Stinkhorns are Smelly Fungi

A foul-smelling mushroom from the stinkhorn fungus appears in many landscapes during the cooler weather of winter.

Stinkhorns belong to an order of fungi that include puffballs, earthstars and the bird's nest fungi. Their putrid odor (described as rotted meat) motivates people to seek advice on control measures. But with the exception of their objectionable smell, stinkhorns pose no problem.

Stinkhorn fungi start as white, egg-like structures that are anchored to the soil by a root-like network. Only the top of the egg-like structure can be seen. Most of the "egg" is underground.

Based on the type of stinkhorn, the fruiting structure (mushroom) will be either column or stalk-like in shape or globular, lattice-like in shape. Mushrooms vary in color but most are pink to orange. They range from 2 to a little over 6 inches in height and from one-half to 3 inches in width. All stinkhorn mushrooms possess foul odors, which attracts insects such as ants and flies that carry the mushrooms’ spores to other places.

The stinkhorn fungus is beneficial because it helps rot wood. More often than not, these mushrooms are found where wood is used as mulch.

January-February 2009
Volume 3, Issue 1
Management options include:

- **Tolerance**: Learn to live with them as they represent beneficial organisms to the soil ecology. Keep windows closed during periods of mushroom production to minimize odor problems.

- **Eradication**: Hand-pick the "egg" stage before it ruptures and put it in a zipper bag and discard. Small or new colonies may be eradicated through complete removal of an area of mulch to the depth of the native soil. No guarantees with this method.

- **Environment alteration**: Use of non-mulch ground-covers, such as ivy, jasmine, liriope, mondo grass, etc., will reduce stinkhorn incidence in a landscape. Distance large mulched areas away from the house.

There are no legal effective or practical chemical control options.

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**Make Your Christmas Tree Truly Evergreen**

Choosing a Christmas tree is one of the big decisions every year. There are many very realistic-looking options for artificial trees these days, and they are a great way for families to reduce waste by reusing the same tree year after year. However, a live Christmas tree brings "the great outdoors" inside and smells wonderful, even if you do have to deal with those pesky falling needles. Many cut trees will last over a month with good watering, but when the holidays are over, what do you do with your tree?

Many cities and counties offer a Christmas tree recycling program, in which trees can be left at drop-off sites or on the curb for pickup. Most municipalities turn the trees into mulch and use it at public facilities. Many individuals reuse trees by placing them in lakes or other water bodies as fish habitats, creating reefs for hiding and nesting. However, be sure and check with local environmental agencies before placing trees under water. If you own a good bit of land or a wooded area, you can lay your old tree out for small mammals and birds to use as shelter. It will eventually biodegrade and add nutrients to the soil. Be sure that if you take advantage of any of these recycling options that you remove all ornaments, tinsel, or other decorations which could be hazardous to animals and/or wood-chipping machines.

There is an option to truly keep your tree evergreen—a live Christmas tree! Many retailers sell potted trees that can be brought inside and decorated, then planted outside after the season is over. One of the plants often associated with this festive time of year is holly, which is an excellent choice for evergreen color throughout the year. There are many native varieties, such as yaupon holly, red cedar, or sand pine for drier areas and myrtle-leaved
holly for wetlands. In addition, there are several dwarf species and the popular ‘Nellie R. Stevens’, a cross between American and Chinese holly. Hollies are typically used as shrubs in the landscape, although many species can grow into small trees if allowed; the East Palatka holly can be as tall as 45 feet at maturity! Hollies are also an excellent food choice for attracting birds, and the shrubs work wonderfully as a natural screen. Now is a great time to plant a new tree--and by the holiday season next year it should be ready to decorate!

A live tree or one planted and decorated outdoors is a wonderful way to commemorate a special Christmas and help replant our community after having lost so many trees to hurricanes. No matter what type of tree you chose for Christmas this year, there are many options for recycling!

Look For Armored Scales On Your Trees And Shrubs

Now is a good time to take a closer look at plants for signs of unwanted pests. Your monitoring should not be too difficult since there are fewer pests present in gardens during cooler weather. One pest that can be present on branches and leaves even during the coldest months of the year are armored scale insects.

Armored scales are unique insects that form a waxy protective covering over their bodies. Underneath the ‘shield’ is a soft-bodied insect that is sucking sap through a needle-like mouthpart from leaves or branches. They range in size from about 1/16 to 1/8 inch in diameter and can be oval, oblong, or pear-shaped. Some scales are white and very noticeable but scales can come in a wide range of colors.

It is hard to believe that an insect so small would be so damaging to plants but where there is one scale there are many. The female scale will lay eggs under the ‘shield’ and then the newly hatched crawlers will move to an area of new growth to begin feeding. If left unchecked, scale can quickly cover leaves or stems with feeding crawlers and adults.

It is a good idea to look over plants throughout the year for signs of scale. Heavy scale infestations can lead to leaf yellowing, leaf drop, branch dieback, and even plant death. The best products for scale management are horticulture oils which suffocate the insects. These products are also safer for the beneficial arthropods that may be helping to control scales and other plant pests. Be sure to match the type of horticulture oil with season. You can use dormant oils during winter months and apply summer or ultra fine oils when plants are in foliage and temperatures are warmer. For more information on scale insects visit: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG005.

Carolina Jessamine Provides Color In The Winter Landscape

The sweetly scented, golden yellow, trumpet-shaped flowers on the cascading, fine textured foliage of Carolina jessamine (Gelsemium sempervirens) covering fences and trees in open woodlands and along roadsides from late January to early April makes it one of the most beautiful vines throughout the Southeast. Carolina jessamine’s growth rate is moderate, reaching 20 feet or more when maintained as a vine. It can also be grown
as a ground cover by cutting yearly in the late spring after flowering. This vine is very adaptable and will grow in a variety of conditions. Carolina jessamine tolerates either full sun or partial shade. Flowering is more prolific and foliage growth is denser in full sun.

*Carolina jessamine* (*Gelsemium sempervirens*) is a twining vine and not a tree or shrub although the yellow blooms may appear at heights above 20 feet.

For best results, plant it in rich, well-drained soil. Overfertilization can reduce flowering, so fertilize only while the plant is actively growing with moderate amounts of a balanced fertilizer. Insects or diseases rarely trouble Carolina jessamine. Deer will not eat it. However, all parts of this plant are toxic. The sap may cause skin irritation in sensitive individuals. People, especially children, can be poisoned by sucking the nectar from the flowers. This should be considered when choosing a location for installing Carolina jessamine.

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**Correctly Pruning Blueberries Is Beneficial**

Pruning is an extremely beneficial practice when growing blueberries. Pruning blueberries can aid in the establishment of young plants by balancing the foliage and root growth. It also helps in the development of a desirable plant shape and size while increasing plant vigor and promoting new growth of fruiting wood. Correct pruning techniques can prevent over-fruiting and enhance fruit size and quality. Pruning can also reduce the occurrence and spread of certain diseases and insects.

Dormant pruning of blueberries should take place in the late winter after flower buds have begun to develop. There are two basic types of pruning cuts commonly used on blueberries.

The first is heading-back cuts which is usually preformed on one year old wood. Heading-back is the pruning of the terminal shoot back to lateral buds. The heading-back technique stimulates growth of vegetative buds below the cut. Heading-back cuts are used to control blueberry bush height and width while at the same time stimulating growth and adjusting crop load.

The second pruning method is thinning out cuts which result in a complete removal of a shoot at or near its...
origin. Thinning out cuts are usually used to remove older unproductive canes and rejuvenate the bush by producing new canes. This technique may also be used to thin out overgrown plants, allowing better air movement and circulation, and improving light infiltration. Each year, when performing thinning, it is necessary to remove approximately 25% of the oldest canes by cutting them back to strong and sturdy lateral branches or even pruning them to the ground. This technique is usually performed with hand loppers or saws while heading-back cuts are usually achieved by hand snips or pruning shears.

Summer pruning or topping may also be required every year or two. This should be done after all the berries are harvested around June and July. Plants should be fertilized a few weeks before pruning so the plant will produce new growth quickly. The new growth from summer pruning or topping (post-harvest) will produce flower buds for the next year’s crop.

Correctly pruning blueberries can increase their yield
Photo: Dan Mullins, Santa Rosa County

For more information on pruning blueberries visit http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/HS223.

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“In winter, when you feel the bone structure of the landscape - the loneliness of it, the dead feeling of winter. Remember, something awaits beneath - the whole story doesn't show.”

Andrew Wyeth
Winter Color in the Landscape

Winter need not be dreary in the north Florida garden. Sometimes if it’s a mild winter, the St. Augustinegrass lawns will even stay green. But if your lawn doesn’t stay green, you can always overseed it with ryegrass for the winter. Within a couple of weeks, you’ll have a bright green lawn. Just remember, you’ll have to mow the ryegrass. So, if you would prefer not to mow so much, you may not wish to overseed the whole lawn, just a highly visible area of it.

![Camellia](image)

*It’s camellia season. So, if you don’t have some of these beauties, visit your local garden center. Now is a good time to plant them. There are many types from which to choose. They prefer filtered or bright shade.*

![Magnolia](image)

*Some of the deciduous magnolias, such as *Magnolia soulangeana* or Japanese magnolia, flower in February.*

![Loropetalum](image)

*One of our early-flowering shrubs is loropetalum. It’s usually flowering before the dogwoods and well before the azaleas. Don’t make the common mistake, though, of planting one of the large types of loropetalum (most types are large) where it will have to be pruned frequently. If you plant it where it has plenty of room, and in enough sun, it will hardly ever need pruning.*

*Photo: David W. Marshall, Leon County*

If you prefer flowers, there’s still time to plant petunias, calibrachoa (trailing petunias), nemesia, diascia, dianthus, pansies, violas and several other cool-season flowers. Just be sure to plant in full sun. And don’t forget the option of planting in containers. A showy container of calibrachoa or petunias can quickly brighten your day.

*Photo: David W. Marshall, Leon County*
If you have an open sunny spot in your garden, you may wish to plant some ‘Bright Lights’ swiss chard. It’s both very ornamental and very edible. Photo: All America Plants Selections

This is the best time of year to add new plants to your landscape. You may want to consider some that flower in late winter to early spring. The Taiwan cherry is one of our earliest flowering trees, sometimes even flowering as early as late January. Photo: David W. Marshall, Leon County

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Enjoy Your Poinsettias After The Holidays

The poinsettia is a beautiful plant associated with the winter holidays. These plants create colorful holiday decorations for any home. After the holidays are over, they can be used as landscape plants.

Poinsettias are non-poisonous and non-toxic. However, some people may be sensitive to the latex in poinsettia sap. Although eating even a large number of leaves will not result in illness, the plant is not considered edible. When used as an indoor plant, it should be kept out of reach of children and pets.

Keep your poinsettias away from drafts and chilly air. Water your poinsettia when the surface of the soil is dry to the touch. Place a saucer under the pot, and drain the saucer if water starts to collect in it. Keep the soil from getting soggy. Gently spray the plants with a mist sprayer or place them on gravel trays. Slightly humid air will help prolong the plants' color and life span. Do not fertilize your indoor poinsettias until you are ready to move them outside. High levels of fertilizer will reduce the quality of the plant.

When the temperatures start to warm up in spring, trim the fading bracts. Leave 4 to 6 inches of the stem on each branch. Begin using a well-balanced fertilizer, and move the plant outdoors to a somewhat shaded area. Once the poinsettia has acclimated to the outdoors, plant it in an area that receives full sun most of the day.

Keep in mind that to put out its colorful bracts, poinsettias require 14 hours of complete darkness each day for 6 to 8 weeks. Any interruption to this dark period can delay or prevent the plant from flowering.

Keep the soil moderately moist at all times. Poinsettias grow best in moist, well drained, fertile soils. The ideal
soil pH range is 5.5 to 6.5, but the plants will tolerate a range from 5.0 and 7.0. Fertilize your outdoor poinsettias once a month. In north Florida, the plants should be fertilized between May and September.

In the landscape, prune your poinsettias in early spring after they are finished blooming, and when the danger of frost has passed. Cut them back to within 12 to 18 inches of the ground. If the plants have been frozen below this point, cut them back to the live wood. Pruning during the growing season will produce a compact plant at flowering time. After four weeks or when the new growth is 12 inches long, cut the plant back, leaving four leaves on each shoot.

You can read more at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/EP349.

Eddie Powell
Courtesy Horticulture Agent
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Mistletoe is a parasite of many trees

Mistletoe is generally thought of only at Christmas, but the Druids used it to announce the New Year. Un fortunately mistletoe is an evergreen parasite of trees and can harm them. It grows on the branches of trees, where it forms pendent bushes, 2 to 5 feet in diameter. It will grow on a variety of deciduous trees preferring those with soft bark.

When the sticky berries of the mistletoe come in contact with the bark of a tree after a few days it sends forth a thread-like root. The root pierces the bark and roots itself firmly in the growing wood, from which it has the power of selecting and extracting such juices as are fitted for its own use. The wood of mistletoe has been found to contain twice as much potash, and five times as much phosphoric acid as the wood of the foster tree.

The berries of mistletoe are poisonous and should be kept out of the reach of children who may be tempted to eat the berries. Mistletoe is always produced by seed and cannot be cultivated in the soil like other plants. Mistletoe's main dispersal mechanism is birds. Birds eat the fruit and then seeds pass through the birds and stick to branches.

Mistletoe harms trees in several ways. Chemical signals from the mistletoe confuse tree growth and transport systems. Local food supplies are continually used by the parasite. Eventually as more and more clumps of mistletoe grow, the tree begins to decline and die. Old, slow growing trees are the most susceptible to attack. Mistletoe seldom infests young, vigorous trees.

Mistletoe is a parasite of many trees. Photo: Dan Mullins, Santa Rosa County

Mistletoe is difficult and in many cases impractical to control. This is partly because of the way it is connected to the tree. In addition, many times the mistletoe is growing very high up in the tree and is difficult to reach. Just breaking away the mistletoe is ineffective because it may redevelop at the point of removal. Systemic herbicides can move through the mistletoe and into the tree. This can injure your tree. Ethephon, a chemical growth regulator, has been used as a method to control mistletoe but its practicality is questionable.

The most successful method of eliminating this parasite from a tree is through proper branch removal. The entire limb should be pruned at least one foot below the point where the mistletoe is attached. Once mistletoe has been removed, there is always the chance that additional mistletoe will again find its way to your tree via birds.

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Your Questions Answered

Q: My hibiscus and several other perennials froze during the last cold snap. They look terrible. Can I cut them back now?

A: There is a tendency to want to repair cold damaged plants by pruning them. Eventually some pruning will be required, but delay any major pruning of plants even though they might already be showing signs of cold injury.

Don't prune cold-damaged plants too early.
Photo: Theresa Friday, Santa Rosa County

There are a couple of reasons for storing the pruners for awhile. First, this soon after a freeze, it is impossible to know the exact extent of the damage. Although tender, succulent plants like tropicales and subtropicales begin showing damage within a few hours or days of a hard freeze, the more woody shrubs often don't show the extent of injury for several weeks. The larger and more woody the stems, the more time it takes for damaged wood to show signs.

Pruning that is done too soon almost guarantees that cuts will be made at the wrong place on stems. If cuts are made above the point where branches were killed they will require pruning again later in the season. On the other hand, if pruned excessively, too much live stem tissue is removed, resulting in weakened plants.

A second, and equally important reason for avoiding heavy pruning now, is because pruning stimulates new shoot growth. Typically, on a stem just below a fresh cut, several buds begin to grow during the first warm period. And stimulated shrub growth is exactly what we don't want during mid-winter.

Most pruning jobs to remove cold damaged branches can wait for several weeks. Late winter, around the last part of February or early March, is normally a good time for this kind of pruning.

Q: I become confused when faced with pruning grapes. There is usually so much growth to deal with. How can I decide what parts to cut off and what to leave?

A: The southern grapes, or muscadines, are pruned to a spur system with permanent arms. Assuming that you have the most commonly used two wire trellis setup, I suggest the following:

First, locate the most vigorous main branch running in each direction on the wire. On a two wire system this would mean that there is a main trunk with a total of four branches - two running in opposite directions.

Next, prune out all other large canes by tracing them back to the trunk and removing them. You will be left with these four main branches with many smaller branches growing from them at approximately a ninety degree angle.
Now, here is where many people make a mistake that costs a year's worth of fruit. Side shoots should be pruned back, but not all the way to the main cane. When cutting, leave “spurs,” or short pieces of stem containing at least two buds.

When the job is properly finished, each vine will appear as a skeleton of its former self. There will be one major branch per wire, with short stubs of one to two inches in length where each side branch occurred. The short pieces that are left are a portion of last year's growth, and the buds that sprout will form the fruiting branches for the upcoming year.

A word of warning--If the side shoots are pruned all the way back to the main canes, all of next year's fruiting wood will be removed and you will not have grapes for 2 years!

Q: Should I let the fall leaves stay on the lawn?

A: You should not allow a thick layer of leaves to stay on the lawn for long periods of time. A layer of leaves left on the lawn through the winter can reduce oxygen and sunlight availability to the lawn. This may result in a weak, thin lawn come spring. Also, a layer of leaves may hold too much water and possibly cause rot problems for your lawn. A few leaves (scattering of leaves) should not be a problem, though.

Rapidly-changing weather can be hard on tender plants, especially when a cold spell is preceded by warm weather that prevents plants from being completely dormant.

Flowers

- Prune rose bushes in early February. For more information on how to grow roses, request the *Growing Roses in Florida* publication from your Extension Office or visit http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/EP339.

  • There’s still time to plant some cool season annual flowers such as carnations, foxglove, nemesia, pansies, petunias and snapdragons. All need a well-drained site and four to six hours of full sun a day.

  ![Photo: Beth Bolles, Escambia County Extension](image)

**Gardening Tips For January and February**

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**Roses in Florida**

**Trees and Shrubs**

- Select and plant camellias. For more information about *Camellias in Florida*, visit http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/document_ep002.

- Florida’s Arbor Day is the third Friday of January. Celebrate by planting a native tree in the right place. For a list of recommended trees, request the *Native
Trees for North Florida publication from your local Extension Office or visit http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/EP007.

- Prune dormant shade trees, if needed. For information on pruning techniques, request the Pruning Landscape Trees and Shrubs publication from your local Extension office or visit http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG087.

- Prune summer flowering deciduous shrubs such as althea and hibiscus. Since they flower on current season’s growth, flowering can actually be enhanced by proper pruning.

- Do NOT prune the spring flowering shrubs yet. Azaleas, spireas and forsythia flower during early spring because buds were formed last summer and fall. Pruning now would therefore remove most of the flower buds.

- Cold damaged trees and shrubs should NOT be pruned until new growth appears. You want to preserve as much healthy plant material as possible.

- If cold weather has damaged your palms, proper care may prevent loss of the palm and encourage recovery. For more information see Treating Cold Damaged Palms at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG318.

Fruits and Nuts

- Citrus may need protection from extreme cold. Kumquats and satsumas can survive temperatures in the low 20’s if they are dormant. Other citrus types won’t tolerate such cold temperatures.

- Apply dormant oil spray to peach, plum, nectarine and other deciduous fruit trees to help control scale insects.

- Prune dormant fruit trees if needed.

- In January, plant fruits such as apples, peaches, nectarines, plums, pears, figs, pecans, blueberries, blackberries, grapes and persimmons.

Vegetable Garden

- Cool season vegetables that can still be planted in the garden are: beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, Chinese cabbage, kale, kohlrabi, leek, mustard, bunching onions, parsley, English peas, Irish potatoes, radishes and turnips.

- Start seeds of warm season vegetables in late January in order to have transplants in March.

- Irish potatoes can be started from January through March by planting seed pieces 3 to 4 inches deep in rows. Always purchase certified seed potatoes.

- Prepare spring vegetable and herb beds for planting by adding and incorporating soil amendments like mushroom compost, manure or homemade compost. Wait 3 to 4 weeks before planting.

Lawns

- Check soil moisture during winter and water as needed. Once the grass is dormant, water every 10-14 days. Of course, a rain event counts as a watering.
• Hold off on fertilizing the lawn. It is still **too early** for an application of a nitrogen containing fertilizer. Cold temperatures and lack of plant response would likely result in wasted fertilizer. However, your winter weeds would benefit greatly.

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**Upcoming Events**

**Growing Shiitake Mushrooms.** Bay County Fair  
Grounds, 15th and Sherman, Panama City, January 13th, 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm. Learn how to grow Shiitake mushrooms. Each participant will prepare a log for mushroom production. Bring a drill with a 3/8th drill bit and hammer if possible. Registration is $10. To register call 850-784-6105.

**Agribusiness Conference to Focus on Small Farms:**  
Mark you calendar for the upcoming Annual Gulf Coast Agribusiness Conference to be held on Thursday, February 26, 2009 in Santa Rosa County. The program will begin at 8:00 a.m. at the Jay Community Center, 5259 Booker Street, Jay, FL. 32565. The morning educational sessions will include beekeeping, small farm economics, a small farm overview and a panel consisting of successful small farm operators. We will move to the West Florida Research and Education Farm for lunch and on-site demonstrations such as practical on-farm biodiesel production, wood pelletizing equipment and greenhouse and hydroponic production of several specialty crops. For further information and to register contact Dan Mullins by phone at 850-623-3868 or e-mail at danm@santarosa.fl.gov.

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