POLK COUNTY URBAN HORTICULTURER NEWSLETTER

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UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Creating a Florida Friendly Yard - Anne Yasalonis: Water Conservation, Micro-Irrigation and Plant Installation, Wednesday, July 9th, 6:00 to 8:30 p.m., Champions Gate Golf Clubhouse, 1400 Masters Blvd, Champions Gate.

Creating a Rain Barrel- Anne Yasalonis, Monday, July 14th, 6:00 to 7:00 p.m., Magnolia Building, 702 East Orange Street, Lakeland. **Attendees must pre-register**.

Selection, Planting and Maintenance of Landscape Trees - David Shibles and Carrie Kotal, Saturday, July 26th, 9:30 a.m. to Noon, Polk County Extension Office, 1702 Highway 17 South, Bartow. The program will include an on-site demonstration of proper pruning of oak trees in preparation for possible hurricanes.

Vegetable Gardening Workshop - David Shibles, Saturday, August 2nd, 9:00 a.m. to Noon, Polk County Extension Office, 1702 Highway 17 South, Bartow.

Limited Commercial Landscape Maintenance Pesticide License - David Shibles, Tuesday, August 19th, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Polk County Extension Office, 1702 Highway 17 South, Bartow. This is a State of Florida Pesticide License which authorizes landscape maintenance people to spray plant beds on residential property.

Compost: Trash Into Treasure - Anne Yasalonis, Monday, September 22nd, 6:00 to 7:30 p.m., Magnolia Building, 702 East orange Street, Lakeland. **Attendees must pre-register.**

Creating a Florida Friendly Yard - Anne Yasalonis: Water Conservation, Micro-Irrigation and Plant Installation, Wednesday, September 10th, 6:00 to 8:30 p.m., Champions Gate Golf Clubhouse, 1400 Masters Blvd, Champions Gate.

Master Gardener Training - David Shibles, Tuesdays, September 16th through December 9th, Polk County Extension Office, 1702 Highway 17 South, Bartow. **Attendees must pre-register - $100 fee.**

Creating a Florida Friendly Yard - Anne Yasalonis: Water Conservation, Micro-Irrigation and Plant Installation, Wednesday, October 8th, 6:00 to 8:30 p.m., Southern Dunes Clubhouse, 2888 Southern Dunes Blvd, Haines City.

TURF

Shade tolerance in turf - There a new St. Augustinegrass cultivar developed at the

University of Florida called Captiva which is reported to be shade tolerant and somewhat chinch bug resistant. It is another dwarf cultivar like Delmar and Pursley Seville and is fairly shade tolerant like the others, getting by with 5-6 hours of direct sun per day. Recent data indicates that Delta Shade and Palmetto are not as shade tolerant as originally reported. The taller cultivars, like Floratam, require 6-8 hours of sunlight per day. Zoysiagrass cultivars, such as Empire, have moderate shade tolerance comparable to Floratam St. Augustinegrass**.** However, I should mention that St. Augustinegrass does very well at 30 percent shade - at times better than full sun. Centipedegrass will tolerate moderate shade. Bahiagrass and Bermudagrass are sunloving species and will not do well in shaded locations.

Irrigation - As we move into the hot summer months, your lawn will need ½ to ¾ inch of water each week either through rainfall or irrigation. I believe deep sandy areas, as in northeast Polk County, will require special care on the once per week watering schedule with no rainfall. Check my web site at http://polkhort.ifas.ufl.edu on the A-Z Publications page for various circulars on turf, particularly the one on developing drought tolerant turf.

Watch for dry areas in your lawn which will not wet well or may be out of reach of your sprinklers. Check the problem area for irrigation coverage with flat-sided containers to collect irrigation water. If the area appears to be getting adequate coverage, then the soil in that area may not be wetting well and the irrigation and rainfall may be running off to another place. To improve soil wetting, the area can be aerated with a mechanical device or treated with a mild detergent solution, which breaks the soil surface tension and allows better water penetration. The hot spots can be legally watered with a hand-held hose any day of the week before 8:00 a.m. and after 5:00 p.m.

Fertility - Your lawn may be turning somewhat yellow as it runs out of nutrients from the March fertilizer application. In many cases, an application of iron will give you the desired green effect without stimulating excessive foliar growth which encourages insects and diseases and depletes the roots. Use 2 ounces of iron sulfate in 3-5 gallons of water per 1000 square feet. This is a temporary effect lasting 2-4 weeks and may have to be repeated a few times during the summer. If iron does not give the desired effect, then an application of slow release nitrogen, such as Milorganite (16 pounds per 1000 square feet), could be applied (at least in Polk County).

Chinch bugs - We now are entering chinch bug season, so watch for suspicious yellow spots in your St. Augustine lawn. The best way to check for chinch bugs is to get down on your hands and knees, spread the stolons apart all the way to the soil and carefully look for little black bugs about 1/8 inch in length. The adults will have white wings laying flat on their back. The young nymphs are pink with a white line across their back. If you have had previous problems with chinch bugs, you may want to make a preventative treatment at this time, and again in July, with a recommended insecticide.

Drought tolerance in turf - The situation is about the same as last year. Bahiagrass is still the most drought tolerant turf available. We are finding that Zoysiagrass is not as drought tolerate as originally thought and requires considerate water, during times of drought, to keep it looking good. Zoysiagrass is similar to Centepedegrass and Bermudagrass in that it has below ground stems called rhizomes which will die back, but come back when the rainy season starts. St

Augustinegrass has above ground stems called stolons which die when severely water stressed. The stolons have to grow back into dead areas. As far I know, there are no cultivars of St Augustinegrass in development which are more drought tolerant than the ones currently available.

State of Florida urban turf fertilizer rule for home lawns - Beginning December 31, 2007, anyone who fertilizes their home lawn will have to comply with a new state rule. Retail stores will have until June 2009 to sell their existing stock. When fertilizers are applied to lawns at above recommended rates or at the wrong time of the year, they may contribute to nonpoint source pollution of our water bodies. Nonpoint means that the pollution is coming from all over an area, such as a whole city, not just one source like a specific manufacturing plant.

The new fertilizer bags will have specific guidelines for using the product on home lawns. If a fertilizer is listed as slow release, then it can be applied at recommended times of the year at one pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet. Products without slow release can only be applied at 0.75 pounds per 1000 square feet.

By the new rule, the application of phosphorous is limited to 0.25 pounds of P2O5 per 1000 square feet for any single application and no more than 0.50 pounds annually. Phosphorous leaches readily and contributes to algal growth in our lakes. Algae blooms die, sink to the bottom and become muck which builds up on the bottom year after year. This layer of muck supports undesirable creatures like blind mosquitoes. Also, when these algal blooms die and decompose, available oxygen in the water is depleted which often leads to fish kills.

You should also know that the State of Florida legislature voted down a bill this year which would require any commercial landscape person applying fertilizer to have State certification. This bill will certainly come up again next year and may pass. Also, to be noted is that some local counties already have fertilizer restrictions in place. Sarasota County, for instance, does not allow nitrogen fertilizer applications from June to September and Lee County does not allow any fertilizer application at all between June and September. Polk County does not have any local fertilizer ordinance at the present time.

BROMELIADS

This family of tropical plants has much to offer home gardeners in Florida. Attractive foliage, geometric form and unusual flowers combine to make bromeliads a favorite plant for use either indoors or outdoors.

Bromeliads are referred to as air plants by many home gardeners. Most are epiphytic, attached to trees and shrubs in their native habitat. However, some grow on the ground. Common bromeliads are Spanish moss, ball moss and pineapples. Bromeliads are native to tropical and sub-tropical regions of the Americas. A large number of the existing 2,000 species were discovered in Brazil, Peru, and Mexico.

Bromeliads vary greatly in mature size, but their rosette, cut-like form remains fairly constant for most of the decorative types. Foliage of the plants vary in that some have scales, spots, stripes and spines. The thick, stiff leaves assist the plants to adapt and thrive in the adverse temperatures and low humidity of home interiors. Many species produce magnificent, colorful flower bracts and berries on long spikes that last for months.

They grow best in a very organic porous medium. Soil mixes of peat moss, shredded pine bark, sand and tree fern fiber create an

environment favorable for root systems. Any type of container may be used as long as the pot has drainage holes. Bromeliads may also be attached to driftwood, tree fern fiber or trees. It is a good idea to wrap sphagnum moss around the roots to maintain a desirable humid environment near the root zone.

Bromeliads may also be planted directly in the landscape. Select a semi-shaded location and provide a good mulch of oak leaves, pine straw or bark. The most desirable effect is achieved when many plants are grouped together to form a bed of irregular shape.

Fertilize once per month with a soluble fertilizer such as Miracle Gro. Watering is not very complicated. Most species in cultivation have a rosette of leaves with overlapping leaf bases that form a vase at the bottom of the plant. Just refill the vase when the water level is low or empty.

Most bromeliads cannot stand temperatures lower than forty degrees F. However, several cold tolerant species are available. All Dyckia, Hectia and Ananas, most Neoregelia species, and a few Aechmea, Vriesea and Billbergia species reportedly will tolerate zone 9b temperatures.

In native habitats, some bromeliads grow in full sun, others do best under light shade and some require almost full shade for best growth. It is, therefore, almost impossible to select a general light level for bromeliads. However, most species will perform satisfactorily in semi-shaded locations.

The life of a bromeliad is relatively short, but offsets are produced more or less continuously to renew a planting. An offset may grow two or more years before flowering.

PERENNIALS TO PONDER

A perennial is a plant which grows indefinitely, remaining or returning on its own roots each year. When considering perennials many people think of typical northern and Mediterranean perennials like Argyranthemum and Osteospermum species. These plants need cool nights and low humidity, which we don't have in Florida, so they generally succumb to hot and wet Florida summers. They are often sold as winter annuals.

We have a number of subtropical perennials which do well in Florida. They may suffer a little cold damage during cold weather, but will usually come back in the spring. Some typical examples are:

Blackberry Lily, *Belamcanda chinensis*, can be grown in zones 8-11. It is a clumping plant and reaches a height of 24 inches. Blackberry Lily is drought and heat tolerant and withstands cold weather. It has iris like-foliage and blooms summer through fall with little lily-like flowers. The seeds are black and are poisonous. It will do well in part shade to full sun.

Bulbine, *Bulbine frutescens*, can also be grown in zones 8-11and is drought, heat, cold and salt tolerant. It is a clumping plant which reaches a height of 10-12 inches, has aloe-like foliage with orange or yellow flowers all year round. It does best in full sun or part shade. 'Hallmark' is a common orange cultivar which is sterile.

Cigar flower, *Cuphea micropetala*, can also be grown in zones 8-11 and reaches a size of 3 by 3 feet. It does best in full sun to part shade and blooms fall through spring. Cigar flowers are very attractive to humming birds. Other common cultivars are *C. ignea*, cigarette plant, which is somewhat smaller than the cigar plant, and Mexican Heather which

everyone is probably familiar with.
Crossandra, *Crossandra infundibuliformis,* can be grown in zones 9a-11and is variable in height from 6 inches to 3 feet tall. This plant is shade tolerant so it is a good one to have in a shaded area for color. The plant is very susceptible to cold weather as it will show cold damage at 40 degrees F. 'Orange Marmalade' is a very desirable cultivar which will hold its leaves even after the flowers have self pollinated. Other common cultivars include 'Florida Flame', 'Nile Queen' and 'Fortuna which have yellow, red and salmon colors respectively.

Another perennial which has become very popular in Florida lately is the Flax Lily, *Dianella tasmanica,* which can be grown in full sun to part shade in zones 8-11 and can even be grown as a house plant. Flax Lily is a clumping plant which reaches a height of 2 feet. The most common cultivar, 'Variegata', has variegated foliage with tiny little pale blue flowers on a long stem. The 'Gold Stripe' cultivar has prettier blue flowers which produce blue berries. The plant is sometimes called blueberry plant.

Gold/yellow Cestrum, *Cestrum aurantiacum,* is a tropical looking, but very cold tolerant plant, which grows well in zones 8b to 11. It is a full sun, large rounded shrub which grows to a height of 6 to 15 feet. The plants need a lot of space and do require occasional pruning. There is also a very attractive red cestrum.

Jewels of Opar, *Talinum paniculatum,* is another shade tolerant perennial suitable for zones 9-11. It has attractive variegated foliage with delicate pink flowers and yellow fruit. It reaches a height of about 2 feet. Keep in mind that the green form is invasive as it produces abundant seed which aggressively spread around the landscape.

Leopard plant, *Farfugium japonicum,* used to be called Ligularia. It is recommended for zones 8-10, does well in shade, but requires moisture. The leaves are bold and leathery with yellow spots reflecting its name. The flowers are yellow and daisy-like occurring fall through winter. The seed are easily to germinate. It grows to about 2 by 2 feet. There are a number of interesting cultivars. Many of the cultivars are not very common and will need to be ordered through a seed catelogue.

Lion's ear or Lion's tail, *Leonotis leonurus,* is recommended for zones 8a-11. It needs full sun and well drained soil. It reaches a height of 4-5 feet. Lion's ear is a native of South Africa and is understandably quite drought tolerant. The flowers are furry and orange. It is not always easy to find plants with orange flowers for the landscape. It can be propagated with seeds and cuttings.

INCORPORATING ORGANIC GARDENING PRINCIPLES INTO YOUR YARD

by Anne Yasalonis, FYN Coordinator

Organic gardening is increasing in popularity. many homeowners and gardeners are now considering organic gardening for its environmental and health benefits. This new "trend" helps many manufacturers sell gardening products, but which items should you invest in? Organic gardening can be a confusing and misunderstood concept, but it can be easy and inexpensive, using many items you already own.

Organic gardening emphasizes recycling, integrated pest management (IPM) and naturally-occurring materials. By law, the organic definition excludes the use of synthetic chemicals on vegetables and other products that will be grown for sale, but the "organic law" doesn't

apply to our home gardens and lawns. Homeowners must be aware of what they are using in their yards and learn how to incorporate the principles of organic gardening into their yards.

Fertilization in the landscape can be done organically using manures, dried blood, bone meal, sludge or other plant and animal products. These products have slow-release properties that benefit the yard and the environment. Slow-release products may reduce surface and groundwater contamination. Compost may also be a source of fertilizer in the landscape. This can be created using kitchen scraps and yard waste – a free fertilizer! Building and improving the soil structure is very important in organic gardening. Healthy soil supports soil organisms, helps improve water holding capacity, helps dissolve the mineral form of nutrients, maintains pH, maintains a steady supply of nutrients to the plants, may contribute to pest control and helps recycle organic wastes.

Pest control can be a bit more difficult in Florida. Beneficial insects, natural products, hand removing insects and scouting should be used in cooperation for pest management in the landscape. There are many beneficial insects that will help to control pests – ladybugs, parasitic wasps and flies, lacewings, stink bugs, preying mantids, assassin bugs – and many more! Make sure you know the beneficial insects and let them do their job. Natural products can be purchased at many garden centers and nurseries to target specific pests. Horticultural oil, insecticidal soap, Neem, sulfur, diatomaceous earth, and nicotine are just some of the natural insecticides that can be found on the store shelves.

Weed control is often a never ending battle. The best way to combat weeds in turf is to maintain a healthy lawn. Proper fertility, irrigation and mowing practices should be followed.

Maintaining 2-3 inches of mulch in all landscape beds will help reduce weeds in mulched areas. Hand pulling weeds is always an option (and good exercise!) and can be quick and easy if you stay on top of it.

Incorporating one or more of the organic landscaping methods discussed will improve your soil, preserve the environment, protect wildlife and recycle waste. Before purchasing a product, look for independent (university) test results. Are the test results consistent? Does the product work in our environment? Are there any application problems? Does the product control pests that are found in Central Florida? Is the product cost effective? It is important to stay informed because of the many products available. The following websites will be helpful for incorporating organic gardening principles into your yard:

Organic Materials Review Institute
http://www.omri.org/

National Organic Program
http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/indexIE.htm

Florida Certified Growers and Consumers, Inc.
http://www.foginfo.org/

USDA
http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/ofp/ofp/shtml

Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education
http://www.sare.org/index.htm

University of Florida Organic Gardening
http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/TOPIC_Organic_Gardening

How to go Organic: Florida
http://www.howtogoorganic.com/index.php?page=florida

MISC. JUNE GARDENING

Flowers to plant - Angelonia, begonias, bush daisy, butterfly plant, caladium, cat's whiskers, celosia, coreopsis, coleus, Dahlberg daisy, fire spike, four o'clock, gaillardia, gerbera daisy, ginger, goldenrod, impatiens, kalanchoe, lantana, marigolds, melampodium, Mexican sunflower, moon flower, nierbergia, porterweed, pentas, periwinkle, portulaca, purslane, salvia, shrimp plant, Stokes aster, sunflower, torenia and zinnias.

Vegetables to plant - Boniato, calabaza, chayote, cherry tomatoes, dasheen, malanga, okra, roselle, Southern peas, Seminole pumpkin, sweet casava, sweet potatoes and yard long beans.

Herbs to plant - Anise, basil, bay laurel, chives, dill, ginger, marjoram, mint, oregano, sage and thyme.

Have a good gardening day,

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For gardening information:
http://polkhort.ifas.ufl.edu

Polk County Web Site:
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