Time to think about planting in the garden and landscape

The days--and especially the nights--are cooling down. It’s a great time to get out and plant in the garden and landscape, and to think about protecting plants and trees from cold weather.

In this issue you will find information on:

- how to give color to your garden beds and brighten up the dull bed areas that lay dormant all winter;
- protecting your citrus trees from cold temperatures and assuring their survival;
- preventing brown patch now before it becomes a problem in the spring;
- controlling dollar weed, one of the most common weeds in the lawn;
- beetles that are affecting red bay and sassafras trees;
- termites and how to prevent damage to your home;
- growing transplants for the winter garden; and
garden tips for November and December.

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Annual Feast of Flowers

Autumn leaves in Florida may not be the explosion of orange, reds and yellows that northern trees have, but for us Floridians the cooler months bring other benefits. We get to work and play outside in the brilliant sunshine and look forward to enjoying our landscape with less irrigation, no fertilizing and no mowing.

A favorite fall chore is adding flowers to the garden beds to brighten up the dull bed areas that lie dormant all winter. Annuals are the quickest way to add color and zest to your landscape and can be changed out seasonally. They are inexpensive and come in large flats and a rainbow of colors. Flowers that can be planted now and bloom through the winter include pansies, violas, snapdragons, calendulas, alyssum and ornamental cabbage/kale.

Wintertime in Florida can be our driest season of the year, so it’s important that we incorporate 2-3 inches of organic matter into our planting beds at least once a year to increase soil nutrition and retain water. This should be done several weeks before you actually plant. Annuals continue to bloom throughout their lifetime and benefit from frequent fertilizing. A slow-release granular fertilizer added to the organic amendments before planting will help flowers bloom.

When you purchase your annuals in the flats and pop them up to plant, you will notice lots of thickly intertwined white or tan roots. Make sure that you loosen the roots with your fingers to untangle them. Don’t worry about hurting your new garden babies; all plants need their roots opened up so that they will be able to become established quicker and suffer less moisture stress.

Annual beds are usually small projects and the gardening chore can be fun. Enjoy the bright sunshine and fresh air, without the humidity. Florida winters give us much to be thankful for. Having a beautiful landscape that your family and Thanksgiving guests “ooh” and “ah” over will have you gobbling up even more compliments than your turkey.

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Control Irrigation--Control Dollarweed

The first line of defense in controlling dollarweed (pennywort) is to take control of your irrigation system. Dollarweed thrives in areas with excess water; you’ll find it difficult or impossible to control dollarweed in areas that stay wet or where irrigation occurs frequently. Lawns should be watered on an as-needed basis. University of Florida research demonstrated a 24% reduction in dollarweed numbers simply by reducing the frequency of irrigation.

In general, herbicides containing atrazine can be used to control dollarweed in centipedegrass and St. Augustinegrass lawns; herbicides containing 2,4-D and/or dicamba can be used to control dollarweed in bahiagrass, bermudagrass and zoysiagrass lawns. Always read and follow the product’s label directions and precautions when using any pesticide, including herbicides.

Chemical control of dollarweed is best achieved during spring and fall while temperatures are mild and dollarweed is actively growing. One application usually will not eliminate this weed.

For additional recommendations in controlling lawn weeds, contact your local UF/IFAS County Extension Office or log onto http://yourfloridalawn.ifas.ufl.edu.

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Winter Protection of Citrus in North Florida

When it comes to growing citrus in northwest Florida, the homeowner is at a disadvantage. Every year there is a high probability that a freeze will occur sometime in December or January. Even though the homeowner citrus grower cannot control outside temperatures, there are many factors that can help citrus survive freezing conditions.

One of the first things to consider is selecting the proper variety of citrus for north Florida. The most cold-tolerant variety of citrus is trifoliate orange, which, although not edible, is commonly used as a rootstock for cold-tolerant kumquats and Satsumas, which are edible. This produces an ultimate cold-hardy citrus.

The next thing to consider is location of the citrus trees. Cold air always drains to low elevations; higher elevations that possess good air movement and drainage are ideal sites for citrus plantings. Citrus will also suffer less cold damage if placed on the south side of a house or building. Air and wind blowing from the north will be forced up and over the structure, thus protecting the citrus trees.

A clean, packed surface will absorb and retain heat during the day and release it overnight. Damp soils also tend to absorb more heat than dry soils; watering 2-3 days before a freeze can help prevent some frost damage. Overall plant health can help prevent the severity of frost damage. Follow proper fertilizer recommendations and cultural practices to maintain plant vigor.

There are many methods for protecting existing citrus trees, including the use of tree wraps, soil banking, and irrigation. Tree wraps and soil banking protect the trunk of the tree from the ground past the graft union to just below the canopy, and work by delaying heat loss from the trunk. Even if the top of the tree dies, it will regenerate from the grafted area in the spring. Trees should be wrapped or banked the day before a hard freeze and then removed shortly after the all threat of freeze is over, usually in February. Lastly, overhead and microsprinkler irrigation, sometimes used in combination with tree wraps and soil banking, can protect from cold damage. Overhead irrigation is the use of a sprinkler which sprays water over the tops of citrus; microirrigation is the use of low-volume misting sprinklers installed at ground level on short risers. These systems should put out 10 to 50 gallons/hour. Irrigation works by using the heat of fusion given off when water freezes to ice. This heat is only transferred on the inside of the ice. Parts of the tree exposed to the exterior of the ice are subject to cold damage. Once irrigation has begun during freezing temperatures, it must be continued until temperatures have risen.

Brown patch: Care now can prevent problems later

Brown patch (Rhizoctonia solani) is one of the most common fungal diseases in lawns in the Florida panhandle. It can show up during the milder weather of fall, winter and spring. In the summer, it is mistakenly identified as chinch bug damage. What you do in the fall can help prevent it in the spring.

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Brown patch is most active at 73 - 80° F, which is why it is common in fall. Moisture in the form of rain, high humidity or excessive irrigation is required for infection to occur. Infection can be severe when the leaf canopy is wet continuously for 48 hours and the temperature is below 80° F.

The fungus infects the leaf area closest to the soil. Infected leaves are yellow; you can easily pull the leaf from the stem of the plant, revealing that the base of the leaf is tan to brown in color and rotted in appearance. This disease does not affect roots.

Infected patches can be several feet across but usually begin as small spots only a few inches to a foot across. As the patch expands, it may take on a "doughnut pattern" with the grass recovering in the center of the circle.

A number of fungicides are labeled to control brown patch, but because there are critical factors involved with achieving control, cultural care is very important. Avoid high nitrogen fertilizing after September. Our lawns need a balanced fertilizer containing equivalent amounts of nitrogen and potassium, preferably in a slow-release form. Irrigate only when necessary and do so only during early morning hours. Since mowers can spread this disease, mow diseased areas last and wash mowers after use.

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Losing Redbay & Sassafras

Much attention has been drawn to the concern about terrorists slipping into our country, but another concern that grabs less attention is the unintentional invasion of unwanted plants, animals and pests. Sometimes the failure to stop an unwanted pest from coming into our country can be very costly. For example, Dutch elm disease, chestnut blight, and the gypsy moth—all relative newcomers to our shores—have decimated the trees of North America.

Now a new invader is threatening to eradicate redbay and sassafras trees in the Southeast. The redbay ambrosia beetle (*Xyleborus glabratus*), a native of Asia first found in traps near Savannah, Georgia in 2002, has spread a fungus which causes laurel wilt disease, affecting redbay and sassafras. Laurel wilt disease is spreading rapidly, and at the present time there is no known method to halt its spread.

This is why I cringe when someone says they slipped a new plant or seeds by customs and want to know if it will grow here. Besides the possibility of a new invasive exotic plant, there is also the risk of spores from a fungus or a small insect in the soil of the plant’s roots that could cause another catastrophe.

**For sunny areas**

- *Euphorbia cotinifolia* – This plant has colorful bronze-burgundy foliage from spring through fall. It grows about three feet tall and almost as wide. Plant it in full sun for the most compact growth, but it will tolerate a little light shade too. It makes a good contrast with the chartreuse foliage color of *Duranta ‘Gold Mound’* or chartreuse coleus.

- *Firebush (Hamelia patens)* – Every garden should have this native shrub. Its continuous red-orange flowers are very attractive to hummingbirds and butterflies. It dies to the ground in winter but resprouts each spring to grow to a height of 3-5 feet.

- *Bulbine frutescens* – This low-growing plant with grassy foliage continuously produces its orange or golden flowers, even in the winter.

- *Variegated tapioca (Manihot esculenta ‘Variegata’)* – Plant for its striking green and yellow leaves with red stems. Ours resprouted after being killed to the ground in winter and now is 5 feet tall and 7 feet across.

- *Alternanthera ‘Brazilian Red Hots’* – Having color doesn’t get any easier than this easy-to-grow alternanthera with leaves of an intense purplish-red. The plant holds up...
through the summer well, maintaining a height of about 2 ½ feet. It makes a great companion planting for red or pink pentas.

**For shaded to partially shaded areas**

- **Stromanthe sanguinea 'Tricolor'** – Spectacular burgundy, green, and cream-colored lush foliage makes this plant really stand out in shaded areas.
- **Sanchezia nobilis** – Yellow mid-ribs and veins adorn glossy green leaves on a compact plant 1-2 feet tall.

It’s time to plant pansies, violas, and panolas in sunny areas. Citrona orange or citrona yellow Erysimums, which have 18-inch-tall flowers, make a good companion planting for blue or violet pansies. Other good companions for pansies include dianthus, snapdragons, nemesia, diascia, and ornamental cabbage, kale, or mustard.

This is also the time to plant poppies, larkspur, sweetpeas, and bachelor buttons from seed. They will grow through the winter and flower next March and April.

Sasanqua camellias are starting to bloom now. Popular types include ‘Bonanza’, ‘Shishi-Gashira’, ‘Sparkling Burgundy’, and ‘Yuletide’.

The changing leaf colors of trees can also add to the season’s color. Trees with particularly showy fall foliage include Florida maple, crape myrtle, dogwood, ginkgo, hickory, Japanese maple, Bradford pear, red maple, sassafras, Shumard oak, sourwood, and sweetgum.

**Cool-season annuals**

- Planted in full-sun, petunias, dianthus, snapdragons, nemesia, and diascia will give you color this fall through early spring.

- For continuous winter color, plant pansies, violas, panolas, and ornamental cabbage or kale once the nights begin to cool a little.

**Fall perennials**

Excellent choices include firespike (Odontonema strictum), lion’s ear (Leonotis Leonurus), Philippine violet (Barleria cristata), cigar flower (Cuphea micropetala), anise-scented sage (Salvia guaranitica), Mexican bush sage (S. leucantha), forsythia sage (S. madrensis), and Mexican sage (S. mexicana). Fall-flowering vines include Argentine sky vine (Thunbergia grandiflora) and St. John’s creeper (Podranea ricasoliana). Plant all in full sun.

Sky vine (Thunbergia grandiflora) is a good choice for covering a fence, arbor, or trellis in full or partial sun. The three-inch-wide flowers of light lavender to sky blue with cream-colored centers start now and continue until frost. Plant a lion’s ear (Leonotis Leonurus) or a firebush (Hamelia patens) in a sunny spot for orange flowers on a 4-6 ft. tall plant. Complement them with the orange and yellow flowers of cigar plant (Cuphea micropetala). Philippine violet (Barleria cristata) will give you lavender flowers in partially shaded areas. Its relative, the giant yellow shrimp plant (Barleria micans), provides cheerful yellow flowers.

Yellow elder (Tecoma stans) selected by the Florida Nursery, Growers, and Landscape Association as one of its Florida Plants of the Year, blooms almost constantly during warm weather in most of the state. Hummingbirds are attracted to the bell-shaped golden-yellow flowers. In north Florida it’s best to grow yellow elder in a container that can be protected during winter freezes so that the plant will resume flowering earlier in the summer. In far south Florida, yellow elder may reach the size of a small tree. Plant in full sun. There is also an orange-flowering form and a form called ‘Gold Star’ which tends to flower throughout much of the year. The plant is not a heavy feeder and is relatively drought-tolerant once established.
Fall & Winter – Florida’s Tree Planting Seasons

From proving wildlife habitat and shade to controlling stormwater runoff and capturing greenhouse gases, trees provide invaluable services to homes and neighborhoods. An economic study performed this year in New York City estimated that the city’s nearly 600,000 trees provided $122 million worth of environmental services to the city!

While many people think of planting trees in the spring, autumn and winter are ideal for these activities in Florida. The cooler weather means most trees are no longer actively growing and producing new leaves and fruit, so there are fewer demands on a newly planted tree to start “working” right away. The dormant winter season allows the trees to acclimate to their new environment and start developing sturdy root systems.

However, a newly planted tree is only as valuable as the care it’s given when planted. To ensure a successful tree, important steps to follow include proper placement, planting depth, mulching, and watering.

- Before digging, look up and around to make sure there are no overhead or underground obstacles within the reaches of the tree’s mature height or root system.
- When digging the planting hole, make sure the hole is 2-3 times as wide as the root ball.
- When planted, the topmost root flare (where the roots join the trunk) should be just above the surface of the adjacent landscape.
- It is not necessary to fertilize a newly planted tree.
- Use mulch to retain moisture in the soil, but do not place it against the tree’s trunk.
- Finally, water the tree daily, saturating the root ball for 1-2 weeks, then weekly for a year.

For more information on planting trees and good varieties of trees for Florida, visit http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/woody/index.htm

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Termites: A Part of Florida Living

Termites are part of living in Florida. Not all homeowners will have a termite infestation in their home, but termites can be found in most landscapes at one time or another.

Subterranean termites will be swarming soon. This means that large numbers of the winged reproductive termites are emerging from their colonies, mating, and looking for a suitable spot to start a new colony.

The primary food of termites is cellulose, a major part of wood and paper products. Although we cannot remove all wood sources from around the entire yard, an effort should be made to eliminate food sources directly around the house.

Subterranean termites also require moisture in order to survive. They live in the soil to obtain this moisture but can also nest in wood that is wet. Homeowners can direct water away from house foundations by using extenders on gutters. Any irrigation system that is around the house should be modified to be at least one foot away from the building and checked so that spray heads are not applying water around the foundation.

Although mulches around a home do not attract termites, the moisture associated with the mulch can allow the termites to establish a colony in that area. Wood mulches should be kept at a thin layer around homes to allow the zones to dry out better. Minimizing irrigation in these areas will help prevent termites from establishing.

Soil treatments are also an important method to prevent subterranean termites in the home. The barrier chemical treatment that is injected into the soil around homes, kill the termites when they move into the treated area. Other treatments include monitoring for termites with baiting stations.

There are no methods to guarantee that a home will be protected from subterranean termites, but homeowners can certainly minimize their risk by having inspections and eliminating moisture and food sources close to buildings.

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Subterranean termite
Garden Tips for November and December

**Flowers**

- Cool season flowers which can be planted now include: carnation, foxglove, pansy, petunia, snapdragon, Shasta daisy, ornamental kale and cabbage.
- Prepare to move potted tropical and subtropical plants inside. Cold-sensitive patio plants like schefflera and philodendrons should not be exposed to 40°F nights. Temperatures in the 40s and 50s, though they might not result in frost-like damage, can cause long-term problems.
- Take a few cuttings from pentas, ixora and other cold-sensitive perennials. These can be rooted, potted and held until spring as "insurance" in case extreme cold kills the parent plant.
- When mums have finished blooming, prune back to 3 inches above the ground.
- If the area receives cold temperatures and plants freeze, do not prune out damaged wood until spring.

**Trees and Shrubs**

- Fall is a better time than spring for planting shrubs and trees. After growing roots all winter, they’ll be prepared for the heat stress of summer.
- Apply horticultural oil if scales, mites, and other plant sucking insects have been a problem. Be sure to read and follow label directions.
- Plant camellias. Camellias grow best in light shade or partial sun and in acidic, well-drained, though not excessively dry soil.

**Vegetable Garden**

- Vegetable gardeners can still set out transplants of beets, broccoli, brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, Chinese cabbage, collards, kale, kohlrabi, leeks, lettuce, mustards, onions, parsley, radish and spinach.
- Harvest gourds, butternut squash, pumpkins and other cucurbits as the vines begin to die. Clip, don’t break, about 2 inches of stem with each fruit.
- Locate sources for Irish potato and English pea seed. They can be started early in the year.

**Fruits and Nuts**

- Plant strawberries before November 15. Recommended varieties for north Florida include: Florida 90, Chandler, Dover, Florida Belle, Oso Grande, Sweet Charlie and Selva.
- Locate and order fruit trees in November so that they can be planted in December.
- Harvest pecans early in order to ensure good quality. Nut quality decreases rapidly if they are allowed to lie on wet ground for several days. Store them in a clean, dry place.
- Citrus especially needs protection from extreme cold. Kumquats and satsumas are some of our most cold-hardy citrus but other types of citrus may be injured by cold temperatures. Call your local Extension Service for more information on how to protect your citrus trees from the cold.

**Lawns**

- In dry weather, water the lawn to keep it healthy during the winter.
- If desired, sow annual ryegrass at the beginning of the November for a green lawn through the winter. Begin mowing the overseeded lawn as soon as it is tall enough to be clipped.
- Allow the permanent lawn (centipede and St. Augustine grasses, in particular) to gradually go dormant by withholding fertilizer.

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Grow Your Own Transplants for Winter Veggies

If you like brussels sprouts, cabbage, collards, lettuce, chives, and rosemary, you will have the option of purchasing transplants from the local stores in varieties that do very well here in the fall and winter. Be sure to check the Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide (SP 103) or the new and improved “Vegetable Gardening in Florida” book by Jim Stephens, retired Vegetable Specialist from the University of Florida. The book is available from the University Press of Florida (http://www.upf.com) or through IFAS Books, http://ifasbooks.ufl.edu.

For other vegetables, you will need to obtain your seed soon from your local feed and seed store, or you can go online (one popular website is www.vivisimo.com) and order seed through any of the reputable seed companies. Be sure to specify the varieties you want and varieties that do well in this area of Florida. Recommended varieties include:

- Broccoli - Calabreese
- Cabbage - Flat Dutch, Copenhagen, and Early Jersey
- Carrots - Danver
- Cauliflower - Snowball
- Collards - Georgia, Vates, and Heading
- Lettuce - Black Seeded Simpson
- Onions - sets are available in the Granex and Texas Grano that will give you the “Vidalia type” sweet onion flavor. In Florida, these short day onions are preferred.

Follow the instructions when planting into the pots of planting soil or Jiffy pots. When seeds are small, be careful not to plant them too deep. Keep moist enough to ensure good germination. The rule of thumb on planting depth is not more than twice the size of the seed. Keep in a warm and dry place and in trays so you can move them around to the best location, and on the outside during the day when the temperatures go above 65 °F. Allow five to seven weeks for the transplants to get tall enough and to have enough stem strength to set into the ground, but do not let them get “leggy” (too tall). Check for insects and any seedling diseases, and discard those unhealthy enough to make it on their own. Use treated seed to avoid most seedling diseases.

For further information, contact your local Extension Office. The Jackson County Office is located at 4721 Pennsylvania Avenue, Suite #3, Marianna, 32448, or better yet, contact us by phone, 850-482-9620, or by email, jackson@ifas.ufl.edu, website http://jackson.ifas.ufl.edu.

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Vegetable transplant

Community Economic Development-garden. UF/IFAS Photo: Thomas Wright.
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