

# POLK COUNTY URBAN HORTICULTURER NEWSLETTER

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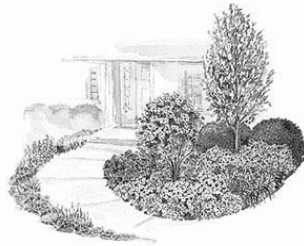
## FLORIDA FRIENDLY LANDSCAPING

Florida Friendly Landscaping is a relatively new term and replaces such terms as Xeriscaping and Environmental Landscape Management.

Xeriscaping was often misunderstood as meaning a landscape with nothing except rocks and cactus, and was often mispronounced as zero-scaping.

Last week Governor Crist signed into law SB2080. This bill refines the definition of "Florida Friendly Landscaping" in s. 373.185 to mean quality landscapes that conserve water, protect the environment, are adaptable to local conditions and are drought tolerant. The principles of such landscaping include planting the right plant in the right place, efficient watering, appropriate fertilization, mulching, attraction of wildlife, responsible management of yard pests, recycling of stormwater runoff and waterfront protection. Additional components include practices such as landscape planning and design, soil analysis, the appropriate use of waste compost, minimizing the use of irrigation and proper maintenance.

In addition, the bill states that a deed



restriction or covenant may not prohibit or be enforced to prohibit any property owner from implementing a Florida Friendly Landscape on his or her land. It is unclear how this bill will impact residential landscapes including the use of certain turfgrasses in places like the deep sand of the Central Florida Ridge.

Another important bill signed by Governor Crist was SB494 which relates to fertilization of home lawns by landscape professionals. This bill requires that all commercial fertilizer applicators have a Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) license by January 1, 2014. Passing the Green Industries-Best Management Training (GI-BMP) or an approved equivalent is mandatory to obtain that license. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), in cooperation with the University of Florida IFAS shall provide training and testing programs in urban landscape management practices and may issue certificates demonstrating satisfactory completion of the training. This means that anyone applying fertilizer to your lawn, other than yourself, after January 1, 2014 must have BMP training and have received a limited certification for urban commercial fertilizer application.

## TURFGRASS

**New Cultivars** - There are two new cultivars which you may be interested in. One is the

latest St. Augustinegrass release from the University of Florida. This cultivar is called Captiva and reportedly has some tolerance to chinch bugs. As with Floratam St Augustinegrass, the tolerance probably will only last a set number of years - the expert say around ten years. Captiva is a semi-dwarf like Pursley Seville and will not need mowing more than every 1-2 weeks in the summer and not more than every 2-3 weeks in the winter. It doesn't sound like shade tolerance will be any better than the other semi-dwarf St. Augustinegrass cultivars. Other factors like water and fertilizer needs are still under investigation.

The second new cultivar is JaMur Zoysiagrass. I asked Dr. Trenholm about this Zoysiagrass cultivar and she indicated that it was not widely grown in Florida and referred me to Dr. Kenworthy - a UF turfgrass breeder. He has this cultivar in his trials this year and feels it is similar to Empire Zoysiagrass and it may have better shade tolerance than Empire. So, we need to keep an eye on the development of this new Zoysiagrass cultivar.

**Drought tolerance** - I don't think anything has appreciably changed on this subject since last year. All of the warm season turfgrass cultivars which have underground stems called rhizomes like Bahiagrass, Zoysiagrass, Bermudagrass and Centipedegrass will go dormant during times of drought and hot temperatures, but usually will recover with the return of rainfall. They will survive with one day per week watering. Bahiagrass still seems to be the most drought tolerant southern turfgrass and it will generally survive with only natural rainfall. However to look green and lush, all of the above turfgrasses will need fertilizer and water.

**Chinch bugs** - I have not had as many

complaints this year about chinch bugs, however I have looked at a few severely infested lawns. The secret for the homeowner is to be able identify chinch bugs. They are small black insects (1/8 inch long). The adults have white wings which lay flat on their back, but they seldom fly. The nymphs are pink with a white strip across their back. Remember, chinch bug damage, drought damage, disease damage and buried object damage can look very similar after the fact.



One way to find chinch bugs is to get down on your hands and knees in a suspicious area and carefully pull the stolons apart down to the soil surface. If they are present, you will see them quickly scurrying in and around the stolons. Another common detection method is to pour two gallons of water mixed with 1.5 ounces of dish soap on a 2x2 foot suspicious area of turf. The chinch bugs should start coming to the surface within about five minutes. Other insects such as ants, big eyed bugs, earwigs, and beetles will also come to the surface. Look at the literature so you will have a good idea exactly what chinch bugs look like. Go to my web site <http://polkhort.ifas.ufl.edu> and look on the A-Z Publications under T for turf for circulars on chinch bugs. There is also a power point presentation on diagnosing lawn problems - just click on power point presentations on the home page.

Control is about the same as in previous years. Talstar with bifenthrin is still commonly being used by most pest control companies as a preventative treatment several times per year. This is the same product which is available to homeowners under the name Ortho Max. This product can be used as a preventative treatment every 60 days or so

in the late spring and summer months, however this product is going to kill everything in the turf including the good bugs. Another option is to spot treat areas which have chinch bugs. The problem is that once you see some damage the spot may eventually die in spite of your treatment.

There are other products on the market similar to bifenthrin, which is a synthetic pyrethroid, including permethrin and cypermethrin, but bifenthrin is the product of choice. Resistance to bifenthrin has been showing up in a few locations in Florida. Another, but more expensive product, is Arena (clothianidin) which has a relatively new chemistry. An inexpensive alternative to bifenthrin for the homeowner is Sevin. Follow the label recommendations for all pesticides.

**Turf diseases** - Take-all root rot continues to be the most damaging of the warm season turfgrass diseases. It is most prevalent during the hot humid and rainy months of the summer. This fungus disease attacks the roots which prevents nutrients from getting up into the leaves and causes large dead patches. The roots of infected plants will be black and easily pulled from the ground. This disease functions best at an elevated pH, so do not make any lime applications if this disease is present.

The only way to diagnose this disease is to have a turf sample tested at the University of Florida Plant Disease Clinic in Gainesville. Unfortunately the fee for this analysis has increased from \$20 to \$40, which is a significant increase and may be out of reach for many homeowners. Commonly available recommended treatments, which are for suppression only, are monthly applications of products containing thiophanate methyl (Scotts Lawn Disease Control) or myclobutanil (Spectracide Lawn Disease Control with Immunox) during summer months. These products are available at the

big box stores and a few retail garden centers and will also control the most of the other common turf diseases.



## CICADA KILLERS

The time of the year has once again arrived for the emergence of cicadas. The cicada is a sucking insect which sits atop large trees and makes that high pitched buzzing sound. The adult cicadas mate and lay their eggs in the ground. The eggs hatch and the nymphs feed on the roots of trees and shrubs. The last nymphal instar emerges from the ground in the spring and attaches itself to an object and the adult emerges. I'm sure you have seen the cast skin of the last nymphal instar attached to an above ground object. There will be a split down the back of the cast skin through which the adult emerged.

Simultaneous to the emergence of cicadas is the emergence of the cicada killers. The cicada killer is a large, formidable looking wasp approaching two



inches long with yellow bands around the abdomen. The females mate with males and then each female goes about the task of catching an adult cicada which they sting and place in an underground cell. They then lay an egg on the paralyzed cicada and seal up the cell. The larval wasp grub feeds on the cicada for a few weeks until it becomes a late instar larva. The wasp larva spends the winter in the underground cell and pupates in the spring. The pupal stage lasts for about three weeks at which time it emerges as an adult in the early summer. The males and females mate and the females continue the species by providing their underground nestlings with cicadas.

The problem with cicada killers for the homeowner is that they use people's yards to make their underground nests. The females fly around very fast catching cicadas and provisioning their nest while the males carefully watch over the females. The males are often the ones to quickly buzz around homeowner heads in an attempt to scare off the intruders - people. And they do scare people! The males cannot sting so they are totally harmless. The females have a stinger which they use to immobilize cicada adults, but seldom sting humans. The sting I understand is very mild to humans. In my ten years with the Extension Service, I have never heard of anyone being stung by a cicada killer.

They can be a nuisance as they may emerge from one individual's yard for several years in a row. The adults actively catch cicadas for several weeks during the summer at which time they die and the problem ends at least for that summer. It is not clear why they select a specific area i.e. turfgrass, shrub bed, etc. as a breeding ground. I have seen them in one homeowner's landscape, but not in the next door neighbor's yard. They are a beneficial insect so therefore we do not recommend any control measures, unless someone in the home is very allergic to bee venom. Check with the Extension Service for control recommendations.

## **Rain Gardens**

### **A Beautiful Garden Solution!**

**By Anne Yasalonis,  
Florida Yards and  
Neighborhoods  
Coordinator**

Looking for an attractive way to control rainwater in your yard?

A rain garden might be just what you are looking for! A rain garden is a depressed area in the landscape that will



catch water during rainfall and slowly filter it over a few hours to prevent it from running off into nearby lakes and ponds. Rain gardens help prevent polluted stormwater runoff from entering into our water systems and help replenish the aquifer beneath us. These attractive gardens can be a showcase or focal point in your landscape, provide habitat to butterflies, aid in drainage problems and protect the environment.

Rain gardens are not ponds. They are garden areas that are planted with Florida-friendly plants that can tolerate being very wet, as well as being dry. They will hold water (sometimes for up to a day) in very rainy situations, but the



water will always filter through. A rain garden can be any size and should be easy to install and maintain. If you would like to install a rain garden in your landscape, the first thing that you must do is determine where to put the garden. It should be located away from the house and in a gently sloping area of the yard where water flows and/or collects during a rain event. If you are having a hard time determining where this area might be, watch the yard closely during and after a heavy rainfall. A full sun location is perfect, but a shady location will also work. Just make sure that you choose plants that will be appropriate to the situation.

Rain gardens can be large or small, and any shape will work. A kidney bean shape is nice and works well with most existing landscapes. You can use a garden hose to try out some different shapes before you start digging. When you are ready to dig the area, heap some of the soil on the side of the garden that is the furthest from the flow of water. This will create a small hill (or berm) that will help stop water that is running very quickly. If you have an area of very fast moving water,

you may need to secure the berm with stones or create a larger berm. The berm should be compacted and secure so that it will not fail in a large rain event. Rocks, groundcover or even sod will work to secure the berm.

After the site preparation is complete and the berm is built, it is time to install plants. Choose plants according to your site conditions. [Http://polkfyn.ifas.ufl.edu](http://polkfyn.ifas.ufl.edu) and <http://floridayards.org> have lists of plants for Florida. Choose plants that will require minimal to no irrigation after establishment and minimal maintenance. Add compost to the planting area and apply 2-3 of mulch over the entire area. Once complete, this attractive garden will turn an area that was once problematic into a beautiful solution!

For more information on rain garden design and installation call the UF/IFAS Polk County Extension Service at 863-519-8677 or visit <http://polkfyn.ifas.ufl.edu>.

Florida Yards and Neighborhoods is a grant-funded program in cooperation with the University of Florida, the Alafia River, Hillsborough River and Peace River Basin Boards of the Southwest Florida Water Management District and Polk County. The program emphasizes creating and maintaining attractive landscapes to enhance the community and protect our valuable natural resources.

## NUISANCE WILDLIFE

### **Pocket gophers -**

This is a small rodent with a 6-8 inches long head and body and a 3-4 inch long tail and is rarely seen above



ground. The pocket gopher is also known as a sandy-mounder or salamanda. This little

critter requires deep, well-drained sandy soil. Pocket gophers dig extensive tunnels which average about 145 feet and one tunnel was discovered to be over 500 feet.

The soil gophers remove while digging tunnels is pushed to the surface making characteristic rows of sandy mounds which may be several inches wide and tall. The tunnels are usually about 2 inches to 2 feet below the surface, but some may be as much as 5 feet.

Gophers are a problem because they feed on tap roots, crown roots, fleshy rhizomes, plus bulbs and tubers of a wide variety of plants and also push up unsightly mounds which look like fire ant mounds. A quick check of the mound will tell you if the mound is a fire ant one or not. About the only way to control pocket gophers is with a trap. You have to find a tunnel under a mound in which the gopher is pushing up dirt and set the trap in the hole. Poisons may not be used to control pocket gophers. Call the Extension Office for more detailed information.



**Moles -** These creatures are about 7 inches long and 3-4 ounces in weight. Moles create 6-8

inch tunnels below the surface which form raised areas on the surface. They make small mounds of soil approximately 3 x 2 inches - much smaller than pocket gophers. The tunneling of moles may cause some physical damage to the root systems of ornamental or garden plants and may kill grass by drying out the roots, but this damage is usually minor. Actually, the moles are eating the grubs and other insects which damage the plants.

If moles become an intolerable nuisance, about the only effective way to control them is by using a bayonet-style trap. Moles also can be discouraged from digging foraging

tunnels in turf by controlling populations of insects which they eat like white grubs and mole crickets. However, chemical treatment may have a negative effect. When their food supply is diminished, they actually may do more tunneling looking for a scarcer food supply. Poisons cannot legally be used to control moles. Call the Extension Office for more detailed information.

**Armadillos** - One of the worst burrowing animals is the armadillo. The burrows are usually located under brush piles, stumps, rocks, dense brush, or concrete patios and are about 7-8 inches in diameter and up to 15 feet long. At one time I had a whole family living under my aluminum sheds in my back yard. I walked out my back door one day and there were 4 babies playing in front of my sheds during the daytime. Armadillos have one litter per year which includes four identical young of the same sex, because they develop from a single egg.



Leprosy in wild armadillos has been reported at rates ranging from 0.5% to 10% in Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi and Mexico, however in the more than 2500 specimens examined in Florida no infections have been found.

They feed primarily on insects and their larvae. They also eat earthworms, scorpions, spiders, snails, and small vertebrates and their eggs. When looking for these bugs in the soil, they dig numerous holes in golf courses, lawns, flower beds and gardens. The holes are typically 1-3 inches deep and 3-5 inches wide. They also uproot flowers and other ornamental plants.

Control of these critters in the home landscape may be a daunting task. Keeping

soil insects in the lawn under control may discourage armadillo digging, however insecticides may not have much impact on earthworms which is another favorite armadillo food. Creating a barrier with a fence may help, but my experience has been that they can readily dig under fences.

Live animal traps have worked best for me personally, particularly in my fenced yard. Armadillos often travel the same route under a fence and a trap can be placed in front of the hole with two pieces of wood in a v-shaped pattern in front of the trap. I have not had any luck with baits such as over-ripe fruit or earthworms in soil. Catching the armadillo is only the first problem, because by law the trapped animals cannot be legally be relocated.

## MISC. JULY GARDENING

**Flowers to plant** - Angelonia, begonia, black-eyed Susan, blue daze, bush daisy, cat's whiskers, coleus, coreopsis, crossandra, golden globe, impatiens, marigold, melampodium, moon flower, pentas, periwinkle, porter weed, portulaca, purslane, salvia, sunflower, torenia and zinnia.

**Herbs to plant** - Anise, basil, bay laurel, chive, dill, ginger, lemon balm, Mexican tarragon, mint, oregano, rosemary, sage, sweet marjoram and thyme.

**Vegetable Gardening** - You can still plant Southern peas, okra, sweet potatoes and possibly cherry tomatoes this summer. Summer in Florida is just not the time to plant many vegetables due to the hot and humid weather which contributes to insect and disease problems. I often see tomato transplants, as well as other vegetable transplants, in the big box stores for sale in June and July. It is best to wait for the recommended times to plant most vegetables

(late February and/or September). If you carry insect and disease infested plants from summer plantings into the fall, then you may inoculate new plants in your fall garden.

When you buy transplants, carefully look them over for insects and diseases. I often recommend that gardeners start with seed, if possible, to avoid transplant problems. One of my clients in Polk County purchased two tomato transplants last fall from a big box store, one of which was infested with tomato leaf curl virus which he didn't realize. This virus disease, transmitted by whiteflies, was passed on to all of his tomato plants through June of this year. The whiteflies quickly transfer the virus from one plant to another. When he finally recognized the problem, he disposed of all of his tomato and pepper plants. This virus disease causes the leaves to become yellow on the edges and green in the middle and to thicken. Once infected, the plants become stunted and produce very few edible fruit. There is no treatment other than disposing of infected plants.

There is an excellent circular on my web site <http://polkhort.ifas.ufl.edu> called "The Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide". Click on A-Z Publication on the home page and then V for vegetables - scroll down to the vegetable gardening guide circular. This guide will give you detailed information on when and what to plant. You can also find numerous other vegetable gardening circulars.

### Flowering perennials -

A summer plant for color you might want to try in your garden is golden globe (Lysimachia procumbens). This is a mat-forming perennial with whorled ovate leaves. The flowers are upturned and cup-shaped, yellow with red



throats and are borne in the leaf terminal. The 'Aurea' cultivar has red-tinged, yellow variegated, green leaves.

The plant flowers from spring to summer and grows 4 inches high and 12 inches wide. It makes an excellent groundcover, and is suited for sun or shade in hardiness zones 6-9. The plant does well in moist soil, but not in areas where water stands. It is very important not to let the plant totally dry out as damage may occur.

**Azalea caterpillar** - I have had numerous calls from homeowners about a large highly colored caterpillar on their azaleas. The mature caterpillar is about two inches long, and predominately black with a red last segment and eight broken white/yellow lengthwise stripes. The head and legs are mahogany-red. This is the azalea caterpillar which turns into an unspectacular adult moth. Check your azaleas today to make sure they are free of these bugs. They can be pruned out of the plants or sprayed with one of several insecticides including B.t., Orthene, Sevin or Ortho Max.



Have a good gardening day,

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For Polk County Gardening Information and Horticultural Links visit:  
<http://polkhort.ifas.ufl.edu>