In This Issue....

Our Gulf Coast weather allows for year round gardening. There is always something to do in the landscape or garden, even during cooler weather. Although the first frost will likely occur in late November to early December, now is a great time to plant trees, shrubs and cool-season annual flowers and vegetables.

The pansy is one of our best winter annual flowers. It is extremely cold tolerant, able to withstand hard freezes and recover completely. A well established and maintained pansy bed provides color throughout the winter and into late spring.

Cool season vegetables can be started now by planting the seeds of beets, carrots, kale, kohlrabi, mustard, parsley, radish and spinach. If transplants are still available, you have time to plant broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, Chinese cabbage, collards, kale,

Firebush (Hamelia patens) is a reliable perennial that provides fall color in the garden

Photo Credits: Theresa Friday, Santa Rosa County
leek and onions.

November is also an ideal time for planting hardy shrubs and trees in the landscape. Our relatively mild soil temperatures allow for root growth during the winter. Fall planted woody ornamentals are well on their way toward establishing their new root systems before the stress from summer heat the following year.

Permanent lawn grasses in Northwest Florida (bahia-grass, bermudagrass, centipedegrass, St. Augustinegrass and zoysiagrass) go dormant in late fall or winter. These grasses grow very slowly and lose color in the fall, and turn completely brown with the first frost. If you want a green lawn throughout the winter, sow ryegrass.

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Be Berry Careful

With the change of season, comes the ripening of colorful berries on many landscape and wild plants. Some of these berries are very enticing to children and many are poisonous. Below are just a few that might be in your yard or nearby woods.

Lantana flowers produce small clusters of green berries that mature to blushish black. All parts of the plant are quite toxic.

Pyracantha is also a common landscape shrub with bright orange or red berries. Eating large amounts of the berries by children is reported to cause stomachache, blistering of the tongue and vomiting.

Common pokeweed is a perennial weed often found in pastures as well as fence-rows, and wooded areas. It is a very tall plant that develops attractive purple berries in early fall. It is also known as poke berry, pigeon berry, inkberry coakun, pocan bush, scoke, poke salad, and American nightshade. And it’s this last name, American nightshade that should tip you off that it is dangerous. All parts of this plant contain toxins. However, it’s the roots and the seeds that contain the highest concentration of toxins.

With Christmas just around the corner, be sure to place mistletoe berries out of reach. Between 1985 and 1992, U.S. poison control centers reported 1,754 cases of accidental poisoning of children or pets with mistletoe.

Always caution children about the danger of eating unfamiliar berries. Unless you absolutely know that a berry is edible, do not eat an unfamiliar one.

Lantana is a very popular summer flowering perennial plant. Butterflies adore the flowers and birds are attracted to the berries. However, all parts of the plant are quite toxic and poisoning may occur year-round, but is most common in summer and fall.

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Always be prepared in case a plant poisoning should occur. First, learn to recognize and name many of the native and cultivated plants near your home. It’s not that we necessarily need to eliminate or discourage the use of these plants in our landscapes. But we do need to be aware of the potential hazards of some of these plants, particularly when they are used in landscapes frequented by young children and pets. As the saying goes “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

References:

Common Pokeweed, http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/AG254


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Fall Leaves Can Control Weeds

Weed control is not top on my list as a reason to use mulch. There are weeds that can push through mulch such as nutsedge (nutgrass) or that can germinate and grow in the mulch. But done correctly, mulching plant beds and gardens can help inhibit some weeds.

In addition to weed control, mulch provides other benefits. It can make landscapes look more attractive. It keeps roots evenly moist, acts to insulate roots from extreme heat and cold and can help decrease loss of soil from wind and water erosion. Mulch serves as a barrier to some soil-borne diseases. And, as organic mulch breaks down, it improves the soil’s fertility, aeration, structure and drainage.

Tree leaves make good mulch. They can be placed on the soil surface beneath and around shrubs, trees, perennials, annuals and vegetables.

Fall leaves are abundant. Some people feel overwhelmed by the volume. One resident reported raking more than 100 large bags of leaves from his half-acre property. One large oak tree can contain over 250,000 leaves!

Mixing leaves from several different species of trees can make better leaf mulch. Leaves of the same size tend to mat together and produce a shingling effect that can shed water and reduce gas exchange in the soil. Shredded leaves stay seated better on the landscape than whole leaves.

A mulch layer three inches deep after settling is enough for most plants. If possible, extend the mulched areas out to the outermost leaves (called the drip line) and beyond. And be sure to pull the mulch back a few inches from the main trunk. Never pile mulch around the trunk.

So, instead of putting all those leaves curbside in plastic bags to be hauled off, use them to benefit your landscape, which may include less weeds.

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Fall leaves used as mulch
Photo Credits: Larry Williams, Okaloosa County
Colorful Plants Usher in Fall

Cooler weather is finally coming to the panhandle. So it's time to plant cool-season flowers. If you select the right flowers, you can have color from now into spring. Just be sure to plant in full sun.

Plant seeds of larkspur and poppies in November for a spectacular show of color in spring. Here the blue, white, and pink spikes of larkspur flowers are contrasted by the orange foliage of 'Tropicana' canna, a perennial in the garden. The larkspur will die back in late spring. But you can collect seed for planting again the next fall. And, if you're careful not to pull them as they emerge, you will even have a new crop of larkspur seedlings emerge in the garden in late fall from the seed that fell to the ground the previous spring.

Photo Credits: David Marshall, Leon County

This is the best time of year to plant petunias in the panhandle of Florida. Don't worry about winter damaging them. If it gets cold enough to hurt petunias, you will have lots of other plants that are damaged also. So the cold-damaged petunias will be the least of your worries. This Supertunia 'Vista Bubblegum' has performed exceptionally well in our plantings in Tallahassee. Plant it now and you will have flowers into the beginning of summer 2010. The peak show will be in spring, when everyone else is just beginning to plant their petunias!

Photo Credits: David Marshall, Leon County

Everyone knows that you plant pansies in the fall. But do you know about some of the other good options for planting with the pansies? In this photo there are blue and orange pansies, coral-colored diascia, and 'Flambe Yellow' chrysocephalum. All bloom well here in the panhandle during the cool months, if planted in full sun.

Photo Credits: David Marshall, Leon County

Nemesia is a great cool-season annual that can be planted in the fall. Flowers have a sweet fragrance. It will bloom through next spring. Sometimes nemesia will even live through the following summer and resume
Growing Dooryard Fruits In The Home Landscape

There is a variety of fruits that can be grown successfully in the North Florida home landscape. Some of these may include apples, blackberries, blueberries, figs, grapes, kumquat, Loquat, peaches, pears, persimmons, plums, and Satsuma’s. Growing these fruits at home can be very challenging, but will yield a great reward if done properly. Some things one may want to keep in mind when growing fruits in the landscape is proper plant selection, proper pruning and training, proper pest management, and proper fertilization.

The first thing to keep in mind is proper plant selection. When discussing correct plant selection always consider using disease resistant and disease free plants, it is also important to select a variety that is suitable for your area. Always buy disease resistant varieties when possible. This will help limit the amount of fungicide applications each year. Never purchase a diseased or unhealthy plant, either. This may cause more headache and trouble later on down the road.

For fruit trees like apples, peaches, pears, plums, and figs make sure the selected variety is a low chill variety. These particular plants require chilling during the winter months of the year in order to set fruit. The Panhandle of Florida usually receives anywhere from 400-700 chilling hours a year. A chilling hour is defined as an hour below 45 degrees Fahrenheit, but above freezing.

The next practice that needs to be taken in consideration is proper fruit pruning and training. This is crucial in order to have a good crop. Pruning will promote plant growth and vigor and with that said it will help the plant set fruit if done correctly. Without proper pruning or training of fruits, good yields cannot be expected.

When pruning a plant you must know if the fruit is born on the current season’s growth or last year’s wood. This will help determine what to prune out of the plant and what to keep. Sometimes there will also be a need to thin fruit on years that have a heavy crop load. This should be done before the fruits begin to develop and ripen. This will help the fruit that remains on the tree get the nutrition needed to develop properly. Something else to keep in mind is that some plants, like grapes and blackberries, may have to be trained to a trellis system.

Another principle to consider is proper pest management. When trying to control a pest, the first thing that needs to be done is to properly identify the pest in question. A sample can always be taken to a local extension office for help with diagnosing the pest.

For fungus disease, fungicides like Bravo (chlorothalonil), Quadris (azoxystrobin), Dithane (mancozeb), and Topsis (thiophanate methyl) may be used. These chemicals may control diseases like anthracnose, Botrytis, leaf spots, and powdery and downy mildew. Remember to always read the pesticide label thoroughly.

When controlling insects, insecticides like Seven (car-
baryl), Malathion, Ortho Bug B Gon (permethrin), Admire (imidacloprid), and horticultural oils and soaps may be purchased. These products will control insects like aphids, beetles, caterpillars, lacebugs, leafhoppers, leafminers, scales, thrips, and whiteflies.

Always keep a weed free area under the plant. The most common method to keep down all vegetation under the plant is apply Round-up (glyphosate). Do not let Round-up get on the fruit leaves because it will cause damage. By keeping this area weed free it cuts out the competition from weeds for resources like water and nutrients.

The last practice to keep in mind is proper plant fertilization. This is key in producing a healthy plant that in turn will generate higher yields. A soil test should be performed every year in order to adequately evaluate the soil. These kits may be obtained at your local extension office.

If a soil test cannot be performed a good rule of thumb is to fertilize using 1 lb of 13-13-13 per inch of trunk diameter. This should be done two to three times a year. The first application should be made in the spring as the plant begins to grow, the second application in the middle of the growing season, and a third application should be made right before fruit sets. This fertilization guide does not replace the accuracy of having a soil test performed and consulting with the local extension agent about specific scenarios.

For more information on fruit care and maintenance please visit
http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic_fruit_and_nut_general

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Go Green This Christmas

Eastern Redcedar is a compact, pyramidal tree making it an excellent choice for a Christmas tree. But remember that this tree is not a true cedar but a member of the juniper family.

The leaves are dark shiny green and usually arranged in opposing pairs. The trees form berry-like fruit that become greenish-white to greenish-blue as they mature. Each little berry contains one to four seeds. The birds and animal feed on them and spread the seed around.

Prior to the availability of plantation grown Christmas trees, wild Eastern Redcedars were the tree of choice for many because of their natural conical shape and ready supply.

They can be started by seed. Grafting and air layering are recommended propagation techniques to have a plant that comes "true".

The Eastern Redcedar is known to aid in erosion control because of its fibrous root system. It also serves as a type of moth repellent that has been used for many years in closets. Eastern Redcedar also makes a good choice in the yard because of its wildlife benefits. Bird will nest in the foliage because it provides such a great cover.

So this year when you’re headed out to get a fresh Christmas tree, why not get one you can enjoy for more than one month. Get one from a local nursery that is already in a pot, just keep it watered and plant it outside in January, February, or when Christmas is over.

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**Bacillus Subtilis Strain Used To Control Diseases**

A new organic disease control product will be on the shelves this spring. The product will be labeled for ornamentals, lawns, vegetables and fruits. It is made from a strain of bacteria called *Bacillus subtilis*.

*Bacillus subtilis* is a naturally occurring bacterium that is commonly found in soil, water, air, and decomposing plant material. Under most conditions, however, it is not biologically active and is present in the spore form. *Bacillus subtilis* strain QST 713 controls the growth of certain harmful bacteria and fungi, presumably by competing for nutrients, growth sites on plants, and by directly colonizing and attaching to fungal pathogens.

The *B. subtilis* strain QST 713 is a naturally occurring strain that was isolated in 1995 from soil in a California peach orchard. This product is applied to foliage. It is not considered a genetically modified organism.

*The B. subtilis* strain QST 713 is approved for use on a wide variety of food crops, including cucurbits, grapes, leafy vegetables, peppers, potatoes, and tomatoes. It is also labeled for ornamentals, trees, shrubs and lawns.

Target pests include fungi and bacteria that cause scab, rust, powdery mildew, downy mildew, dollar spot, brown patch, and early leaf spot, early blight, late blight, and bacterial spot.

No harmful health effects to humans are expected from use of *B. subtilis* strain QST 713. Be sure to read the label and follow the EPA guidelines for the use of personnel protective equipment. This will help to insure the safety of the applicator.

At this time there are no adverse effects expected to non-target organisms, the exception being honey bees. To reduce the risk to honey bees, applicators are not allowed to spray areas where bees are actively foraging.

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**Minigardening**

Many people who are growing flowers and vegetables in containers are practicing minigardening. This practice is common among persons living in apartments, condominiums or yard limited homes. Minigardening areas can include spots such as near the foundation of the house; along sidewalks and drives; on balconies, patios and porches. Because minigardening involves growing in contained vessels, most any outdoor space that receives adequate sunlight, even rooftops, are suitable for plant growth. Containers for minigardens can range from hanging flowerpots, planters, cans, baskets or even an old bathtub.

If you decide to grow using homemade containers, punch holes at the bottom of the container for drainage of excess water. The growth medium can be native soil, a commercially available potting mix or a soil substitute. If using a native soil, resist using a heavy soil such as clay since these typically do not drain well and can retain moisture for longer periods. Heavy soils can cause root rot problems if they do not drain well. For a list of soil substitutes please visit [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/VH/VH03200.pdf](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/VH/VH03200.pdf).

Red Sage Salvia planted in an old bathtub in Quincy, FL

Photo Credits: Alex Bolques, Gadsden County

Monitoring your growth media for moisture is essential, especially when using a sandy mix and during hot/dry weather. Please keep in mind that the more porous the growing media, such as sand, the quicker it will dry out and leaching of nutrients can occur. Fertilizers can be
Trees That Provide Fall Color

Leaves turning color in the northern part of the United States can be quite spectacular. Up north, the leaves all change color in a one to two week period. This synchronizing of fall color is brought on by the quickly changing cooler weather and shortening days.

In North Florida, our weather changes more slowly and the shortening of day length is more gradual. Thus our trees tend to change color over a longer period of time.

Most of our trees begin a color change sometime in October and will continue turning into December. Although variable everywhere, leaf color tends to be less consistent here. The quality of color is actually better if soil moisture is good and we have cool night temperatures with no freezes or frosts and cool, bright, unclouded sunny days. These conditions allow the tree to produce the most sugars. The sugars are what we see in the leaves once the green chlorophyll is gone from the leaf. Cold and dry weather produces the poorest fall color because the tree produces the least amount of sugar.

There are however, several trees that will provide stunning fall color in our area. The often planted shumard oak has brilliant red to red-orange fall color. It is quite adaptable to most urban soils. Trees that are not so common include the blackgum and sourwood. Both trees constantly give us a scarlet red color. The blackgum can grow into a large shade tree while the sourwood is generally a medium sized tree often growing in light shade.
Indoor Pest Management

During the cooler months of the year, homeowners move many frost tender plants or house plants back into structures or homes for protection. During their stay inside, keep a close watch for arthropod pests on plants which can build up quickly in this artificial environment.

The best prevention for indoor pest problems is to inspect plants thoroughly before bringing them indoors. Look over all the leaves, stems, and trunks for any signs of eggs, nymphs, or adult arthropods. You may want to spray your plants with an insecticidal soap to help manage any insects you are unable to see.

Some of the common indoor pests during the winter are spider mites, whiteflies, mealybugs, and fungus gnats.

Spider mites may be heaviest on plants that receive bright light and are in drier indoor air. Heavily infested plants will have fine webbing on leaves and stems. Use a hand lens to see the microscopic mites or shake stems over a white piece of paper to see the spider mites.

If you see small white insects hovering over foliage when it is disturbed, you have whiteflies. While the adults fly, the immatures are attached to the undersides of leaves as flat circles.

Mealybugs are often found on stems and in leaf axils. These insects have a white powdery covering and long filaments at the end of the body. Many mealybugs can be found grouped together on plants.

If your container’s soil is kept too moist, fungus gnats could be a problem. Infested plants may show wilt, yellowing leaves, or even drop foliage. The maggots live in the organic soil and can feed on small plant roots. Allowing soil to dry or changing out soil can help control fungus gnats.

Effective controls for spider mites, whiteflies, and mealybugs include many least toxic methods. Spraying the foliage with water can take care of light spider mite infestations. Insecticidal soaps work well against mite, whiteflies, and mealybugs. For more information on management techniques of indoor pests visit: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG004.

Holiday Gifts for the Florida Gardener

The holidays are the perfect time to show your favorite gardener how much you care. There are many thoughtful gardening gifts for every price range, from just a few dollars to many hundreds. And there’s something for every taste.

Books make great gifts. When choosing a book for your Florida gardener, ensure that it addresses the unique growing conditions in the southeast. When choosing a book about plants, try to find one that lists them by hardiness zone. The hardiness zone classification is a handy guide to selecting plants that will be successful in your specific environment.
Your Florida Guide to Perennials by Sydney Park Brown and Rick Schoellhorn is a must have for anyone who wants to know more about growing perennials in Florida’s challenging environmental conditions. All the basics are covered from preparing the soil to utilizing a Florida-friendly approach to maintaining your perennial garden. With over 250 perennials featured and nearly 200 color photos, this book is like having a garden mentor that you can come back to again and again.

Another book to consider, especially for anyone who wants a healthy looking lawn, is The Florida Lawn Handbook by Drs. Laurie Trenholm and Bryan Unruh. The new third edition is now available and is completely up-to-date. This “how-to” book is written in practical language by turfgrass experts and covers everything from how to prepare your soil and select your grass to how to deal with weeds, insects and diseases.

For the avid gardener, one who appreciates the value of Latin plant names, The Pronouncing Dictionary of Plant Names is now available in a new edition. Offered by the American Nurseryman Publishing Co. this handy little dictionary contains more than 3000 botanical names. Each is spelled phonetically and contains a brief description of the plant name origin and its meaning.

For more ideas, visit the IFAS Extension Bookstore at http://www.ifasbooks.ufl.edu/merchant2/.

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Newsletter Deemed Best in the Nation

Gardening in the Panhandle, this Northwest Extension District horticulture newsletter, was recognized by the National Association of County Agricultural Agents (NACAA) during its national conference in Portland, OR in September. It was chosen as the national winner in the team newsletter category. In the poster session, the newsletter was recognized as a national finalist.

Agents (L-R) Alex Bolques, Carrie Stevenson, Larry Williams, Theresa Friday, and Ken Rudisill receive the award for the best team newsletter in the nation from NACAA
Northwest District Extension Offices

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