Insects Take a Break in Winter

A common question about insects when cold temperatures arrive is whether or not the cold will kill many pests. Although temperatures will occasionally drop below freezing in north Florida, it is normally not cold enough to significantly impact insect populations for the upcoming year.

Even when we do receive a significant amount of cold weather, insects have many methods to survive weather changes. Some insects survive by moving to micro-habitats that are more resistant to temperature fluctuations. Beetle larvae may move deep in the soil or into logs and trees for protection. The grubs can continue feeding on decomposing material throughout winter months. Beneficial insects such as dragonflies and damselflies stay protected in their nymph forms in the mud of ponds and lakes.

One of the most famous insect survival strategies is migration. We are
all familiar with the late summer and fall flights of the monarch butterfly to warmer regions of Mexico and southern California. Those butterflies and moths that do not migrate have their own survival techniques. They will overwinter in protective pupal cases to emerge as adults in the spring. Moth cocoons are spun of silk and may be composed of multiple layers, making them a good protection for the transforming insect.

Insects are adapted for survival and can live through far colder winters than we experience. Even though our cold weather will not drastically change insect populations, periods of cold will at least slow down their activity enough for us to enjoy a break from many pest worries.

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Winter Guide for Fruit and Citrus in North Florida

October through December is an excellent time to locate and plant dooryard fruits throughout the landscape. Apples, blackberries, blueberries, figs, kumquats, muscadines, nectarines, peaches, pears, persimmons, plums, and satsumas are some of the common fruits that can be planted during these months in north Florida landscapes. Strawberries may also be planted by mid-November; some good strawberry varieties for Florida include Chandler, Sweet Charlie, Florida 90, Tioga, Sequoia, Florida Belle, Dover, Tufts, Douglas, Oso Grande, and Selva.


Deciduous fruit trees should be pruned between November and February when the trees are dormant. The best time to begin pruning fruit trees is after they have dropped all their leaves. Pruning refers to the selective removal of limbs in order to obtain desired growth and development. Pruning is used to limit tree size and increase plant vigor within the tree canopy. Proper pruning of deciduous fruit trees is necessary to maintain tree health, vigor and productivity throughout the life of the tree.

Ice protects citrus from freezing.

For more information on pruning dooryard deciduous fruit trees visit: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG345

Every year in north Florida there is a high probability that a freeze will occur sometime in December or even well into January. There are many methods for protecting existing citrus trees from cold damage in the home landscape. These include the use of tree wraps, soil banking, overhead irrigation, and micro irrigation. A tree wrap is the process of wrapping the trunk of the tree from the ground past the graft union to just below the canopy. Tree wraps work by delaying heat loss from the trunk. This method is mostly used during mild to moderate freezes. Materials commonly used in tree wraps are fiberglass, polyurethane foam, polystyrene foam, and polyethylene foam. Another method of protecting citrus from freeze damage is soil banking. This process is done to ensure that the graft union is protected by mound ing soil around the trunk. The soil retains heat during the day and releases heat at night, thus protecting the tree by conduction and insulation. Trees should be banked the day before a hard freeze and then removed shortly after the threat of all freezes is over. Blankets and quilts may be used in place of mounding soil. Lastly, utilization of irrigation can protect dooryard citrus from cold damage. Irrigation may also be used in combination with tree wraps. There are two types of irrigation methods used in cold protection of citrus: overhead and microsprinkler
irrigation. Overhead irrigation uses a sprinkler that sprays water over the tops of citrus; micro irrigation uses low-volume misting sprinklers installed at ground level on short risers. Irrigation protects the trees because when water freezes, it releases heat, which is transferred to the citrus tree. 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. In late winter or early spring blueberries and other fruit trees, like peaches, may need the same type of freeze protection during flowering.

For more information on protecting citrus and blueberries from cold damage visit: [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic_citrus_and_cold](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic_citrus_and_cold) & [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/HS216](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/HS216)

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**Lawn Burweed is a Sticky Problem**

Lawn burweed is a winter annual weed that becomes problematic in spring. It is a low-growing weed with leaves somewhat resembling a miniature version of parsley.

Burweed seeds germinate in fall. The plant remains small and inconspicuous during the winter. It’s not until temperatures warm in spring that this innocent-looking and often unnoticed weed begins to rapidly grow, forming spine-tipped burs in its leaf axils. These sharp, spiny burs hurt as children begin to use the yard again, running around barefoot on a nice early spring day. Even the dog playing fetch suddenly starts doing a painful dance as it finds its way into a prickly patch of burweed. This weed can make a lawn area completely useless until it dies away and decomposes in late spring or early summer, only to reappear from left behind seeds next winter. Individual plants can form a mat spreading to a foot or more in diameter.

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Lawn Burweed  
Photo: John D. Byrd, Mississippi State University, Bugwood.org

Sharp spines can be found in the leaf axils.  
Photo: Joseph M. DiTomaso, University of California - Davis, Bugwood.org

Burweed can easily be controlled during the winter months before the spiny burs become a problem and seeds are produced. But if you wait, you’ll have to put up with the pain and inconvenience until the burs again wither away.
December, January and February are ideal months to apply a herbicide for the control of burweed. Look for lawn herbicides containing atrazine, 2,4-D or dicamba. Centipedegrass and St. Augustinegrass have excellent tolerance of atrazine. Although labeled for use on most of our permanent lawn species, 2,4-D has been known to cause injury to St. Augustinegrass, especially during periods of hot weather. Use lower rates of dicamba on centipede and St. Augustinegrass. Do not use these herbicides (especially dicamba) within the root zone of desirable plants. Always follow label instructions and precautions.

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Winter Color in the Landscape

Just because the weather is turning cooler, it's no reason to give up on having color in the landscape.

Plant pansies, violas, nemesia, diascia, and chrysocephalum to provide color from now until next May. Just be sure to plant where the flowers will receive full sun most of the day. If you don't have a sunny bed, consider using pots that can be placed in sunny spots.

Petunias, dianthus, snapdragons, and sweet alyssum can also be planted now. If planted in a sunny location, they will grow all winter and explode with color next March.

Buy seed packets of larkspur, bachelor buttons, poppies, and sweet peas at your garden center. Clear a space in a sunny bed, pulling back the mulch, and sow the seed on bare ground. Keep the soil moist. After the seedlings emerge, you may find that you need to thin them in spots. Keep the plants watered over the winter and the plants will continue growing slowly. Then, in late winter, they will grow quickly and produce an abundance of flowers in March to April.
Demystifying Bats

During Halloween season, one of the most popular spooky images is that of a bat. Creepy tales of vampire bats and Count Dracula are enduring and certainly exciting; unfortunately, they also help to promote negative connotations that exist year-round concerning these fascinating creatures. Perhaps you’ve heard they carry rabies, that they will fly into your hair, or that many of them want nothing more than to suck your blood?

In fact, there are many benefits to having bats in one’s landscape and neighborhood. The predominant role of bats in our local ecosystem is that of insect predator. A single little brown bat (Myotis lucifugis), which is native to the Florida Panhandle, can eat 1,200 mosquitoes in one hour of feeding! Other species in warmer climates eat fruit and play a major role in reforesting rain forests in Central and South America. After digesting the fruit they leave seeds in their droppings (guano is excellent fertilizer, by the way), helping replant 95% of the very

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trees they feed upon. Some species feed on nectar, filling the same role as bees by helping pollinate bananas, avocados, cashews, and figs.

Contrary to popular belief, bats are not blind and many have excellent vision. However, they do rely heavily on echolocation to sense prey and are extremely accurate hunters. They often fly erratically because they are chasing very small flying insects, so the only reason one would end up in a person’s hair is if a mosquito flew through it with a bat in chase! While vampire bats do exist, there are only 3 out of over 1,000 species of bats that feed on blood, and they all live in Latin America. They also tend to feed on the blood of livestock. Human contact with bats is rare unless the bats are sick, which is why one found on the ground should be left alone. Rabies transmission from bats accounts for only one death per year in the United States—much fewer than deaths from dog bites, bee stings, and lightning strikes! In fact, several towns in Texas with the highest populations of bats in the country have recorded zero bat-transmitted rabies cases.

Bat populations are declining in North America due to disease, loss of habitat, and the slow reproductive cycle of bats. For example, the hoary bat (Lasiurus cinerus) lives in trees and Spanish moss, so preserving wooded habitats is important to this species. You can also help the world’s only flying mammal by installing a bat house in your yard. Keep in mind that bats attracted to bat houses prefer to be in open areas away from trees (where their predators hide), and the house should be installed at least 15 feet in the air. Bat houses can be purchased or built rather simply—keep an eye out for Extension workshops near you, or visit Bat Conservation International’s Web site for simple instructions (http://www.batcon.org).

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Poinsettia Scab

Poinsettias are as traditional as Christmas trees. They are easy to care for and grow in our part of Florida. But even with their ease of care they can be susceptible to diseases such as Poinsettia scab.

Poinsettia scab (Sphaceloma poinsettiae) was discovered in Florida in 1940. It is not a common disease on greenhouse-grown poinsettias but is found mostly in outdoor plantings. Poinsettia scab is a fungal disease that may attack poinsettias, causing circular spots of a light cream color of the midrib and veins of leaves and raised, often elongated lesions or cankers on stems and leaf petioles. The lesions are usually circular but, in advanced stages, may coalesce to form large, irregular areas that may completely encircle the stem, causing dieback above the infected area. Scab is most prevalent in the summer, and scab-infected branches should be pruned and discarded as soon as they are noted.
Hot, wet conditions favor development of this disease. The fungus is spread primarily by splashing water, such as by overhead irrigation. Select a well drained planting site and use good watering practices to help prevent the disease. When symptoms appear, it is usually too late to control. The diseased plant should be removed and the area treated with a soil fumigant or fungicidal drench before placing another poinsettia. For recommendation on selection and application of fungicides and soil fumigants, contact the Cooperative Extension Service Office in your county.


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"Beauty is not caused. It is."
Emily Dickinson

Landscaping for Wildlife with Food Plots

Many of us enhance our home landscaping with bird feeders, bird houses, bird baths and other items so that we can attract wildlife. To accomplish the same thing, many rural landowners plant wildlife food plots. While large landowners often plant several acres, food plots can work well in any sunny area and can be as small as an urban garden.

Food plot plants that do well in our area include clovers, millet, partridge pea, winter wheat, corn, sunflowers and legumes. Deer also like beggarweed and cowpeas.

If you decide to establish a wildlife food plot, you should manage it just like any other garden. The location should be sunny (a minimum of 50% sunshine is recommended) and plots often look better and wildlife will feel safer if you have a backdrop like a forest edge or tall hedgerow.
Just like any other garden, turn the soil with a garden plow or shovel and then smooth the seedbed. Seeding can be done by hand or with a handheld broadcast spreader.

Seeds should be covered lightly (1/4 to 1/2 inch in most cases) and watered as needed. In normal years watering won’t be needed, but if you get an extended dry spell you may want to give the plants additional water. Fertilizer is also recommended and will definitely give you more productivity. I have escaped that myself by growing clover in the winter for nitrogen and adding fireplace ashes to provide calcium (liming agent), potassium and phosphorus. If there is any doubt about what to apply, it is best to get a soil test and follow the recommendations for applying lime and fertilizer. Contact your local County Extension Office for more information.

I generally plant two crops in my wildlife garden--crimson clover in October (that beautiful clover you see in spring along the highways) and brown top millet in the spring after the clover dies back. I mow between seedings; this can work without tilling with some crops, if you keep the weeds under control. When I mow the millet it puts the seed on the ground and many ground feeding birds like doves move in to eat the seeds.

For more ideas and planting dates for cool-season plants, you can go to http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/AG140.

Speaking of gardens, the wildlife food plot makes a useful cover crop for your vegetable garden if you are taking a long vacation or just need a break for any other reason. You can also use the plants as green manure when you decide to put vegetables back in your garden.

It is always good to remember that when wildlife view your landscape, they don’t see pretty grass, flowers, shrubs and trees--they see habitat, good or bad. Food plots simply boil down to food and shelter for them.
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.

- If the area receives cold temperatures and plants freeze, 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. Visit http://hort.ufl.edu/woody/documents/EP314.pdf for instructions on how to properly plant a tree.

- Apply horticultural oil if scales, mites, and other plant-sucking insects have been a problem. Visit http://santarosa.ifas.ufl.edu/lawn_garden/friday/oil0204.pdf for tips on how to have the most success with horticultural oils.

- December is a great time to collect and stick hardwood cuttings. Good candidates for rooting by this method include privet, forsythia, wisteria, honeysuckle, crape myrtle, althea, fig, quince, grape and hibiscus. Visit http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/EP030 for instructions on how to propagate from cuttings.

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.

- 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.

Vegetables

- 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.

- Plant camellias. Camellias grow best in light shade or partial sun and in acidic, well-drained, though not excessively dry soil. Some favorite cultivars for the Gulf Coast include Frank Houser, Lady Laura, Pink Perfection, Elegans Supreme and Don Mac.

- Avoid heavy pruning jobs this late in the year.
Lawns

- If desired, sow annual ryegrass at the beginning of 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. Augustinegrass, in particular) to gradually go dormant by withholding fertilizer.

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**Florida Butterfly Encounters**

In parks, in fields, and in their own home gardens, people are discovering the bright and beautiful world of butterflies. Florida Butterfly Encounters is a series of booklets designed to enlighten both the beginner and the experienced butterfly enthusiast. You will find information on how to attract, observe, identify, and keep track of the wonderful butterfly species found in Florida. The four booklets included are:

**50 Common Butterflies of Florida:** A basic introduction to some of our most commonly encountered Florida butterflies. Each species is pictured in color with an easy-to-follow guide to useful field marks and other helpful identification tips.

**Butterfly Watching Basics:** Learn how to observe and identify butterflies in the field, record your observations, and discover some of the many resources available to enhance your skills and increase your enjoyment.

**Florida Butterfly Gardening:** Turning your property into a haven for butterflies doesn't require a large investment of time or money. This guide walks readers through the basics and provides simple guidelines to help develop a successful butterfly garden.

**Checklist of Florida Butterflies:** Use this checklist to help enjoy Florida's rich butterfly life and record your observations of common species, rare endemics, and even the occasional tropical vagrant.

Authored by Dr. Jaret Daniels, the booklets are available through the UF/IFAS Extension Bookstore at 800-226-1764 or [http://ifasbooks.ufl.edu/merchant2/merchant.mv](http://ifasbooks.ufl.edu/merchant2/merchant.mv). Ask for publication SP 446. Cost is $7 plus shipping.

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**Cabbage Palms**

The cabbage palm (*Sabal palmetto*) is one of the most widely used landscape trees in the South. There are many ways in which cabbage palms are used in the landscapes around north Florida; you often see them along street medians and in lawns as focal points. Although the cabbage palm is not native north of Panama City, they are still being planted in our area because of their adaptability. The cabbage palm is readily adaptive to sandy soils.
and will withstand salt spray and brackish water along the coast as far north as North Carolina.

Cabbage palms can reach a height of 80 feet. Its straight trunk with gray-to-brown furrowed bark is crowned with a semi-circle of fan-shaped leaves. Leaves consist of about 40 to 90 blades, each about 4 to 5 feet long and one to two inches wide with a darker upper surface and a paler underside. Cabbage palms have clusters of berry-like fruit about 1/2” to 3/4” in diameter.

If you would like to learn more about cabbage palms, please visit the EDIS Web site, http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic_palm_trees.

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One problem found with cabbage palms in west central Florida is lethal yellowing disease. The leaves typically appear to have a bronze or reddish-brown appearance. Later, these discolored leaves become more grayish-brown in color. Controlling this problem is very difficult and expensive--you will probably need a tree surgeon to complete the process.

Other problems affect cabbage palms, including lightning, nutrient deficiencies, over-trimming, deep planting, insects, and other plant diseases such as ganoderma butt rot.

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### Northwest District Extension Offices

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