



Monthly Newsletter

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Table of Contents:



Soil: The Foundation of Good Gardens

Timely Gardening Tips

“What’s Bugging You?”

New Beginnings

2011 Upcoming Events

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**Timely Gardening Tips
for MARION COUNTY**

by Master Gardener,
Jo Leyte-Vidal

There are four gardening activities that can enhance or harm the garden. They are:

Watering

Overwatering is a huge problem which will cause fungus and dieback in turf and root rot in plantings. Lawns should not receive more than one inch of water per week, and this includes the rain. Turf can do well for 10 days between waterings.

Fertilizing

Fertilizer is a substance that should replace nutrients in the soil that the plant has removed. Sometimes we need to ask ourselves if we really need to push plants toward excessive growth.

Soil: The Foundation of Good Gardens

by Anne Lambrecht, UF/IFAS Marion County Master Gardener

Not being allowed to stay up late or eat massive amounts of candy and pork rinds; having to wear sensible shoes and going to church gave me a good foundation, according to my mother. Having good soil gives your garden a good foundation.

As you know, Florida soils are a challenge: sandy, full of clay, undernourished. So now, while the earth sleeps, start the year off right and amend your soil. You will have a beautiful garden come springtime.

Once upon a very, very long time ago, Florida was underwater. That’s why there’s so much sand everywhere. So it makes sense that Florida’s natural ecosystems co-evolved with the soils, and soil conditions often determine what can and cannot be grown both on the farm and in our gardens.

Imagine the entire Floridan peninsula at the bottom of a shallow sea. The land under water is limestone – a porous, weak, light colored loamy substance which is now just a little bit under the ground we live on. While the earth was becoming our home, as ice melted and refroze and the land rose, mineral laden sediment from the melting continent was deposited on top of that limestone. The earth below us is a myriad of underground streams, lakes and sinkholes known by scientists as Karst topography. Sure, there are minerals in our soil but to have a great garden-- even just a good garden--we need to give it some vitamins in the form of amendments.

Oak leaves, manure, peat, pine needles, humus, mushroom compost, mulch, kitchen scraps like eggshells and banana peels, worm castings and grass clippings are all amendments for your soil. All these amendments are referred to as compost. The definition of compost is “organic matter that is undergoing or has resulted from decomposition”.

When you amend your soil, you are adding microorganisms: colonists of invisible animals in the form of bacteria, fungi and molds, invertebrate decomposers, nematodes, fermentation mites. Organic matter improves the condition of the soil because it makes the soil able to store nutrients like nitrogen, and able to retain moisture. This is good Juju.

In order to grow a garden properly, your soil should have a pH of 5-8. Basically pH is an index of how alkaline or how acidic your soil is. It is measured on a scale of 1-14, with neutral being right in the middle at 7. Certain factors can alter your pH like fill that’s been brought in from construction sites as well as the addition of organic matter. It is important to get a soil test done and usually the county extension services do this for free or for a very small charge. In Marion call 352-671-8400; Lake 352-343-4101; Sumter 352-793-2728.

Each time you plant something, amend your soil. Whenever you dig out soil to put in a plant, put that soil in a place where you can add leaves or some other amendment to it. Then mix it all up and add it back into the earth.



Timely Gardening Tips for MARION COUNTY

by Master Gardener, Jo Leyte-Vidal
(continued from page 1)

Most plants fare better when they grow slowly and easily to their normal size. Pushing a plant to grow faster or produce huge fruit only causes stress. Stress leads to disease, just like with humans.

Mulching

Mulch is wonderful for keeping roots cool, keeping down weeds, and preserving moisture. But, piling mulch deeper than four inches and completely surrounding the trunk of a tree or shrub becomes a problem. A volcano of mulch will cause suffocation, and cause roots to grow up to the surface. This shallow growth will eventually girdle the plant and choke it to death.

Spraying/Dusting

Do we really need to kill all the bugs? NO! Most plants could lose up to one third of its leaves to insects and still do very well.

Be aware that many of our insects are beneficial to our gardens. They will eat the "bad" bugs and or help pollinate our crops. Pesticides can destroy insects that are necessary for our plants' well being. Always read the label before applying pesticides to your garden.

One of your 2012 New Year resolutions could be; "Always remember that too much of any good thing can be destructive".

Soil: The Foundation of Good Gardens

by Anne Lambrecht, UF/IFAS Marion County Master Gardener
(continued from Page 1)

Animal manures are considered to be the best source of fertilizer and organic matter for the gardener. Animal manures are horse, cow, chicken, or rabbit poodie. Dog doodie is not a good choice.

I have a few neighbors who confessed when we were buying our homes, that they had their eye on our lot which has a huge oak tree in the back. They didn't want the lot because they considered the tree "messy" due to the leaves and the catkins. These leaves and catkins are treasures to me. I rake them up and add them into the soil when I'm planting and use them as mulch and in my potting soil to fluff it up. Catkins are the little flower buds of certain trees and they are super gifts to the garden. Some of my neighbors actually bag them up for me during catkin season.

It's been many years and a long, hard time amending my soil and I'm still not all done. But now I can say I've got a good foundation – and without the sensible shoes!

You may reach Anne Lambrecht at annegarden@embarqmail.com

What's Bugging You?

by Urban Horticulture Agent Norma Samuel

Find out what local residents are calling in about.

I have a honey bee hive that I would like to have a bee keeper remove.



Due the presence of Africanized honey bees in Florida, we had to provide this client with a recommendation of having a certified pest control operator remove the colony. She was certainly not thrilled as bees are beneficial insects that provide honey, pollinate plants and the list goes on. Here is a link that provides in detail the reason for the recommendation from UF/IFAS. Also provided is a Department of Plant Industry link on Africanized bees.

http://entnemdept.ufl.edu/afbee/bee_removal.shtml

<http://www.freshfromflorida.com/pi/plantinsp/apiary/images/ahbfactsheet.pdf>



Cold Weather Protection

by Norma Samuel, Urban Horticulture Agent

December usually starts the onset of what I consider really COLD weather. Some of you may laugh at me because you really enjoy the chill. Tropical plants, like me, do not do well in cold weather. The advantage I have over them is that I can bundle myself up when the temperature falls below 70°F or turn up the thermostat. I must confess - my garden is the last place I want to visit in cold weather, so I try to implement practices that help to increase cold tolerance of plants starting in the spring. Here are a few tips that I strongly recommend you adopt.

- **Right Plant, Right Place** – Select plants appropriate for our hardiness zone – Zone 8 – 9a. Plants adapted to the lower number will be more cold tolerant. Know the various microclimates that exist within your landscape and plant tender plants in the warmer areas. These can be along a fence that will protect the plants from cold winds and areas with good drainage. Avoid low areas as these create frost pockets.
- **Proper Plant Nutrition** – As a general rule of thumb, avoid late season applications of nitrogen. Excessive nitrogen application will stimulate a new flush of growth that does not get enough time to harden and is more susceptible to frost damage. The last fertilizer application for the year to lawns should be potassium at a recommended rate of ½ lb per 1000 square feet.
- **Avoid Late Summer Early Fall Pruning**. Pruning late in the season will also result in a new flush of growth that will be susceptible to cold damage. So avoid what seems to be the customary practice of whacking plants like crape myrtles back in the fall.
- **Proper Mowing**. Mowing turf at recommended heights will promote deeper roots that are known to be associated with increased cold tolerance. See “Mowing Your Florida Lawn” for mowing heights that are specific to your grass type (<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/LH/LH02800.pdf>).

Protection Before the Freeze. The day before the freeze is expected water landscape plants well. This will allow the soil to absorb more solar radiation and the heat will be reradiated at night; thus, keeping the plants warm. Adding a layer of mulch also helps to keep that heat around the root zone of plants. Sheets, quilts, black plastic, and frost cloths are all appropriate for covering plants. The cover should extend to the ground and should not touch the leaves. The leaves that are in contact with the cover can suffer cold damage because of the transfer of heat from the leaves to the cold cover. Immediately remove black plastic the morning after the freeze as black absorbs the heat of the sun and will result in high temperatures that can damage the plant. There is also the option of moving plants indoors or inside the garage for some warmth.



After the Freeze. If you did not protect plants like firespike and firebush, the entire plant may look mushy if it is not in a protected area. Avoid cutting frost damaged plants back until spring. Pruning them now will result in new growth that will only get damaged again with the onset of another frost.

Types of Frost Damage. The damage resulting from cold weather may not manifest itself in some plants until months later. Symptoms may include: water soaked and wilted leaves, marginal leaf burn in evergreens such as hollies; splitting of the stem or bark; or frost cracks running the length of the tree; and desiccation (drying out) if the ground gets frozen within the root zone of the plant.

Items below are available for purchase at the UFIFAS Marion County Extension Service. Please come to see these environmentally-friendly products.

MICRO-IRRIGATION:

- Eco-friendly
- Plants love it
- Saves time & money

Eco-Friendly
MULCH
AVAILABLE
HERE...

Cost-Saving,
Eco-Friendly
Rain Barrels
FOR SALE!

Got Questions?

What does 4-H have to offer my child? When is the best time to prune crape myrtles? How can I make money off 10 acres of land? What is the difference between type 1 and type 2 diabetes?

uf/ifas marion county
EXTENSION SERVICE

We Have Answers

2011 Upcoming Events

Mark your calendars for our upcoming events:

In observance of the Christmas Holiday, the Extension Office will be closed on Monday, Dec. 26, 2011 and the Plant Clinic will be closed Friday, Dec. 23, 2011—Jan. 2, 2012. Have a wonderful holiday season!



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IFAS Extension



New Beginnings

Kathleen Patterson, FYN Program Coordinator

It's time to think about the problems you dealt with in your landscape this year and how they might be corrected in 2012. We have the answers you are looking for in our upcoming events. Attached is a copy of The Florida-Friendly Landscape Challenge flyer for our classes that begin on January 24, 2012. The classes run for 3 consecutive evenings from 6-9pm. Our classes are designed to discuss how to best manage your landscape while using the nine Florida-Friendly Landscaping Principles that ultimately help you reduce maintenance, while saving time, money and water. The cost is \$5.00 per person and you must pre-register by January 20, 2012.

In other news, Norma Samuel and I are creating a Horticulture calendar for 2012 that will have a complete listing of all of our programs that are open to the public. It includes our Library presentations, On Top of the World-Master the Possibilities and our hands-on workshop here at the Ag Center. This calendar will help you plan for the coming months. We are anticipating that it will be ready for the January newsletter so be on the lookout for this valuable resource for all of your gardening needs.

It's been a terrific year and I expect that 2012 will be even more spectacular. Happy Holidays to all and enjoy the relaxation and comfort of your home while you gear up for 2012 with all the spring catalogs that will fill your mailbox and mine!



Florida-Friendly Landscape Challenge

Learn how to make the outdoors the best room of your home and save time and money!

Master the nine Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ principles.

Challenge yourself and your classmates.

Team up and create the best Florida-friendly landscape for a prize!

Date: Jan. 24, 25 and 26

Time: 6 - 9 p.m.

Location:

UF/IFAS Marion County
Extension Service
2232 NE Jacksonville Road, Ocala

Fee: \$5 per person

Door prizes, free giveaways
and refreshments!

*Must pre-register by Jan. 20, 2011
to Donna Redner at 352-671-8400.*

Florida-Friendly
Landscaping™ PROGRAM 

UF UNIVERSITY of
FLORIDA
IFAS Extension

Southwest Florida
Water Management District
WATERMANAGEMENT DISTRICT

Marion
County
FLORIDA
EXTENSION SERVICE

Funding for this program provided by Southwest Florida Water
Management District Withlacoochee River Basin Board 2011
Cooperative Funding Grant