Late spring and early summer are busy times in the lives of Extension Agents, as our clientele have been out working in their yards and questions arise on gardening, landscaping, insect problems, irrigation issues, and more. The weather is also typically beautiful, so Agents are participating in outdoor festivals and school field trips this time of year. With this issue of Gardening in the Panhandle, we hope to help you with timely lawn and weed issues, along with answering questions related to problems you may have noticed in the environment, such as the decline of red bay trees and presence of African honeybee colonies. We welcome your feedback, so please participate in our short survey, and be sure to check out our "Upcoming Events" section to see what Extension programs will be in your area in the next few months.

Carrie Stevenson
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Gardening in the Panhandle Goes on the Road

How would you like to experience what you read in our newsletter--live and in person? That's the idea behind our new mobile exhibit coming to an event near you. You really can't miss this opportunity or miss seeing us--literally. Our exhibit rolls down the highway in a 6' x 12' trailer with unique eye-catching graphics. Housed inside is the latest information for homeowners regarding rain harvesting, smart irrigation, and great plants for your home landscape and vegetable garden.

Key features are equipment and information related to harvesting rainwater with cisterns for home irrigation and other non-potable uses. Did you know that each year, in the Panhandle, every square foot of roof receives 30 to 35 gallons of rainwater? One thousand square feet of rooftop receives over 30,000 gallons of water running off annually! That sounds like a lot of water until we realize that the amount of average weekly irrigation for a 5,000 sq. ft. landscape or lawn is 4,684 gallons per week, when watered.
twice a week with 3/4" of water. Water conservation experts suggest irrigation accounts for nearly 50 percent of our total domestic use of water. Keeping in mind that these numbers can vary based on yearly rainfall, soil type, and water use, in our example the total irrigation use is conservatively estimated to be 187,360 gallons for 40 weeks of irrigation during the year. So, collecting rainwater can offset irrigation use but other strategies must be utilized to maximize efficiency in a landscape.

"Smart Irrigation" includes the use of controllers and distribution technology that provide irrigation as needed in the precise amount. Smart controllers take into account environmental and weather conditions such as water loss to the atmosphere and current soil moisture content. This important site information is relayed to appropriate switches, telling irrigation systems to provide water based on a programmed schedule, to reduce the watering amount, or skip watering entirely based on current conditions. Zones and sensors can be arranged to accommodate various watering needs in the landscape and can be retrofit to an existing sprinkler system.

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'Bourbon Street' *Acalypha* stands up well through the summer heat and will last until the first winter freeze. Plant it where it will receive at least half a day of full sun. Some good combination plantings for this *Acalypha* or copperleaf plant include 'Burgundy Wine' cotinifolia (see below), 'Acapulco' agastache, and red powderpuff plant (*Calliandra haematocephala*).

Photo Credits: David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension

'Brazilian Red Hots' alternanthera holds its color best in an area that receives morning sun but that receives protection from the harsh afternoon sun. A mass planting of these combines well with pink or red flowers, such as pentas or vinca.

Photo Credits: David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension

Hawaiian ti plant, *Cordyline terminalis*, is showy almost to the point of being gawdy. But it still can be useful in the garden, quickly brightening areas where there is no color or combining well with more subtle colors such as light pink or white. It will tolerate partial to full sun, but it does best if it receives a little protection from the afternoon sun.

Photo Credits: David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension

For ease of color in the garden, it's difficult to beat the chartreuse foliage of 'Gold Mound' duranta. Here is shown a pleasing combination of the duranta with 'Petra' croton. Throw in some 'Orange Marmalade' crossandras and this would really be an attractive planting. The croton is another great warm-season foliage plant we can use to great advantage in our gardens. It will still be growing strong come fall, when its orange colors make it seem just as home in north Florida as in front of a south Florida condo.

Photo Credits: David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension
‘Burgundy Wine’ euphorbia will grow to about four feet tall and three feet wide if planted in a spot where it receives at least half a day of full sun. Plant it where you will be able to enjoy the leaves backlit by either the morning or afternoon sun, and you, too, will become a fan of this plant. It makes a great combo planting with ‘Acapulco’ agastache. Don’t plant it in an open area subject to high winds as it is a little brittle as it becomes larger. Also, beware of getting the white, milky sap on your skin without promptly washing it off. It is a very strong skin irritant.

Photo Credits: David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension

Variegated tapioca, Manihot esculenta ‘Variegata’, is another fast grower in the summer garden. Plant it in spring and it will grow and grow until a winter freeze kills it. Mulch it well and it may return the following season from the ground. It prefers full sun. With its green and yellow foliage and red stems, a number of pleasing combinations is possible in the landscape. The bronze-colored, bold foliage of ‘Haleakala’ acalypha, the yellow flowers of yellowbells (Tecoma stans), or the glossy green fo-

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Proper Mowing Affects the Lawn's Appearance and Health

Proper mowing not only keeps your lawn looking its best, it also keeps it healthier. Poor mowing techniques can stress the turf and increase its susceptibility to weeds, diseases, and insect pests. Proper mowing height is critical. Every turf species has its own optimum mowing height. Failure to mow at the correct height could result in thinning and even loss of the lawn.

Recommended cutting heights are as follows: bahiagrass, 3 to 4 inches; bermudagrass, 0.5 to 1.5 inches; zoysia, 1.0 to 3.0 inches; centipedegrass, 1.5 to 2 inches and St. Augustinegrass, 2.5 to 4 inches. Only the dwarf varieties of St. Augustinegrass (Seville, Captiva, Delmar) should be mowed at less than 4 inches.

Mowing frequency is also an important consideration. Follow the “one-third” rule regardless of the turf species. Never remove more than one-third of the turf height in a single mowing.

Always mow with a sharp blade. A dull mower blade will rip instead of cut the leaf tips. A ripped leaf tip will make the grass more susceptible to diseases such as gray leaf spot.
It's important to have a sharp mower blade that is properly balanced. Photo Credits: Theresa Friday, Santa Rosa County

The best way to sharpen a rotary mower blade is to take off the blade and sharpen with a grinder or metal file. When grinding, use eye or face protection and watch out for your loose clothing and sparks.

Before working on the mower, always disconnect the spark plug wire. Tilt the mower body to reach the blade, and watch for leaking gas and oil. Chock the blade with a piece of wood so that it can’t spin. Remove the blade’s fastening bolt with a wrench or socket. Note the top side and bottom of the blade. Installation is the reverse procedure.

When sharpening the two cutting end surfaces, maintain the cutting surface angle at an angle of about 40 degrees. Thinner will be too knife-like and weak; it won’t hold up. Thicker angles will be blunter and will not cut as cleanly. As you sharpen, move the blade back and forth with light pressure. Avoid overheating the steel and losing the metal’s temper (hardness).

After sharpening, always check the blade’s balance using an inexpensive cone balancer. A nail in a wall or stud can do in a pinch. If the blade leans more to one end, take more metal off of that end's cutting surface to balance it. A balanced blade will vibrate less and cause less engine wear.

Theresa Friday
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Florida Pusley

Florida pusley (*Richardia scabra*) is a common lawn weed that can be difficult to control. It is a summer annual but perennial types of pusley may be found growing with Florida pusley, including largeflower pusley and Brazil pusley.

In routinely mowed lawns, Florida pusley will have a prostrate, spreading growth habit. Plants produce noticeable white, tubular flowers that are clustered at the ends of branches. It reproduces by seeds.

Florida pusley can become mat forming in sunny, thinning areas of a lawn. It is very drought tolerant and will easily out-compete lawngrass on well drained, sandy soils during dry periods when the lawn is not being irrigated adequately.

Regular irrigation to prevent wilting of grass plants can allow a lawn to better compete with Florida pusley. Small infestations can be physically removed. It is important to control the plants before they begin to reproduce. Seed production quickly follows flower production. Mature, well established plants are more difficult to control. Florida pusley can be an indication of nematode infested soil.

Larger infestations of Florida pusley will likely require herbicide treatment. A preemergence herbicide such as pendimethalin should be applied during mid February to early March when day temperatures reach 65°F to 70°F for 4 to 5 consecutive days. A second application may be needed 6 to 9 weeks after initial application to achieve season-long control. With postemergence herbicides such as those containing 2,4-D, dicamba, carfentrazone,
imazaquin, etc., make your application when Florida pusley is young, actively growing and not under drought stress. Check the herbicide label for specific application rates and turfgrass tolerance before use.

Florida pusley is a prostrate, spreading summer annual with branched hairy stems. Its six petal flower helps to distinguish it from the four petal flower of Virginia buttonweed.

Photo Credits: Rebekah D. Wallace, Bugwood.org

All chemicals should be used in accordance with directions on the manufacturer's label. Use pesticides safely. Read and follow directions on the manufacturer's label. The use of trade names in this publication is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. UF/IFAS does not guarantee or warranty the products named, and references to them in this publication does not signify our approval to the exclusion of other products of suitable composition.

Honey Bee Swarms

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) Apiary Section has recently recommended that all wild honey bee swarms found close to people be eradicated by a specially trained licensed Pest Control Operator. This recommendation will be alarming to many people since they know how important honey bees are in the pollination of so many food and ornamental plants.

The main reason behind this recommendation for wild colonies is because African honey bees (AHB) are in Florida. These bees are very defensive of their colonies and can cause serious injury to adults, children, pets, and other animals who come in contact with a breeding colony. There is no way in the field to tell the difference between the AHB and the European honey bee. In order to protect the public, it is best that wild swarms be destroyed.

African honey bee swarm in a tree.

Photo Credits: Michael K. O'Malley, University of Florida

If you have a wild swarm in our yard or one that sets up in a structure, you may call your county extension office for a list of qualified pesticide applicators to help with the issue. These are also listed on AFBEE.com under
‘Bee Removal’. Only trained professionals in AHB eradication should be contacted. A defensive AHB colony will send out larger number of bees and travel much farther distances than the European honeybees to protect their nest.

Of course, FDACS strongly supports the beekeeping industry and works closely with beekeepers to maintain healthy bee colonies. One important way to reduce the negative impacts of wild AHB is to encourage managed hives and support your local beekeepers. For more information on African Honey Bees visit the following website: http://www.doacs.state.fl.us/pi/plantinsp/ahb.html or http://entnemdept.ifas.ufl.edu/afbee/.

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Growing Figs in the Landscape

Fig trees can make a great addition to a landscape or fruit orchard. There are some aspects that are important to consider when selecting and growing figs. These facets include proper variety selection, good site selection, appropriate fertility, and correct pruning techniques.

When growing figs, proper variety selection is extremely crucial. There are several varieties that are suitable to grow in Florida. Commonly grown varieties include: Alma, Black Spanish, Brown Turkey, Celeste, Champagne, Conadria, Green Ischia, Hunt, Jelly, Kadota, LSU Gold, LSU Purple, Magnolia, Mission, O’Rourke, Osborn Prolific, Pasquale, Tena, Tiger, and Ventura.

Another aspect that must be considered is good site selection. Figs perform best in locations that receive direct sunlight for the entire day. Due to the fact that fig trees get fairly large, they should be planted in an area that allows them plenty of room to grow.

Appropriate fertility should also be taken into consideration when growing fig trees. All fertilizer applications should be based on a soil test from the University of Florida Soil Testing Lab. If the fig tree grows less than one foot per year a fertilizer application might be needed. A good rule of thumb for young trees is to apply ½ pound of 10-10-10 that contains micronutrients in late March, May, July, and again in August. For older trees apply 2 to 4 pounds of 10-10-10 with micronutrients in late March, May, July, and August.

If you’re a fan of figs, you’ll be glad to know that fig trees are one of the easiest fruit trees to grow around your home.

Photo Credits: Theresa Friday, Santa Rosa County

Lastly, correct pruning techniques and timing must be considered. Pruning is not always required for fig trees in order to have acceptable yields, but sometimes pruning may be necessary. Since fruit is produced on last year’s growth, fig trees should be pruned after fruit ripening and harvest in mid to late summer (July-September). This is done at this time of the year to encourage flower bud and fruit development for the following year. Significant pruning of late maturing varieties and winter pruning may result in a yield reduction or
Indian Hawthorn

Indian Hawthorn (*Rhaphiolepis indica*) is an evergreen shrub with dense foliage, a mounded canopy, and a compact growth habit. Additionally, the plant survives drought and salt spray conditions. While most cultivars of Indian Hawthorn are dwarf plants, there are a few selections such as Rosalinda and Majestic Beauty that are large shrubs that can be pruned into small trees. These features have helped make it one of the most popular choices for residential and commercial landscapes in the Panhandle.

The plant has one major issue, the disease *Entomosporium* leaf spot, which is caused by the fungus *Entomosporium mespili*. The disease, which occurs not only on Indian Hawthorn but also other woody ornamentals in the rose family, is characterized by heavy spotting of the leaves followed by premature defoliation. The symptoms typically begin in late fall to early winter. At early stages of this disease, the leaf spots are bright red. A maroon to yellow halo or blotch may appear and as the disease progresses the red spot forms an ash-brown to gray center. *Entomosporium* spreads rapidly especially after several days of frequent showers coupled with persistent cloud cover and mild temperatures or wet winter conditions. By early spring some cultivars will begin defoliating from the base upward to the shoot tips. Little, if any, spread of the disease occurs on Indian Hawthorn during the summer, particularly during extended period of hot, dry weather. However, *Entomosporium* can remain active on other plant species during this time and excessive overhead irrigation practices can perpetuate the disease.

Fungicides can provide good protection from this disease, but the intensive spray program needed to control this disease is not a practical option for most residential and commercial landscapes. The best defense against *Entomosporium* leaf spot is to use disease-resistant cultivars coupled with efficient irrigation and good sanitation. A couple dozen cultivars are available on the market. Research has been done by several southern states to evaluate the top performers. However, if the plants are installed in shady parts of the landscape, watered daily with spray heads and the old, defoliated leaves are never cleaned up, there is little point in spending time to locate a disease-resistant cultivar.

![Indian Hawthorn](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

Indian hawthorn variety ‘Eleanor Tabor’

Photo Credits: Sheila Dunning, Okaloosa County

When the right place is chosen and proper cultivation management practices are utilized there are several excellent performing Indian Hawthorn cultivars to install. The top ten results from research in Florida, Alabama and Georgia are Gulf Green, Indian Princess, Olivia,
Snow White, Janice, Majestic Beauty, Eleanor Tabor, Jack Evans, Clara and Rosalinda. There are both pink and white flowering cultivars included in this list.

Laurel Wilt: A Devastating Disease of Redbay

Laurel wilt is a disease that affects not only the redbay (Persea borbonia) but other trees in the laurel family. Water flow is blocked by a fungus causing the tree to wilt. The fungus is introduced into the tree by the non-native redbay ambrosia beetle. The disease is spreading rapidly in Florida but has not yet been reported in the Florida Panhandle.

When the beetles leave the tree and move to new trees, they carry the fungus with them. The beetle will not kill trees unless the fungus is on the beetle.

The leaves of affected trees droop and have a reddish or purplish color. Wilted foliage can be seen in only part of the crown at first, but eventually the entire crown wilts and turns red. In redbay, the leaves typically turn brown and remain on the tree for up to a year or more.

To reduce the spread of laurel wilt:

- Don’t bring firewood or mulch from redbays (and other laurel family host species) from counties where laurel wilt has been confirmed
- Do not transport dead and dying redbay wood (and wood from other laurel family hosts), leave it on site instead
- Burn or chip infested host tree material
- Sterilize saws and pruning blades after cutting an infected tree and before using them on uninfected host tree species
- Report new finds to the Florida Division of Plant Industry (http://www.doacs.state.fl.us/pi/) or Division of Forestry (http://www.fl-dof.com/)

Reference: Laurel Wilt: A Threat to Redbay, Avocado and Related Trees in Urban and Rural Landscapes, March, 2008, Albert E. Mayfield III, Jonathan H. Crane and Jason A. Smith, A. E. Mayfield III, Forest Entomologist, FDACS, Florida Division of Forestry, Gainesville, FL; J. H. Crane, Professor and Tropical Fruit Crops Extension Specialist, Tropical Research and Education Center, Homestead, FL; Cooperative Extension Service, IFAS, University of Florida, Gainesville; J.A. Smith, Assistant Professor of Forest Pathology and State Forest Health Extension Specialist, School of Forest Resources and Conservation, IFAS, University of Florida, Gainesville.
Trees diseased with laurel wilt initially exhibit drooping foliage with a reddish or purplish dicoloration. Gradually, the entire crown wilts and reddens. The foliage eventually turns brown and may remain on the branches for up to a year or more.

Photo Credits: Albert (Bud) Mayfield, FDACS, Bugwood.org

Pot Bound Container Plants

Plants grow at different rates, depending on the particular plant species being grown. In actively growing plants, as the plant canopy or upper portion of the plant increases in size, so will the root system. In potted plants, the volume of soil media in the container can limit the plant’s growth and performance, particularly in fast-growing plants. There are several visual indicators that a plant would benefit from repotting, including the presence of roots growing out of the container drainage opening. Also, the plant may be pot or root bound if you remove the plant from the container, look at the root ball, and find excessive root growth or encircling roots. Pot bound plants can restrict growth and result in poor plant performance. To correct a plant that is pot bound, consider shifting it to a container that is larger than the root ball. The frequency at which you may need to repot a container plant depends on the plant’s growth rate. Slow growers may need repotting every two to three years, while faster growing plants should be repotted annually.

For details on repotting plants, see this excerpt on repotting from the Black & Henley EDIS publication on “Care of Plants in the Home” http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/MG/MG03100.pdf

Water the plant thoroughly several hours before removing it from the container. Then invert the pot and place your hand on the potting mix so the base of the plant is between the index and middle fingers. Next, tap the rim of the pot on the edge of a table until the root ball slides out of the container. Remove an inch or two of potting mix from the top of the root ball. If the roots are matted around the root ball (pot bound), force the roots apart and cut the entangled roots. Select a pot with a diameter equal to 1/3 to 1/2 the height of the plant. Usually, transplant to one size larger than the pot in which the plant was previously grown. Place a small piece of broken clay pot over the drainage hole to keep soil from draining through the hole. Do not include other aggregates in the bottom, since the aggregate actually slows water movement through the pot. Cover the bottom of the pot with a layer of potting mix and firm with fingers. This layer of mix should bring the top of the root ball within one inch of the container top. Fill around the root ball...
with mix and firm gently. Water thoroughly and do not repeat until the potting mixture surface becomes slightly dry.

Encircling roots in potted Spathiphyllum.  Photo Credits: Alex Bolques, Gadsden County

For pot bound trees and large shrubs that will be planted in the landscape, expose the root ball and make 3 or 4 vertical cuts (slices) from the base of the root ball to the upper surface of the soil. Cuts should be made about 1 to 2 inches deep. The idea is to prevent encircling roots from girdling the plant. Plants planted with encircling roots can result in slow, weak growth. Encircling roots may even cause the plant to die in future years because the movement of water and nutrients from the root zone through to the plant stem or trunk is progressively restricted as the plant root system and upper plant portion grows and expands.

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Upcoming Events

**Escambia**

*Dreaming in Color? Spring Garden Festival & Master Gardener Plant Sale*
Saturday, May 1, 2010  8 am to 12 noon.
Escambia County Extension Demonstration Garden, 3740 Stefani Road, Cantonment, FL
http://escambia.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/Spring%20Garden%20Festival.pdf
Contact Beth Bolles at 850-475-5230 or bbolles@ufl.edu

*Blueberry Jamboree*  "Blueberries & Bluegrass" Saturday, June 12, 2010
8:00am - 4:00pm Barrineau Park Community Center.
Contact 595-3476 or www.blueberryjamboree.com

*Victory Garden Series, "Preserve and Can Your Fresh Food*" Saturday, June 19, 2010  10:00am - 12:00 noon
http://escambia.ifas.ufl.edu/agriculture/Victory_Garden_Food_Preservation.pdf
Escambia County Extension  cost: $5.00, Contact Dorothy Lee @ 850-475-5230 or colethia@ufl.edu

**Okaloosa**

For information on upcoming events, visit http://okaloosa.ifas.ufl.edu/calendar.shtml

**Santa Rosa**

*Panhandle Butterfly House.* Open to the public Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 10am to 3pm. Visit our website at http://www.panhandlebutterflyhouse.org/ for more in-
Wakulla

Green Living Expo - May 8, 2010 Riversprings Middle School, Crawfordville, FL (featuring new Rainwater Harvesting/Irrigation exhibit)

Washington

Big Bend Alternative Farm Enterprise Conference and FAMU Farm Festival - June 5, 2010 (featuring new Rainwater Harvesting/Irrigation exhibit)

And the Survey Says....

Please help us create a better newsletter for you. Go to http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/5Z88HS3 to complete a short survey and let us know what you would like to see in future issues.
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http://washington.ifas.ufl.edu

Gadsden County
2140 West Jefferson Street
Quincy, FL 32351-1905
(850) 875-7255
http://gadsden.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

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