean brown recluse spider, which was found in a house in Winter Haven a few years ago. Those spiders were believed to have come in with some building materials.

So, the question is what is causing the necrotic lesions in people in Florida, if it is not brown recluse spiders. Brown recluse

bites cause clear necrotic areas in the skin. If an inflammatory core lesion exists, necrotizing infection should be anticipated, not a spider bite.

A number of other arthropods and an assortment of diseases, some caused by microorganisms such as flesh-destroying bacteria, and some with other causes, are known to produce necrotic or apparent pre-necrotic wounds. These wounds could be tick-induced, viral, bacterial, fungal or caused by a blood disorder, cancer, a reaction to drugs, chemical burns or an underlying disease such as diabetes. Some wounds just can't be explained. For more information, visit my Web site at <http://polkhort.ifas.ufl.edu> and click on A-Z publications where you will find a circular entitled "The Brown Recluse Spider."

TERMITES

This is the month when you may begin to see evidence of termites in or around your home. People often have trouble distinguishing termites from ants. There are, however, distinct differences. Termites have two sets of equal size wings, beaded antennae and the abdomen is broadly joined to the thorax. Ants have elbowed antennae, two sets of different size wings and the connection between the abdomen and thorax is constricted.



Subterranean termites - There are many species of termites, but you only need to be concerned with two general types – the dry wood termite and the subterranean termite. At this time of the year, you may see swarms of subterranean winged adults both indoors and outdoors. They select a mate, fall to the ground and search for a site in the

soil to start a new colony. The male and female adults remain together for many years with the female laying thousands of eggs.

Subterranean termites are everywhere in the landscape feeding on any type of woody material in the soil such as buried wood, dead roots, mulch, etc. They will feed on any mulch containing wood. Melaleuca mulch seems to be the least attractive. The worker termites need high moisture to live and will quickly die when exposed to outside air. However, they can construct mud tubes above the soil which enables them to travel up exterior walls and into buildings through cracks without becoming desiccated.

Subterranean termites are present in most residential landscapes. The presence of the little white worker termites in mulch, in rotting logs or swarming adults outside of your home does not necessarily mean that they will eventually infest your house, but of course it is possible. However, if you see winged adults flying in your house, then you probably have an infestation which will need treatment.

Termite infestations need to be treated by a professional. Call 2-3 reputable companies for a free inspection. If you have questions call the Extension Office. Left untreated, a large subterranean colony can eat up to one pound of wood per day – 365 pounds per year. There are excellent soil insecticide and bait treatments available for control of subterranean termites. This treatment should give your house five or more years of protection from termites. Be sure to ask the company about the warrantee.

Drywood termites - Drywood termites will infest dry wood as the name implies, are not associated with soil and only need minimal

amounts of moisture which they readily find in rafters. They exist in separate small colonies and are not as destructive as subterranean termites; however lack of treatment can lead to serious structural problems. They also have mating flights like subterranean termites. The mated pair search for suitable wood to infest, which might be another rafter in your attic.

The treatment for drywood termites is altogether different from subterranean termites as the infestation is an aerial one not associated with soil, so it is critical to identify the winged adults or the type of damage. An identifying characteristic of drywood termites is the presence of fecal pellets which they push out of the infested wood. The pellets are small (not powder-like), can be different colors from red to white depending on the wood, and have indentations on the sides. If you are unsure of the type of infestation you have, bring a sample to the Extension Office and I will examine it.



The treatment of choice is tenting in which the structure is enclosed in a plastic tarp. After the tarp is secured over the house, a volatile gas is pumped into the structure. The gas penetrates the wood and kills the termites. There is no residual with the gas treatment, so future re-infestation is possible. There are other less expensive treatments in which the suspected wood is drilled and an insecticide is injected into the void occupied by the termites. The problem with the drilling treatment is that colonies can be missed.

What can you do around your home?

- Do not leave wood scraps lying around your yard.

- Do not place mulch up against your foundation – any type of mulch as this increases the capacity of the soil to hold moisture.
- Repair leaky hose bibs.
- Direct sprinklers away from the house.
- Stucco or veneer exterior finish should be 6-8 inches above grade so you can see mud tubes. Subterranean termites will travel up from the soil behind stucco and veneers and on into the house.
- Do not disturb soil around the foundation as this may impact previous termite treatments.
- Watch for drywood termite fecal pellets.
- Repair screens and caulk cracks and crevices in the structure.
- Keep shrubs at least 2-3 feet away from the foundation – termites will travel under foundations following tree roots.

WATER CONSERVATION

By Anne Yasalonis

Florida yards and Neighborhoods Program

As Polk County faces new watering restrictions, it is important that we all do our part to use water efficiently when we irrigate our lawn and landscape. But how can we make this easier? There is new technology being developed to make this task a little bit easier for all of us.

If you have an automatic sprinkler system, it is required that your system have a rain shut-off device so that you are not irrigating when we have had sufficient rainfall. Although these devices work well most of the time, they are often installed improperly or malfunction.

New soil moisture monitors are being tested at the University of Florida that are proving to be much more accurate and can save home and business owners a lot of money. These devices monitor the moisture in the soil and prevent irrigation systems from turning on if sufficient moisture is detected.

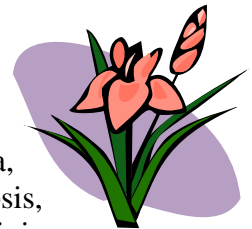
These new devices will not only benefit your bank account, they will also benefit the plant material that is being over watered. Plants are less susceptible to disease and pests and have increased vigor when watered efficiently. In a recent UF study, irrigation systems with soil moisture sensors used an average of 56 percent less water than systems with rain sensors, and 70 percent less water on average than systems without any water saving devices.

If you are interested in more information about soil moisture monitors, contact the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program at the Polk County Extension Service and we can send you information on the most recent products being tested.

MISC. FEBRUARY GARDENING

Vegetables to be planted - Asparagus, beets, broccoli, Brussels' sprouts, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, collards, endive, horseradish, kale, kohlrabi, lettuce, mustard, onion sets, peas, potatoes, radicchio, roquette, rutabagas, spinach, Swiss chard and turnip.

Flowers to be planted – alyssum, baby's breath, begonia, candytuft, carnation, calendula, coneflower, coreopsis, cosmos, dahlia, delphinium, dianthus, dusty miller, false heather, four



o'clock, gaillardia, geranium, gerbera, godetia, Johnny-jump-up, licorice plant, lobelia, 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, parsley, rosemary sage, sweet marjoram, tarragon and thyme.

Crape myrtle pruning –

This is the time of the year to prune crape myrtles. It is important to keep in mind that if a cultivar with the desired height is planted in the first place, then “crape murder” type pruning in which the tops are removed would not be necessary. If you have a tree in the wrong place, then it might be better to remove and replace it rather than cut the top off every year. When you buy new crape myrtles make sure you know the cultivar and expected maximum height. There are several cultivars which reach a maximum of 8-10 feet and are resistant to powdery mildew such as Tonto (fuschia), Acoma (white), Hopi (pink) and Velma’s Royal Delight (purple).



Crape myrtles have a natural shape and when planted in the right place require very little pruning. The only annual pruning required is to thin out the trunks and remove suckers leaving around 3 to 7 permanent trunks. Also, remove dead flowers and fruit structures, along with light thinning and removal of dead and rubbing branches. The removal of seed pods during the summer months does promote faster re-bloom.

Have a good gardening day,

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