



Monthly Newsletter

October 2011

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Published by Norma Samuel  
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Marion County Horticulture Agent

**Timely Gardening Tips  
for MARION COUNTY**

by Master Gardener, Jo Leyte-Vidal

Dr. Ed Gilman, University of Florida Environmental Horticulture Professor, has good advice for all of us who will be planting trees and shrubs this winter. Why in the cold part of the year? The plants are dormant and will work at growing roots instead of new leaves, which will make for a stronger plant in the spring.

Dr. Gilman has developed some simple steps to help ensure your plants establish well:

- Consider planting at the start of the rainy season

## The Mantis Is A Surly Chap, With Manners Unrefined. He'll Eat You Up In A Snap, Even His Own Kind!

by Lori Tamblingson, UF/IFAS Marion County Master Gardener

In the insect world, the praying mantis is a highly developed hunting machine. They have enormous front legs that are not used for walking. The legs are raised in a praying fashion and have serrated, alternating rows of long and short spines. These spines are designed to impale their prey. They can strike an insect within a four inch range in five-hundredths of a second. It's like the proverbial bolt of lightning; you never see the one that gets you. They are unusual looking insects with a long body and a tiny triangular shaped head with large eyes on either side. They can also turn their heads 180 degrees to scan their surroundings. It can be a little unnerving to have one watching you. They can be tan or light green colored, but some resemble flowers or leaves in shape and color. They can also get quite large, up to five inches long.



For years I labored under the misconception that Florida didn't have praying mantis. Up until last year, I had never seen one, except in Ohio. I lived in Lima, Ohio, for five years and regularly saw mantis in my courtyard. I became enamored with their quirky ways and superior attitudes. When we moved back to Florida, I was saddened to leave my praying mantis behind. It took eight years for me to spy my first praying mantis in my yard. It was only by chance that I looked out the window and saw one perched on one of my plant stands.

Upon doing some research I found out why I only saw one. These insects are highly predaceous and will eat whatever they can catch. This includes other praying mantis. Due to their cannibalistic nature and migratory ways, it limits the number of mantis in an area. It also limits how beneficial they are. They are considered important predators, but not as much as lady beetles and green lacewings. Some people purchase their egg cases and release them, but because of their tendency to eat each other and migrate, you could end up with just one in your yard. In Florida, mantis is often seen in late September and early October. My mantis sighting occurred in September.

I stated earlier that I considered praying mantis to be charming creatures. I changed my opinion after further reading about them. They are only charming if you aren't their prey. I came upon an article about a praying mantis that had managed to capture a hummingbird. He had impaled the hummer right through the chest with that powerful front leg. The author stated that the mantis ate his fill, and with a jerk of his leg, dropped what he didn't want to the ground. The accompanying picture was disturbing to say the least! It's definitely not for the faint of heart. The University of Florida states that praying mantis neither bite nor sting humans. I have no intention of testing that statement. Anything fast enough and capable of catching a hummingbird is going to get a wide berth from me. As we approach the prime viewing time of these incredible insects, I would suggest a foray into your yard to see if you can spot your own praying mantis. Just be sure and give him plenty of room!



### Timely Gardening Tips for MARION COUNTY

by Master Gardener, Jo Leyte-Vidal

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- Do not amend the soil in the planting hole
- Irrigate based on location and weather
- Apply water directly to the rootball
- Use drip irrigation
- After establishment, irrigate at the first sign of wilting
- Surround with 2 inches of mulch that does not touch the trunk

For more information go to the web site:

[www.edis.ifas.ufl.edu/EP391](http://www.edis.ifas.ufl.edu/EP391) and check out the fact sheet titled Establishing Shrubs in Florida Landscapes.



## Caring for Mums

by Norma Samuel, Urban Horticulture Agent



The chrysanthemum is one of the most colorful of all fall flowering perennials. A wide selection of varieties is available in white, pink, yellow, lavender, bronze, salmon, orange, or red. In addition to this extensive color range, flowers vary greatly in type and size. One of the most popular flower types is the single or daisy form. Other flower types are anemone, spoon, spider, standard, and pompon.

Here is Dr. Robert J. Black of the UF/IFAS Horticulture Department recommendations for purchasing and caring for your chrysanthemums (mums). Mums can be purchased in bloom from nurseries and garden supply stores. This is an advantage over growing them from cuttings because you can see the flower color and type, and you can have instant color in your flower beds. When buying potted mums, look for healthy, well-shaped plants with many flower buds, since a plant with many partially opened buds will have a longer period of bloom than a plant in full bloom.

The mums you plant this fall will carry over the winter and resume growing in the spring. The plants (clumps) should be divided to prevent the shoots comprising the clump from becoming too crowded. Failure to divide the clumps will cause weak, spindly growth with few flowers. Select strong-growing clumps and separate the individual shoots with an adequate root system, so the new small plant can become reestablished quickly. Avoid using the shoots in the center of the clump because a crown rot fungus, which may weaken or kill the young plants, is often present.

Chrysanthemums grow best in well-drained soil. The yearly addition of compost or other suitable organic matter to the planting bed is desirable. Apply a three to four-inch layer of organic matter and two pounds of 6-6-6 fertilizer per 100 square feet over the bed and till them into the soil to a depth of six inches. The plants should be set 18 to 24 apart to provide adequate space for development. Vigorous varieties may need a 30-inch spacing to prevent crowding.

Pinch off the top one to two inches of the stem after the plants are established and at least six inches tall. This will encourage lateral branching and produce lower, bushier plants. When the lateral branches are six to eight inches long, they too can be pinched. This practice should be continued with the final pinch made between August 1 and 15. If pinched later, the plants may not have sufficient stem length by the time days are short enough for bud formation and flowering.

Two to three applications of a 6-6-6 fertilizer at the rate of one pound per 100 square feet of bed during the growing season are sufficient to grow a good crop of flowers. Water beds thoroughly to distribute the fertilizer throughout the root area.

As the days get shorter in the late summer, flower buds will begin to develop and at this time of year some varieties should be providing color in your landscape. Contact UF/IFAS Marion County Master Gardeners at 671-8400 if you need additional information on caring for mums or other plants in your garden.



Photo by Brady McTigue

# The Black Thumb

Kathleen Patterson, FYN Program Coordinator

I kill houseplants. Over the course of my lifetime I've most likely killed hundreds of houseplants. You name them—I kill 'em. Dead. African violets, ivy, philodendron, arrow plant, spathiphyllum, corn plants, etc. etc. etc. Too much water, not enough water, too sunny, not enough sun. Even the Christmas cactus (never shall I call them holiday cactus) wither up and die. I may have a green thumb outside but it surely turns black once we start talking about houseplants. So I've stopped buying them. But for one plant. One that doesn't die when I look at it. One that can be ignored or babied and it will thrive. It's taken me years to figure out that I can grow something inside the house.

I would have to give credit for this amazing feat to my sisters. When my parents had their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary we all got together to celebrate. At that time my three sisters lived in Michigan so they had much farther to travel. We all met in Key Largo along with nieces and nephews to have some fun. And fun we did. My nieces went parasailing and my sisters and I went shopping. For orchids. My two oldest sisters were very familiar with the different types of orchids so it was easy for me to follow their lead.

They were willing to spend big money for orchids. I remember that Janet picked out a beautiful orchid and spent about \$100 for just one plant. I on the other hand chose the more inexpensive types because I just knew that once in my hands they were goners. Jeanie the true orchid lover picked out several to add to her already large collection and I bought three small orchids spending less than \$50.

That was almost 13 years ago. Many things have changed since then. And some things remain the same. I still have one of the original orchids that I purchased way back then. Of course I gave it up as a goner many years ago. It remained alive but never bloomed once I brought it home—until this past year. I have a very small greenhouse that stores my orchids over the winter along with several tropical plants that can't take the cold weather of north central Florida. Plumeria, bottle palm, coral tree, perfume plant and now about two dozen orchids. Cattleya, Dendrobiums, Vandas, Phalaenopsis, and a few other unusual orchids. And to my utter amazement, against all that I have read or been told they seem to thrive on neglect. Yes, you did read that correctly, neglect.

I've read that they should be fertilized at least monthly and some say weekly. Light fertilizer applications will encourage better blooming. I must admit that my intentions are good; I tell myself that I will go out and fertilize the plants in the greenhouse. Almost every week I say that I will, and every week I forget. I believe that the last time I fertilized the orchids was way back in the spring—almost a year ago. Yet in the last several months nearly every orchid that I own has bloomed. Some with 5—6 sprays of blooms that last for months. Some Cattleyas that only have two or three blooms but they seem to stay colorful for weeks at a time. And the size. A single bloom larger than my hand. Imagine when there are several that size all on a single plant. And they bloom even if neglected. I have found the perfect plant.



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!





## The Black Thumb

Kathleen Patterson, FYN Program Coordinator  
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I know that most people don't have greenhouses that they can utilize but my orchids love to sit in the window or hang from the ceiling in the bathroom. An ideal area where they can enjoy the humidity and warm temperatures, or perhaps a sunny kitchen that warms while you bake. They thrive in hot and humid conditions. During the summer they can be placed outside under the shade of a tree. The summer rains offer nitrogen which encourages new growth. Unfortunately, they won't tolerate temperatures below 40 degrees so they must be protected during the winter months.

Today I have six blooming orchids inside the house. Two cattleya that have a beautiful fragrance and several Dendrobiums. Once finished blooming they are returned to the greenhouse to enjoy the light and humidity. Many of the orchids will bloom twice a year giving you months of blooms. Start small. Start with the common varieties and be patient. I waited 12 years for my first orchid to bloom but hopefully yours won't take that long!



Cattleya

## What's Bugging You?

by Urban Horticulture Agent Norma Samuel

**Found out what local residents are calling in about**

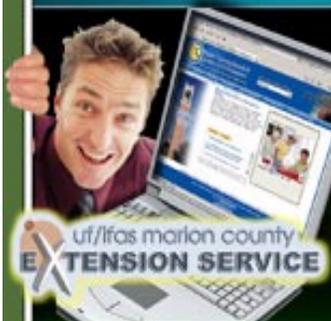
I have an orange tree with distorted leaves. What's wrong with it?

This question was posed to me by a resident on a recent visit to a gardening presentation at the Belleview Library. The sample was infested with citrus leafminer. The larvae of this very small moth feed between the upper and lower leaf surface. With high infestations the leaves become distorted and look very unsightly. Don't be alarmed. It will not kill the tree. A systemic insecticide is the only product that is effective in controlling internal feeders. However, I do not recommend using a systemic product in the home vegetable garden or on backyard fruits. If leafminers are usually a problem on your citrus wait until the spring when the tree sends out a new flush of growth, spray it with a horticultural oil and this will deter the adult moth from laying its eggs on the leaves; thereby reducing the level of infestation.

On another note, if you have problems on your citrus that you need diagnosed call the Plant Clinic at 352-671-8400 to troubleshoot first. If your problem is not resolved on the phone you will be asked to email a photo showing the damage. If you are requested to bring a sample in, be sure to bring it in a securely sealed plastic bag. We are putting this policy in place to prevent the spread of citrus diseases such as citrus greening.

### 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



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