

Gardening Tips

By Wendy L. Wilber

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January is the month when we make resolutions, and think about changes for the New Year. Diet and exercise are all well and good, but the lawn and landscape are great places to make changes for the better! If you have been thinking about making your yard more environmentally friendly, using less pesticides, and having a lower maintenance landscape, 2008 is a wonderful year to make it happen. Change happens best when you have clear goals and take steps to reach them. Here are some steps that you can take to make your landscape more Florida friendly.

- Come to a Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Class (there's one at the end of the month)
- Fertilize with slow release nitrogen only when needed
- Irrigate only when grass or plants show a need (turn the clock off)
- Use soft pesticides or no pesticides
- Plant more trees
- Mulch areas where turf is not used



Get the vegetable seeds started soon.

- Use plants that are Florida Friendly www.floridayards.org has the list
- Remove invasive plants

Vegetables

If you are currently growing a garden, you need to fertilize with 6-6-6 or 8-8-8, 2 to 3 times during the growing season. Apply 4 ounces per 10 foot row in bands 2 to 3 inches on either side of the plants. Work it into the soil, then

water. You can also use 15-0-15 at one half the above rate.

It is not too late to plant cold-hardy vegetables such as beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, celery, Chinese cabbage, cauliflower, mustard, kale, leek, bunching onions, shallots, radishes, English peas, potatoes, and turnips. Use transplants when possible since they are cold-hardy.

If a freeze is forecasted, water your garden 24 to 48 hours before



For more information, contact the Alachua County Extension Office at 2800 NE 39th Avenue, Gainesville, FL 32609 (352) 955-2402 or TDD/TYY (352) 955-2406

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a severe freeze. Cover plants with plastic, cloth, paper, or pots. Be sure to remove covers the next day as temperatures rise.

Start looking in seed catalogs and garden centers for seed and plant selections for your spring garden. *Call the Extension office at 352-955-2402 and ask for the *Vegetable Gardening Guide (SP 103)* and the *Starting the Garden With Transplants (HS 507)* to help get your spring garden growing.

This is also a good time to get the soil tested if you have not done so in the past two years. Add lime only if test indicates you need to raise the pH.

You can start your own transplants indoors or in a protected location. Grow them to the seedling stage and thin plants when they are about two inches. Transplant seedlings into paper cups, small plastic pots, flats, or peat pots. Vegetables that readily transplant are beets, broccoli, brussel sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, lettuce, collards, endive, and tomatoes. Transplants should be ready to plant outdoors between the end of February and the middle of March. Plant after a



Pick up air potatoes when you see them to help control this invasive vine.

COMING EVENTS

Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Landscaping Program

January 25th from 3:00-5:00 pm at the Alachua County Extension office. This class will cover the ins and outs of creating a Florida Friendly Yard. If you have been thinking about having a low maintenance yard that still looks great, come to this free class and learn how to have a landscape that conserves water and is easy to take care of. We will also cover invasive plants in this class. Call (352) 955-2402 to register.

Great Gainesville Gardening Course

Gardening & Landscaping in Gainesville can be unique. These classes will help you have a great yard with minimum environmental impacts. Courses include:

- Invasive Plants and Alternatives – January 23rd
- Raised Bed Square Foot Gardening – February 6th
- Selecting Shrubs and Trees – February 20th
- Perennials for the Butterfly Garden – March 5th

All classes are scheduled for 6:00-8:00 pm at the Alachua County Extension Office. Please call the Extension Office to register.

Air Potato Round-Up

The Air Potato Round-Up will be on Saturday, January 26th from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm. Contact the Gainesville Parks Division at (352) 334-3326 or www.natureoperations.org to participate in removing this invasive plant from the natural areas of our city.

rain when it is cloudy or in the evening. This will cause less stress for the plants in adapting to their new environment.

Fruits and Nuts

We have had some cool temperatures already this season so leaves of citrus trees that have suffered severe freeze damage will gradually collapse and dry out. This will occur rapidly if the freeze is followed by a warm sunny day.

The youngest leaves of the tree are the most sensitive to the freezing temps, but all the leaves can be killed if the freeze is severe enough. If the twig and branch damage is serious the leaves will dry out and remain attached for several weeks. If the leaves are

dropped soon after the freeze, the twigs and larger branches are probably not as seriously injured. Cold damage can also be seen as splitting and loosening of bark on the trunk and large branches.

This is the best time to plant fruit and nut trees; peach, apple, plum, pecan, chestnut, persimmon, fig and pear trees.

Bare-root or balled and burlapped trees can be planted when dormant. Ask for Extension *Fact Sheet #8 entitled Fruits and Nuts* for Alachua County for specific varieties.

Late January and early February are the best times to prune most fruit and nut trees. Prune or thin persimmon, pecans, figs, peaches,



and nectarines. Remove crowded or damaged branches. Annual pruning of fruiting plants renews vigor to the tree. Pruning also allows you to maintain a desired size.

If you did not apply a dormant oil spray to your deciduous fruit trees last month, there is still time for an application. Oil sprays help to control scale insect problems.

Prune grapes from now to mid-March by removing tendrils and branches less than 3/16 inch in diameter. Cut back spurs and fruiting arms, leaving two or three buds per spur.

Peach trees should be pruned to maintain low growth for picking and to open the canopy to allow light. Prune out crowded branches and sprouts.

Herbs

Cold-hardy herbs that can be planted now include parsley, sage, rosemary, thyme, dill, fennel, winter savory, chervil, lovage, chives, garlic chives, and coriander. These usually get through the winter without too much of a problem.

Lawns

Lawns should be dormant during this time of year. Do not fertilize; this will only cause cold damage during freezes. Like the garden, the lawn will benefit from about one-half inch of water the night before a freeze. This will help to protect the grass from severe frost damage.

Lawns overseeded with ryegrass require fertilizer every four to six weeks. Keep ryegrass cut and water conservatively. Ryegrass is



Prune grapes, peaches, persimmons while dormant.

susceptible to a disease called Pythium (damping off and cottony blight). Avoid over watering and fertilizing during warm, humid, or foggy weather. If this problem occurs, apply a fungicide immediately.

Leaving a thin layer of fallen leaves on the ground will not harm the vegetation below, however a thick build-up of leaves can promote pathogenic organisms. Mowing over the leaves to

assist in decomposition helps to eliminate this problem. Either mow or rake the leaves before a thick layer accumulates to avoid future problems.

Trees and Shrubs

Florida's Arbor Day is the third Friday of January. Celebrate by planting a native tree in the right place. Live oak, Shumard oak, winged elm and red maple are some favorites. For a list of more trees, request *Native Trees for North Florida*, (Circular 833) from the Extension Office.

Take care to keep your plants in optimum growing condition before the freezes come. Late fall fertilization can sometimes result in a flush of new growth which is vulnerable to freeze damage. Also late pruning can result in a flush of leaves that will be cold sensitive. Watering landscape

ALACHUA COUNTY EXTENSION OFFICE HAS NEW DIRECTOR

First, by way of introduction, my name is Cindy Sanders, the new Alachua County Extension Director as of November 2, 2007. I may not be new to the office but definitely new to the director's position. I have served as the Livestock Agent for the past 6 ½ years at the Extension Office. My new responsibilities will include management of five Extension Agents and three office staff, implementation of County and IFAS policies, and to maintain good relations with County government, IFAS, community organizations, and the overall support of the County Extension program. I will keep my beef and forage programmatic work, and still work with those producers in the county. I have a B.S. in Animal Science and a Masters Degree in Agricultural Education both from the University of Florida. I have a life long experience in Agriculture, growing up on a cow/calf operation and work experience as a ranch manager, high school vo-ag teacher, agricultural sales representative, and a meat processing supervisor.

I am excited about serving the residents of Alachua County in this capacity. I have big shoes to fill, for those of you that know William "Bill" Brown. If you ever have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to call the office or e-mail me.

I look forward to working with you in the future.



plants before a freeze helps to protect the plants. This is because a well-watered soil will absorb more solar radiation than a dry soil will. This solar warming of the soil will radiate heat back to the plant during the cold temperatures.

If you purchased a living Christmas tree like a Leyland cypress or a southern red cedar, they can be used as great specimen or screen trees in the landscape. They prefer a full sun location, and should be given plenty of space. The Leyland cypress will grow rapidly and can reach heights of 35 to 50 feet. The Southern red cedar, a native Florida tree, will grow to 30 to 40 feet tall. Take care to water the establishing trees 2-3 times a week.

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For persons with disabilities requiring special accommodations, please contact Wendy Wilber at the Alachua County Extension Office, at least five working days prior to the program so that proper consideration may be given to the request.