

Gardening in the Panhandle

Rain Gardens

Do you have an area in your yard where water always runs after a storm and washes out your property? If so, you may want to consider a rain garden for that spot. Rain gardens work similarly to swales and stormwater retention ponds in that they are designed to temporarily hold rainwater and allow it to soak into the ground. However, they are quite different aesthetically, because they are planted with water-tolerant trees, shrubs, groundcovers and flowers to provide an attractive alternative to the eroding gully that once inhabited the area. Rain gardens are not "created wetlands", but landscaped beds that can handle both wet and drier soil. Many of the plants best suited for rain gardens are also attractive to wildlife.

A perfect spot for a rain garden might be downhill from a rain gutter, an area notorious for excess water and erosion. To build a rain garden, the rainwater leaving a particular part of the property (or rooftop), is directed into a gently

sloping, 4"-8" deep depression in the ground, the back and sides of which are supported by a berm of earth. The rain garden serves as a catch basin for the water and is usually a semi-circle. The width of the rain garden depends on the slope and particular site conditions. Within the area, native plants are placed into loose, sandy soil and mulched. Care should be taken to prevent the garden from having a very deep end where water pools; water should spread evenly throughout the basin.

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Rain Garden. Photo: Jennifer Heady, Okaloosa County Extension.

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Beneficial Nematodes

Many homeowners have learned that nematodes can be a serious pest in a residential landscape. There is no good control method for nematodes and their presence can mean starting over with a different grass, replacing a row of shrubs, or sacrificing delicious home-grown vegetables.

Times are changing. Did you ever think homeowners could be thankful for nematodes in their landscape?

Several years ago, University of Florida researchers described a new species of nematode that was imported into Florida. This nematode was different from more commonly known plant feeding nematodes in that it feeds on insects, particularly mole crickets. In its native South America, the 'mole cricket nematode,' *Steinernema scapterisci*, is instrumental in managing certain species of mole crickets.

The life cycle of the mole cricket nematode includes eggs, four stages of juveniles and adults. Most often it is the 3-staged juvenile that is found in the soil and moves into mole crickets. Adult mole crickets must come in close contact with the nematodes, allowing the roundworm to move into its body through either the mouth or spiracle (breathing hole). Once inside, specialized bacteria are released by the nematodes which will eventually kill the mole cricket. In the process, the mole cricket moves around in the soil, allowing the nematodes to be dispersed.

Currently, mole cricket nematodes can be purchased through several mail order garden supply companies. The product may be sold as Nematac S or simply as mole cricket nematodes. The following are a few handling and application guidelines

that will help ensure the success of the product:

- Use the nematodes soon after receiving them. Keep them refrigerated until you are ready to apply them to the lawn.
- Apply the nematodes with spray equipment as directed by the manufacturer and irrigate the area immediately following application.
- Apply on cloudy days or just before dark to protect nematodes from ultraviolet rays.

Mole cricket nematodes are most effective against adult mole crickets. In Florida, the best times of the year to apply the nematodes are Sept. through Nov. and Feb. through April in Florida. For more information on using beneficial nematodes against pest mole crickets visit <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/IN674>.

BETH BOLLES

Escambia County
Horticulture Extension Faculty
bbolles@ufl.edu

As Lawns Thin, Weeds Move In

People sometimes go to great extents to grow grass where it doesn't want to grow. However, sometimes we need to look for alternatives to grass.

You might have noticed that the areas around the base of your trees that used to be covered in a lush lawn are now thinning out. More than likely the problem is not a pest but rather the tree out competing the grass. This is a common scenario. When faced with this situation (particularly around a group of large trees) it might be time to consider alternatives to grass.

A mulched bed or a shade tolerate groundcover may be a better

solution to a declining lawn. A mulched bed will look better than a weedy, thinning lawn. And the tree's roots will benefit from the mulch.

Some people blame the weeds as the lawn declines. But in reality, it's not until the lawn thins that the weeds move in.

As grass declines in high traffic areas, consider pavement or mulch. In naturally wet areas, consider plants that do well on wet sites. Some areas just aren't appropriate for growing grass. As the grass declines in these areas, other plants (weeds) that are better suited to the conditions out compete the grass. In such cases, consider turf alternatives and avoid the use of herbicides, which are only a temporary fix at best.

LARRY WILLIAMS

Okaloosa County
Horticulture Extension Faculty
lwilliams@co.okaloosa.fl.us

Fertilizing Your Blueberries

In Florida, blueberries prefer frequent and light fertilization. A good fertilization plan is to use a 12-4-8 complete fertilizer. A special formulation called "blueberry special" is also available in Florida. If none of these fertilizers can be found, you can use any type of "camellia-azalea" fertilizer. Many of these are suitable for blueberries and are easily accessible in smaller sizes for home gardeners.

Apply fertilizer by hand evenly in a 2- to 3-foot circle around the plant. The fertilization ring or circle should begin approximately 1 foot away from the trunk. If the plants are in a row, broadcast a continuous band two to three feet wide, one foot from the base of the plant. Expand the fertilization area 1 foot each year until a 4-foot area is reached. This

procedure should be done in April, June, August and October.

Locations with high amounts of organic matter or nitrogen may require little to no fertilizer during the first year. When planting, do not put fertilizer in the planting hole. Give newly planted and un-mulched plants 1 ounce. If plants are heavily mulched, use 1.5 ounces of 12-4-8 per plant.

Blueberries are also susceptible to iron deficiencies, so supplemental foliar or soil applications of

chelated iron may be necessary for temporary improvement of iron deficiency symptoms. Lasting solutions of such deficiencies usually involve changing the soil pH, adding organic mulches and proper irrigation practices.

Excessive fertilizer amounts can cause plant injury or even death to blueberries. Over fertilization symptoms may include pale yellow chlorosis of leaves and low vigor, which mainly occurs when too little water is applied to the over fertilized areas. To avoid this, do not apply fertilizer

in a small area around plants and try to stay away from using nitrates.

Table 1 contains general guidelines and should be adjusted based on the plant's performance and a soil test from the County Extension Office. Generally, blueberries will suffer from over-fertilization than from lack of fertilization.

COLLIN ADCOCK
Washington County
Horticulture Extension Faculty
collinwa@ufl.edu

Table 1. General fertilizer rates for blueberries

Plants Age	Complete 12-4-8 Fertilizer per plant	Diameter/Area
Newly planted	1.0 - 1.5 ounces	1 ft area*
One year	1.5 ounces	1 to 2 ft area*
Two years	3.0 ounces	2 to 3 ft area*
Three years	4.0 ounces	3 to 4 ft area*
Four years	6.0 ounces	4 ft area*
Five Years	8.0 ounces	4 ft area*
Six years or older	10.0 ounces	4 ft area*

*1 foot from the trunk

Sensitive Plant: One Tough Cookie

Called "sensitive plant" because its leaves draw back when touched, *Mimosa strigillosa* is actually a reliable and vigorous low-growing, drought-tolerant Florida native that serves as a wonderful butterfly attractor. Chosen by The Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association as one of the 2008 Plants of the Year, sensitive plant is an excellent plant to use if you're looking for a groundcover to replace your grass. It produces pink-purple "powderpuff", ball-shaped flowers from spring to early fall. The foliage is delicate looking with small compound leaves which fold up at night and when touched, yet are durable enough to walk on, park on, drive on and even mow. *Mimosa strigillosa* does well in sun



Mimosa strigillosa. Photo: Larry Allain, USDA-NRCS, PLANTS Database.

or shade, tolerates a wide range of pH, and accepts wet or dry conditions; however, it grows best when well watered. The mature size of this tough plant is 6 to 9 inches high, by 3 to 5 feet wide. Sensitive plant is cold hardy through Zone 8 and can be propagated easily by cuttings or by seed. With virtually no

major insect or disease problems, this groundcover is a winner.

SHEILA DUNNING
Okaloosa County
Commercial Horticulture Extension
Faculty
sdunning@ufl.edu

Besides reducing a problematic area of the lawn, a rain garden can play an important role in improving water quality. With increasing populations come more pavement, roads, and rooftops, which do almost nothing to absorb or treat stormwater, and usually add to the problem. Vegetation and soil do a much better job at handling that water. Excess sediment, which can fill in streams and bays, and chemicals

from fertilizers and pesticides are just some of the pollutants treated within a rain garden via the natural growth processes of the plants.

Some well-known plants that work great in rain gardens include: Louisiana iris, cinnamon fern, button-bush, Virginia willow, black-eyed Susan, swamp lily, tulip poplar, oakleaf hydrangea, wax myrtle, Florida azalea, river birch, holly, and

Southern magnolia. For a complete list of rain garden plants appropriate for our area, visit the "Rain Garden" section of Tallahassee's "Think about Personal Pollution" Web site, www.tappwater.org

CARRIE STEVENSON
Escambia County
Florida Yards & Neighborhoods
Faculty
ctsteven@ufl.edu

UPCOMING EVENTS

BAY COUNTY

March 7-9, 2008: *American Red Cross Home and Garden Expo*. Bay County Fair Grounds, 15th and Sherman, Panama City. Extension Horticulture and Sea Grant faculty and Bay County Extension Master Gardeners will be giving educational seminars, and will be conducting a plant sale and plant clinic.

March 27, 2008: *Lawn Care for Home Owners*. Bay County Extension Office, 9 a.m. to noon and 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Learn how to care for your Florida lawn. Call (850) 784-6105 to make reservations.

April 27, 2008: *Landscaping for Home Owners*. Bay County Extension Office, 9 a.m. to noon and 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Learn the principles of landscape design and common

pitfalls. Call (850) 784-6105 to make reservations.

OKALOOSA COUNTY

April 26, 2008: *Plant Sale*. The Okaloosa County Master Gardeners, at the Northwest Florida Fairground in Ft. Walton Beach. Call (850) 689-5850 for more information.

SANTA ROSA COUNTY

April 11-13, 2008: *Plant sale*. The Santa Rosa County Master Gardeners, at the 11th Annual Emerald Coast Flower and Garden Festival. Located on the campus of Pensacola Junior College in Milton, FL, other vendors, food and a lecture series will be offered. Call 850-623-3868 for more information. Hours are noon to 5 p.m. on Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Sunday.

WALTON COUNTY

March 11, 2008: *How Does the Urban Turf Rule Affect Your Fertilizing Practices?* Walton County Extension Office located at 732 N. 9th Street, DeFuniak Springs from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Dr. Laurie Trenholm, UF/IFAS Turfgrass Specialist, will be speaking on the new Urban Fertilizer Rule that went into effect December 31, 2007. To register or for more information, call (850) 689-5850 or (850) 729-1400 ext 5850.

SANTA ROSA AND OKALOOSA COUNTIES

March 13-May 15, 2008: *Master Naturalist Course, Coastal Systems Module*. Registration closes March 3. Call 850-623-3868 for more information or visit <http://conference.ifas.ufl.edu/fmnp/#cs8-07>.

“ When weeding, the best way to make sure you are removing a weed and not a valuable plant is to pull on it. If it comes out of the ground easily, it is probably a valuable plant. ”

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

Garden Tips for March and April

Flowers

- Begin planting colorful annual flowers such as ageratum, alyssum, amaranthus, asters, baby's breath, begonia, calendula, celosia, cosmos, dahlia, dusty miller, gaillardia, geranium, hollyhock, impatiens, marigold, nicotiana, ornamental pepper, pentas, phlox, rudbeckia, salvia, sweet Williams, torenia, verbena, vinca and zinnia.
- Caladium bulbs are extremely sensitive to cold soil so there is no advantage to planting early. Purchase caladiums while there is a good selection, but wait until late March or April before planting them in shady beds.
- Begin watching roses for black spot fungus disease (small black spots on the leaves that quickly worsen). Control it by spraying every seven to ten days with a fungicide. Call your local Extension Office for recommended products.

Trees and Shrubs

- Finish pruning summer flowering shrubs such as althea, hibiscus, abelia, oakleaf hydrangea and oleander.
- Delay pruning azaleas, camellias, spiraeas, gardenias and other spring flowering shrubs until after flowering is complete.
- Prune any cold weather-damaged plants only after new growth appears.
- If needed, fertilize shrubs and small trees with a slow release fertilizer. A good general-purpose landscape fertilizer is a 15-0-15.

- Mature palms should receive an application of granular fertilizer. Use a special palm fertilizer that has an 8-2-12 +4Mg (magnesium) with micronutrients formulation. Apply one pound of fertilizer per 100 sq ft of canopy area or landscape area.
- Pick up all fallen camellia blossoms and remove them from your property. This practice helps to prevent petal blight next season.
- Prune ornamental grasses. For more information visit the online publication, "Considerations for Selection and Use of Ornamental Grasses," at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/EP233> or call you local Extension Office for a copy.
- Evergreen and semi-evergreen trees such as live oak and laurel oak shed most of their leaves during March and early April. Make plans to recycle these leaves on your property by composting or using them as mulch in vegetable, flower and shrub beds.

Vegetable Garden

- In mid-March, plant vegetables such as bush beans, pole beans, lima beans, cantaloupes, sweet corn, cucumbers, eggplant, okra, southern peas, peppers, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, summer squash, winter squash, tomatoes and watermelon.
- Sweet potato plants (slips/draws) can be set out April through June.

Lawns

- Removing excessive accumulation of leaves from the lawn will increase the effectiveness of fertilizer and pesticide applications.

- If a preemergence lawn herbicide is needed to control summer weeds, it should be applied in early March or when day temperatures reach 65 to 70 degrees F for 4 to 5 consecutive days. Make certain to choose one that is safe on your type of grass. Call your local Extension Office for a recommendation.
- Wait until early April to fertilize lawns. If fertilized too early, they often respond with yellow spots of iron chlorosis. Use a slow release nitrogen product with a 3-1-3 ratio (like a 16-2-16) or a 1:0:1 ratio such as a 15-0-15.
- Service the lawn mower by sharpening the blade and adjusting the cutting height for your type of grass.
- Anyone considering establishment of centipedegrass from seed should hold off until the soil warms up and stabilizes above 70° F.
- Spring dead spots may be present. Before treating these areas, get a diagnosis. Treat, if necessary, and then patch these areas before weeds invade the bare spots. Sodding, plugging or sprigging helps them to fill in quicker.

TERESA FRIDAY
Santa Rosa County
Horticulture Extension Faculty
tlfriday@ufl.edu

Timing Your Herbicide Application

The best time to apply a preemergence herbicide to control summer annual lawn weeds is Feb. 15 to March 5.

Use preemergence herbicides to control summer annual weeds such as crabgrass, Florida pusley, sandspur and other annual weeds that don't show up until spring and summer. A preemergence herbicide must be applied before these weeds are visible.

Preemergence treatments have some advantages over postemergence treatments when targeting annual weeds.

Since you apply the chemical before weed seeds germinate, susceptible weeds never show up in the lawn. You can get many preemergence herbicides as granular formulations that tend to be easier to evenly apply than sprays.

Preemergence herbicides for lawns are sold under a number of trade names. Your local UF/IFAS Extension Office or a local lawn and garden store can help you select a preemergence herbicide. Be sure to select one that's labeled for use on your grass species. And follow the product's label directions and precautions.

Preemergence herbicides will not control all lawn weeds, but are particularly useful to prevent weed problems such as crabgrass and other summer annual weeds. They are not for every lawn, either. But if your lawn has had a history of problems with summer annual weeds, you may consider using a preemergence herbicide that lists the weeds you want to control on the product's label.

Remember timing is important. If you wait until the weeds are up and growing, it's too late to bother with a preemergence herbicide.

LARRY WILLIAMS

Okaloosa County
Horticulture Extension Faculty
lwilliams@co.okaloosa.fl.us

Slime Molds

Slime molds are casual organisms that are found on turfgrasses and plants. During prolonged wet periods the mold can be prolific. The slime mold does not directly harm turfgrasses or plants, but does affect their appearance. Plant discoloration is due to massive amounts of fungus spores. Plant vigor may be slightly reduced in severely colonized turf due to excessive growth of the fungus on leaves causing a shad-

ing of the leaf surface and leading to a reduction in photosynthesis. Slime molds may reoccur in the same location each year.

Slime molds are primitive fungi that use the living turfgrass plant strictly for structural support. They are saprophytes, or organisms that obtain their nutrients solely from dead or decaying organic matter in soil or thatch. Areas with poor drainage and heavy thatch also may enhance the likelihood of their development.

Slime mold varieties range in color, shape and size. These fruiting bodies are typically grayish-white to blue-gray or ash colored and contain purple spores. Some slime molds appear as thin, white, yellow, or gray layers of slimy paste-like material that covers the leaf blades. These masses later dry to form bluish-gray,



Slime Mold. Photo: Theresa Friday, Santa Rosa County Extension

black or white powdery growths on the leaves. The grass looks like it has been dusted with soot. In the case of heavy spore production, some yellowing or chlorosis of the leaves may be observed due to shading of the turf causing reduced photosynthesis.

Slime molds will disappear as drier weather returns. There is no chemical control. If you have a heavy infestation you can sweep the spores off with a broom, mow over the area and disperse the fungi, or hose off the turfgrass with a water hose. Washing the leaves with a stream of water should be attempted only after the onset of dry weather to avoid further development or spread of the fungus.

Source: *Slime Mold*, M. Elliott, G. Simone, UF/IFAS, *Slime Mold on Turfgrass*, J. W. Rimelspach, M. J. Boehm, The Ohio State University.

KEN RUDISILL
Bay County Extension
Horticulture Extension Faculty
krru@ufl.edu

Time of Year for Planting Trees

It is the time of year for planting your fruit and shade trees. Many people look for foliage color while others plant for the fruit. But there are some fruit trees that produce both color and fruit. Whichever you're looking for, choosing an adapted species will ensure success.

When choosing your fruit or shade trees, be sure to do a little research on the types of trees adapted to our area. During this research you will be looking for chill hours on the fruit trees and the native area that the shade trees do well in. The chilling hours in our area range from 450 to 600 hours. The chilling requirement is fairly high due to the mild winters we have, but research tells us what chilling requirements work best.

After purchasing the correct trees, proper planting is a must. Before planting, find an appropriate area. Then prepare the site by digging a hole twice as wide but slightly

more shallow than the root ball. After removing the tree from the potting container, carefully break up the root ball (make sure there are no roots girdling the tree root ball). Next, place the root ball in the planting hole and make sure the top of the root ball is approximately one inch above ground level. After applying soil around the root ball, water the soil to fill in any air pockets in the soil and around the root ball. Create a mulch berm around the edge of the root ball for holding rain water. The last step is to mulch around the berm. Make sure not to place mulch on top of the root ball.

To read more on planting trees or fruit tree chilling hours visit EDIS, the University of Florida Extension publications Web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG211> <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/EH140> <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/EP007>

EDDIE POWELL
Horticulture Agent
Walton County
poweddie@co.walton.fl.us



Basket with fruit and flowers on beach, sailboat in background. UF/IFAS Photo: Thomas Wright

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact your local Extension
office

SolutionsForYourLife.com

NORTHWEST DISTRICT EXTENSION OFFICES

BAY COUNTY

647 Jenks Avenue, Suite A
Panama City, FL 32401-2660
(850) 784-6105
<http://bay.ifas.ufl.edu>

CALHOUN COUNTY

20816 Central Avenue East, Suite 1
Blountstown, FL 32424-2276
(850) 674-8323
<http://calhoun.ifas.ufl.edu/>

ESCAMBIA COUNTY

3740 Stefani Road
Cantonment, FL 32533-7792
(850) 475-5230
<http://escambia.ifas.ufl.edu>

FRANKLIN COUNTY

66 Fourth Street
Apalachicola, FL 32320-1775
(850) 653-9337
<http://franklin.ifas.ufl.edu>

GADSDEN COUNTY

2140 West Jefferson Street
Quincy, FL 32351-1905
(850) 875-7255
<http://gadsden.ifas.ufl.edu>

GULF COUNTY

200 North 2nd Street
Wewahitchka, FL 32465-0250
(850) 639-3200
<http://gulf.ifas.ufl.edu>

HOLMES COUNTY

201 N Oklahoma Street
Bonifay, FL 32425-2295
(850) 547-1108

JACKSON COUNTY

2741 Pennsylvania Avenue, Suite 3
Marianna, FL 32448-4022
(850) 482-9620
<http://jackson.ifas.ufl.edu>

JEFFERSON COUNTY

275 North Mulberry Street
Monticello, FL 32344-2249
(850) 342-0187
<http://jefferson.ifas.ufl.edu>

LEON COUNTY

615 Paul Russell Road
Tallahassee, FL 32301-7060
(850) 606-5200
<http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu>

LIBERTY COUNTY

10405 NW Theo Jacobs Way
Bristol, FL 32321-0368
(850) 643-2229
<http://liberty.ifas.ufl.edu>

SANTA ROSA COUNTY

6263 Dogwood Drive
Milton, FL 32570-3500
(850) 623-3868
<http://santarosa.ifas.ufl.edu>

OKALOOSA COUNTY

5479 Old Bethel Road
Crestview, FL 32536-5512
(850) 659-5850
<http://okaloosa.ufl.edu>

WAKULLA COUNTY

84 Cedar Avenue
Crawfordville, FL 32327-2063
(850) 926-3931
<http://wakulla.ufl.edu>

WALTON COUNTY

732 N 9 Street Ste B
DeFuniak Springs, FL 32433-3804
(850) 892-8172
<http://walton.ufl.edu>

WASHINGTON COUNTY

1424 Jackson Avenue Ste A
Chipley, FL 32428-1602
(850) 638-6180
<http://washington.ufl.edu>