



Monthly Newsletter

March 2012

Table of Contents:



Just Passin' Thru

Timely Gardening Tips

"What's Bugging You?"

Tips For Getting Your Plant Problems Solved

Mason Bees-Whats The Buzz?

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Timely Gardening Tips for MARION COUNTY

by David Y. Goodman,
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Master Gardener, In-Training

I remember the first time I discovered the Power of Fertilizer. I put a handful of granules into a pot where a sickly gourd plant was growing... and a week later – BAM! That thing turned into a writhing green monster, quickly jumping out of its pot and up the wrought-iron bars of the porch. I was hooked.

This is the time when the lawn-growing faithful start spreading things with names like "Super-Duper TurfGro" and "Greenwonder Wow Granules" across their yards... and the grass responds with vigor and a burst of vibrant Technicolor green. It's a satisfying chore but make sure you don't overdo it. Over-application not only wastes money, it also pollutes our water supply.

Just Passin' Thru

by Kathleen Patterson, FYN Program Coordinator

I have found over the course of the last ten years or so that I love to write about gardening. How many people can say that they love their job? Well, I can. Researching plants suitable for this area, sharing of information with you, encouraging builders and developers to become better stewards of the environment, and being outside enjoying nature while planning or installing demonstration garden; who could ask for anything more?

I can tell that spring has finally arrived. First by the increased bird activity in my landscape and second by watching the plants as they begin budding out, blooming or dropping the old foliage and generating new. As I write this article I can see from where I write the various birds visiting my main bird feeder. Gold Finches, downy woodpeckers, titmouse, cardinals, red headed woodpeckers, pine siskin's, blue jays and..... I have also noticed that the traditional weeds are also out there in masses this year. Thistle, spreading day flower, amaranth, cudweed, spurge and my favorite-wild geranium; all these and more growing in my own patch of heaven. Many more than in previous year's most likely due to the increased rainfall in recent months.

Never one to complain about too much rainfall, I have also seen many positive effects this spring. The wildflowers blooming along the roadsides are outstanding this year. Rainwater contains nitrogen and our plants thrive on rainfall. Dogwood and Redbud trees really showed their colors this year. The new flush of growth that occurs on some oak trees has been very noticeable. I could give you dozens more but I think you get the idea. The rainfall has been good for the plants and for replenishing our lakes, rivers and the Floridan Aquifer. Let's hope to see plenty more this year.

In my Florida Friendly landscape you will find a variety of plant materials. I incorporate native and drought tolerant plants that use far less water than most tropical plants. Both deciduous and evergreen trees and shrubs are used, perennials, bulbs, woody ornamentals, grasses, wildflowers and most important of all-plenty of plants that produce berries. This year we watched the Robins come in for the day-several hundred in the flock. They were the first to enjoy the berries of the several holly trees that are scattered throughout the landscape. They ate nearly every berry off the Sabal Palms (cabbage), and the Beautyberry shrubs that were loaded with ripe purple berries were stripped clean.

Last year the Cedar Waxwings arrived in droves and ate the berries on the Crape Myrtle and I'm hoping for the same this year. The beautiful orange berries on the Simpson's Red Stopper have been devoured. I have done a good job of providing for wildlife. Food, shelter, water. The southern red Cedars are providing nesting areas this year for Mockingbirds and Cardinals. These too provide berries so they serve for food and shelter. But with the good also comes the not so good. This year I have a red shouldered Hawk that has decided to also take up



If you're going to plant tomatoes and watermelons – provided you didn't succumb to last month's balmy allure – do it now. And get rocking with corn, squashes, cucumbers, sweet potatoes and beans. One variety I find to be very productive in this area is called the "yard-long" bean, an oriental variety with amazingly long pods (though I've never had one reach the advertised length). The taste is excellent and it does well in low-water conditions. A sunny fence is a perfect spot to plant a few – but watch out – the vines can grow to more than 10' in length.

Water is at a premium right now so make sure you keep on top of things. The warm weather can trash needy plants if they're ignored during a rainless stretch. Think about putting in a rain barrel if you don't have one. A full rain barrel will save you money and provide redundancy in your water supply in case of societal collapse. I currently have two and plan on adding a few more for my backyard later this year. Rain barrels are available for sale at UF/IFAS Marion County Extension office.

Enjoy the spring weather, Marion County Gardeners... and may your thumbs remain a lovely shade of green.



Just Passin' Thru

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

residence. I have several black racer snakes and several corn snakes that Franklin hasn't managed to bring in as gifts-yet. The hawk has also found the pond and enjoys the feeder fish on occasion. The koi keep to the deeper water so for now they are safe.

Yet all of this is a balance of nature. Soon I will have tadpoles in the pond. I already have heard the first singing of the frogs. Many of these will also become a food source for the beautiful hawk. Mother Nature needs our help as do the birds and other wildlife. More and more habitat is being lost to development. When they lose their habitat they need to find new. We as responsible homeowners should provide what we can to prevent the loss of these important creatures. A few plants that provide food, a few that provide shelter, and offering water with a birdbath or small pond will help keep the balance between nature and man. If we don't do what we can it won't be long before other problems occur. Increased insect populations are just one example but the chain of life from beginning to end is a complex event. Each cycle must be in place for without one the next event can't occur.

I'm looking forward to our annual Master Gardener Spring Festival this coming weekend. My list is at hand and I'm ready to get busy and enjoy what's left of winter and what I anticipate as a wonderful spring. Hope to see you this weekend!



What's Bugging You?

by Urban Horticulture Agent Norma Samuel

Find out what local residents are calling in about.

I have lots of red and black bugs all over my yard. What can I do to get rid of them?

We've been getting a lot of calls lately in the Plant Clinic about infestations of red and black bugs. These are called Jadera bugs or golden raintree bugs. They appear in clusters and the nymphal stage closely resembles the adult stage. The body of the insect is red with black wings and big red eyes. They are nuisance insects and do not warrant the use of insecticides to control as they will disappear in a few weeks.

For more information on these insects visit:

http://osceola.ifas.ufl.edu/pdfs/Natural%20Resources/PLC_GoldenRainTreeBugs.pdf



Tips for Getting Your Plant Problems Solved

by Norma Samuel, Urban Horticulture Agent

Well, when you are sick, where do you go if your ailment does not pass in a day or two? To the doctor, of course! The UF/IFAS Marion County Master Gardener Plant Clinic is a doctors' office of sort. It's where you take diseased plant samples, insects, weeds, and unknown plants to be identified, or soil samples to be tested. In order for our "Plant Doctors" to correctly diagnose the problem, a representative sample of the problem must be presented.

Here are a few tips that will help you to collect and bring a sample in excellent condition to the Plant Clinic:

- Insects.** Live specimens are best. Do not attempt to kill the insect by crushing it before you collect it. Place the insect in a jar or plastic bag with a piece of the plant material. Bring any eggs, or fruit, stem, root or leaf damage that might be associated with the insect.
- Diseases.** Here look for signs and symptoms. A symptom is the reaction of the plant due to the disease, for example wilting, stunted growth, and yellowing. Make note of the symptoms you observe on the plant, when they started to appear, how many plants are affected, and under what conditions. A sign is the actual pathogen or its parts or products, for example fungal spores that is responsible for causing the disease. A dead plant is of no use. Bring in an entire plant or portions of a plant that shows the progression of the disease – healthy, newly infected and advanced symptoms. Keep specimens fresh by placing in a plastic bag with moist tissue, or collect it just before you bring it in. **A special note on citrus.** If you suspect you may have citrus canker or citrus greening, call the Plant Clinic for instructions on how to bag your diseased sample before you bring it to the office. Improper packaging and transporting the diseased plant material will only spread the pathogen from one area to another and cause further devastation to the citrus industry.
- Soil sample.** Take a representative sample of soil from area where crop is grown. If you need to test the soil from your vegetable garden and lawn, you will need to collect two different soil samples. One for the lawn and another for the vegetable garden; since both of these areas are treated differently. Collect soil from 10 to 15 spots. To sample the lawn, take soil from the upper two to four inches and for landscape beds and vegetable gardens the upper six to eight inches. Place each small sample in a bucket then mix them all together. Take one pint of soil from the bucket and allow it to air dry. Bring dry sample to the Plant Clinic in a paper bag. Plastic bags will keep the sample moist.
- Plant identification.** Again, fresh specimens are best. Bring in entire plant, if possible, or leaves, branches, flowers, and or seeds. Provide any information you can on growing conditions, plant height, time of year the plant flowers, and any other information you think might be useful.



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

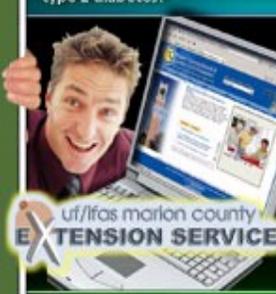
MICRO-IRRIGATION:

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



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?



We Have Answers

**UPCOMING
LECTURES/EVENTS:**

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

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

**Ask the Expert Booths at
Box Stores**

Master Gardeners will be available at Lowes, Home Depot and Walmart to answer gardening questions from residents between 8am – noon on the dates below.

March 17

The Home Depot
3300 SW 35th Terrace, Ocala

March 24

Lowe's
4600 E. Silver Springs Blvd., Ocala
Lowe's
3535 SW 36th Ave., Ocala
Lowe's
7575 SW 90th Ave., Ocala

March 31

Walmart
9570 SW Highway 200, Ocala
Walmart
11012 N. Williams St., Dunnellon
Walmart
2600 SW 19th Ave. Road, Ocala
Walmart
4980 E. Silver Springs Blvd., Ocala

Tips for Getting Your Plant Problems Solved

by Norma Samuel, Urban Horticulture Agent
(continued from page 3)

The key to successful pest control is correct identification of the problem. There's a likelihood we'll have your plant problems diagnosed on the first visit, if you follow these tips when collecting specimens. The Master Gardener Plant Clinic is located at 2232 NE Jacksonville Road, Ocala, FL 34470. To contact the Master Gardeners, call 352-671-8400.

Mason Bees - What's the Buzz?

by Anne Lambrecht Master Gardener



We all know that for some mysterious reason our honey bees are in trouble. They are dying by the thousand and no one knows exactly why. Some scientists think it is perhaps a virus brought about by pesticides on the crops they pollinate. Honey bees are responsible for successful pollination of important crops: vegetable, fruit, nut and flowers. Their hives are actually shipped by tractor trailers all over the country to accomplish this activity. The native Americans called them the "white man's fly" because the Europeans brought them along in their cargo.

Mason bees are our native bees. It is a common name for solitary bees that build part or all of their nests with mud or plant fiber chewed into a paste. I'm sure you've seen them but just didn't realize who they were. Most Mason bees are smaller than honey bees but some are about the same size as honey bees. They have stout bodies and many species are metallic green or bluish in color and at first they look like a housefly. About 140 species of Mason bees are found in North America out of about 200 species worldwide. These bees have a sting but do not attack defensively unless handled, squeezed or stepped on. Two hundred fifty Mason bees can do the work of 20,000 honey bees!

Mason bees are in the genus *Osmia* in the leafcutter bee family Megachilidae. Mason bees are very effective pollinators. Two or three females can pollinate the equivalent of a mature apple tree in one season. They fly in cool or rainy weather and can supplement or replace honey bees as commercial pollinators in some situations. The Blueberry bee is used as a pollinator for blueberry plants. The Japanese hornfaced bee is native to Japan and has been used to pollinate apple trees there for more than 50 years. One female can pollinate over 2,000 apple flowers per day! The Spanish hornfaced bee is used in Spain for pollinating the flowers of almond trees.

Unlike honey bees or bumblebees, the Mason bees do their own work and live alone. They are solitary which means that at the end of their day, they go to their own place, not to a hive with others. They are active from spring through late summer. Every female is fertile and makes her own nest. There are no worker bees for this species. Solitary bees produce neither honey nor beeswax. They are immune to the viruses and mites that honey bees are plagued with but they have their own unique parasites, pests and diseases.

Mason Bees - What's the Buzz?

by Anne Lambrecht Master Gardener

(continued from page 4)

Mason bees mate in the spring. The bees emerge from their cocoons in the spring with males the first to come out. They wait for the females to emerge and the first thing they do is mate.

Mason bees like to nest in narrow holes or tubes, typically naturally occurring tubular cavities such as hollow twigs, the abandoned nests of wood boring insects or even snail shells. They do not excavate their own nests. The material used for the cell can be clay or chewed plant tissue. One species of the Mason actually lines her nest with flower petals. Females then visit flowers to gather pollen and nectar and it will take many trips to complete a pollen/nectar "provision mass". Once she has put in enough "food", the bee backs in to the hole and lays an egg on top of the mass. Then she creates a partition of mud which doubles as the back of the next cell. The process continues until she has filled the cavity. The female eggs are laid in the back of the nest and the male eggs toward the front. Once a bee has finished with a nest, she plugs the entrance to the tube and then may seek out another nest location. By the summer, the larva has consumed all of its provisions and begins spinning a cocoon around itself and enters the pupal stage, and the adult matures either in the fall or winter, hibernating inside its little cocoon. Many *Osmia* species live where the weather can get really cold, like Canada.

You can get an untreated block of wood and drill holes 5/16th of an inch wide and in about 4 to 6 inches and they will come—I kid you not. I had such a block of wood on the end of my work bench last summer and then moved it so I could clean off the bench, not realizing that some Mason bees were in the process of making nests there. I kept seeing and especially hearing the buzzing of this bee looking for her nest in the place where it was! I moved the block of wood back quickly and she resumed her work. These nests should be facing south or east and have a little overhanging cover for protection from the elements.



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