



Monthly Newsletter

February 2012

Table of Contents:



Garden Renovations

Upcoming Events

“What’s Bugging You?”

Spring Garden Options

The February Garden

Published by Norma Samuel
University of Florida IFAS
Marion County Horticulture Agent

UPCOMING LECTURES/

EVENTS: Educational seminars and events are presented by UF/IFAS Extension Agents and or Master Gardeners.

Unless otherwise indicated, to pre-register, please call 671-8400 or e-mail Donna.Redner@marioncountyfl.org,

Gardening Q & A
Bellevue Public Library
March 1
10:30 am
Please Pre-register by
February 26

Ask You Master Gardener: Landscape Design
Marion County Public Library Headquarters
March 10
2:00 pm
Please Pre-register by
March 7

Garden Renovations

by Kathleen Patterson, FYN Program Coordinator

Are you thinking of renovating your current landscape? Have you just moved into a home with an old established landscape? Are you in a newly landscaped home that was done by the builder/developer? Are you just tired of what you have whether it is old or new? Then let’s spend some time talking about all that needs to be done.

First and foremost it is advisable to get your soil tested to determine your pH level. By checking the level it will make it much easier to pick plant materials well suited to your soil rather than trying to adjust your soil pH to match your plants. Adjusting the soil pH requires the use of sulfur or lime to lower or raise the level as necessary and can take as much as a year to raise or lower the level by a single point. Most plants do quite well with a pH level of 5.5-6.5 with 7.0 being neutral. However, some plants such as azaleas and blueberries prefer a pH of 4.5 so knowing the plants and its characteristics is the key to correct plant materials.

Next it is important to know the right plant for the right place. Grouping like-plants together will promote better growth and easier maintenance of your gardens. Place plants that require little to no water other than rainfall away from the house while plants that require additional water close to the house and group them together. By doing so you water only one area rather than throughout the landscape thereby reducing the amount of water you are using. Drought tolerant plants and most native plants can tolerate longer periods of time without regular irrigation.

Native plantings combined with the use of compatible drought tolerant plants will make your landscape easier to manage. Native plants are already adapted to our sandy soil helping them to get established a bit faster. They also tolerate drought conditions and require less use of pesticides. The use of native plant materials will also increase the population of beneficial insects that will then help control the bad insects that cause us so much time, worry and money. Native plants also provide food and shelter for our wildlife, an important consideration when we think of how much land mass is being converted to home sites reducing the area the wildlife needs to eat, live and reproduce.

Native plants also tend to grow a bit slower, meaning less pruning is required. Fertilization can be kept to a minimum and these plants still manage to thrive. As I replace some of my worn out landscape I am trying to incorporate more native plants to increase the bird population. I use no chemicals in the landscape so that the caterpillars and butterflies have a fair chance of calling my landscape home.

In addition to the native plants I have bahia grass on my one acre with no irrigation. I find that this grass also tolerates drought and will green up at the first sight of rainfall. Each year I also install at least one new bedded area thereby decreasing the grass even further. Bedded areas are mulched with Melaleuca mulch derived from the invasive Melaleuca tree that has become a nuisance in South Florida.



UPCOMING LECTURES/ EVENTS:

(continued from Page 2)

Marion County Master Gardeners 2012 Spring Festival

Marion County Extension
March 10
8:00 am—5:00 pm
March 11
9:00 am—4:00 pm
Admission \$1.00

Trees in the Landscape

On Top of the World
March 13
9:30 am
To register, call 861-9751

Gardening Q & A

Marion Oaks Public Library
March 15
10:30 am
Please Pre-register by March 10

Herbs in the Landscape

Dunnellon Public Library
March 20
2:00 pm
Please Pre-register by
March 16



Garden Renovations

by Kathleen Patterson, FYN Program Coordinator
(continued from Page 1)

By using the by product of this tree we are helping to preserve our native cypress trees. This helps improve the natural areas still left in Florida. This mulch can be purchased through the Marion County Extension Service, 2232 NE Jacksonville Rd., Ocala, FL 34470, (352) 671-8400. The cost per two cubic foot bag is \$3.25 (tax included). This mulch may be picked up during the week if you load yourself or during the Master Gardener Spring Festival held on Saturday, March 10 and Sunday, March 11, 2012 and we will load it for you!

Melaleuca mulch has been tested and been found to repel termites, is nematode free and best of all it doesn't float away during a thunderstorm. I also find that when using this mulch it is very easy to determine when your plants need additional water by the color of the mulch. The wetter it is, the darker in color. When it is light tan then additional water is needed.

When choosing plants for your landscape place in multiples of threes, fives etc. This will give you a fuller effect especially if you plant them in a pyramid shape. Choose colors that compliment each other; purples with yellows, blues with white or use different textured plants with varying colors of green foliage. If you are like me and don't like to prune plants then choose slow growing plants or plants that have a weeping effect. This reduces your pruning considerably.



What's Bugging You?

by Urban Horticulture Agent Norma Samuel

Find out what local residents are calling in about.

Termites will begin to swarm in January, so be on the look-out as they may be bugging your house!

Termites usually swarm January through May. Being able to distinguish a termite from an ant is important. Termites have stout bodies with straight antennae, while ants have constricted waists and elbowed antennae. Termites are beneficial insects in nature, but they can devastate your home if undetected.

The three main types of termites in Florida are subterranean (nest in the soil), dampwood (infest damp wood), and drywood termites (infest dry wood). Subterranean termites are most common and most destructive in Florida. More information on each type of termite can be found on the following websites:

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ig097>

http://flrec.ifas.ufl.edu/entomo/Structural_Entomology/drywood/drywood.htm

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/mg064>

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ig098>

What's Bugging You?

by Norma Samuel, Urban Horticulture Agent
(continued from page 2)



Recommendations for control of termites specific to gardening are:

- Keep mulch and irrigation about two feet away from the foundation of your home.
- Avoid disturbing the termite barrier around your home. Once the barrier is broken it provides easy access for termites to reach your home.
- Do not store firewood close to the house. These are an excellent source of cellulose for termites.
- Drain downspouts away from the house.
- Contact a pest management professional for chemical control as they have the equipment needed to reach target areas.



Spring Garden Options

by Norma Samuel, Urban Horticulture Agent



The onset of warm spring temperatures will bring gardens to life. Trees that lose their leaves in the fall begin to send out new flushes of growth or some like peaches bloom first. A trip to the garden center will reveal tons of options for planting material. Before you purchase any plant material do a site analysis. Check to see if you have full sun or partial shade, and the drainage conditions. Get your soil tested to determine the pH and what nutrients are available in the soil. The UF/IFAS Marion County Master Gardeners can do a free soil pH test for you or you can send your soil sample to the Soils Lab at UF for \$7 to do a complete analysis that comes with a recommendation for what nutrients should be added to the soil to meet the needs of the plants you intend to grow.

Decide what you would like to grow: vegetables, annuals, perennials, shrubs, shade trees, fruit trees, lawns, or groundcovers. Learn as much as you can by reading books specific to gardening in Florida. Many of these are available to purchase at the UF/IFAS Marion County Extension Master Gardener Plant Clinic on 2232 NE Jacksonville Road in Ocala. You can also visit the internet to find information. An excellent website is: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> to find information from the University of Florida experts. Many of the factsheets on the site will have information specific to Central Florida. You can also find plants for shade or sun, recommended maintenance practices and pest identification and control.



Got Questions?

What does 4-H have to offer my child? When is the best time to prune crepe 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

Items below are available for purchase at the UF/IFAS 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!



Spring Garden Options

by Norma Samuel, Urban Horticulture Agent
(continued from page 4)

The trend these days is to buy local and eat local. It ensures a fresh and tasty source of food, but even better yet is stepping out your backdoor and harvesting your own vegetables. Vegetables like full sun, so your vegetable garden should be located in the sunniest spot that is close to a water source. Make a list of the vegetables that your family likes to eat and start with those. Tomatoes are a favorite of many gardeners. Slicing varieties to try are Early Girl, Big Beef and Beefmaster. Grape varieties such as Sweet Baby Girl and Super Sweet 100 will provide an abundance of tomatoes throughout the growing season. Zucchini is a great crop for a first time gardener. Black, Grey and Elite are some excellent varieties to try. Radish is an excellent option for gardeners who like instant gratification. They go from seed to harvest in approximately 30 days.

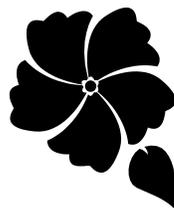
Flowering plants add a lot of color to the landscape. Group plants with similar growing requirements together. This makes maintenance a lot easier as all plants in that plant bed can be treated the same and will thrive.

Texas sage, a shrub that performs well in this area will suffer in a bed with impatiens because impatiens require a lot more water. Texas sage will quickly die from too much care. A better option for a low growing plant is lantana that is more drought-tolerant.

Many annuals can be easily planted directly in the ground from seed. These include sunflowers, zinnia and marigolds. These are all quite drought-tolerant and will bloom until the first frost with proper care. Four o'clocks are a favorite of mine. The blooms open in the afternoon and they have a very deep root system so they come back every year.

Healthy plant material is paramount to achieving a garden that requires little care. Avoid purchasing plants that are diseased, infested with insects, spindly or with roots extending from the pots. The place to visit for a wide selection of plant materials and garden décor for every gardener is the UF/IFAS Marion County Master Gardener Spring Festival. Visit 90 vendors all in one location on Saturday, March 10 from 8:00am – 9:00pm and on Sunday from 9:00am – 4:00pm. There will be educational seminars and hands-on demonstrations on both days conducted by University of Florida Faculty, Master Gardeners and industry professionals. Master Gardeners will be in their green polo shirts throughout the grounds and will be willing to answer your gardening questions. 4-H members in their green shirts will haul your plants to your car for a tip. Admission is \$1. No pets allowed. For more information visit:

<http://www.marioncountyfl.org/SpringFestival.htm> or call 352-671-8400.



The February Garden

by David Y. Goodman, UF/IFAS Marion County Master Gardener

Ready... set... plant!

It's officially panic time. Garden centers are booming, well-rested tillers are being prodded, yanked and cursed to life, and trays of seedlings beckon from storefronts across the county.

Hopefully you prepared beds in the fall, but if not, fear not. Though your first instinct might be to fire up the tiller and plow under last year's garden (or sacrifice some turf to make a new bed), that's not necessarily the best bet when it comes to preserving your soil's fertility. Though a newly tilled garden may look lovely, our hot sun and dry springs will quickly bake and remove organic matter from the soil.

Here's one quick way to make a new bed: mow down the grass/weeds where you'd like to plant and water the area thoroughly. Then lay six or more sheets of newspaper or single sheets of cardboard down over the grass and wet them as well. Top with a layer of rotted manure, compost, weed-free garden soil or a mix, then mulch heavily on top of that. The grass beneath (provided you put a solid, overlapping layer of paper/cardboard down) will be smothered. You're looking for a good, thick cover of material. To plant seedlings or seeds, simply pull back the mulch and plant. No digging and no tilling – and the smothered grass beneath the bed will release valuable nitrogen into the root zone of your new plants.

Veggie gardens aside, now is also the time to look at pruning some of your fruit trees, vines and shrubs. If you can catch most plants before new leaves, the pruning will bring vigor to their new growth. Prune azaleas and other spring blooming ornamentals after blooming is complete and before the end of June so you are not removing the next year's flower buds. Crape myrtles love a good trimming. Topping them off isn't the best for long-term management, though it makes them look strangely like an alien life-form when they're leafless. Identify crossing branches, open up the form as desired, and remember that it's almost impossible to kill a crape myrtle through pruning. I once chopped one to the ground in fall, intending to put a garden where it stood – then got caught up in work and never got around to digging the poor thing up. Rather than dying, the decapitated tree rewarded me in spring with a huge flush of new growth and a rich bouquet of flowers. At that point, my sympathy overruled my desire for order... and I let it live in the midst of my veggies.

Proper pruning is an art, however, and I recommend spending some time reading and making sure you get good species-specific information on the trees and shrubs in your yard. And don't forget – those prunings are great for a rough compost pile or a small brush pile habitat for lizards, toads, beneficial insects and other creatures. Burying them deep beneath a garden bed will slowly add valuable organic matter and increase the soil's moisture retention. Look up "hugelkultur" for more on this fascinating and ancient technique for recycling woody "waste."

Pests shouldn't be too bad at this time of year – and by removing weed competition from around your plants, you'll give them the vigor to shake off what pests do appear. Make sure to water your demanding plants well if rainfall is low – and enjoy the explosion of growth at a time of year when most of the country is still facing snow.

Happy gardening!



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