Dear Extension Friend

We hope you and your family had a happy and safe holiday season.

Be sure to stop by and welcome our new extension agents to Baker County. Heather Futch is our new Family & Consumer Sciences Agent and Barbara Smith is the new Horticulture Agent. With all the growth occurring in our area, they will have plenty to do!

As always, if you have a specific concern, please do not hesitate to call.

Sincerely,

Mike Sweat

Controlling Armadillos

Armadillos are a concern to many rural homeowners. Armadillos have a shield-like shell covered with horny scales. The joints in the shell are flexible which allows the animal to bend and twist. They have 28-32 peg like teeth in rows in the back of their mouth. They have extremely poor eyesight and hearing, but a keen sense of smell. They are agile runners and good swimmers. They can even walk underwater across small streams.

Armadillos typically rest in a deep burrow during the day and become active at night. One litter of 4 identical young of the same sex is born each year in February or March. They feed primarily on insects and their larvae. They also eat earthworms, scorpions, spiders and snails. Their digging in search for food is the cause of problems for many homeowners. They uproot flowers and ornamental plants by digging 1-3 inch holes that are 3-5 inches deep.

Trapping is probably the best method of control. Most garden centers carry live traps that would be suitable for armadillos. Traps should be placed near the entrance to burrows or along fences. Boards should be used to funnel the animal into the trap. Overripe fruit or a hanging nylon stocking bag filled with earthworms could be used for bait. It is also a good idea to cover the wire bottom of the trap with leaves to make it more appealing. It is illegal to transport and release
The 17th Annual Tri-County Pesticide Update will be held on Tuesday, February 20th, 5:30-9 pm. at the Fellowship Baptist Church in Raiford. This will be an excellent opportunity to keep updated on the latest information affecting pesticide applicators and earn required CEU’s.

A meal will be served beginning at 5:45 PM, followed by the educational program from 6:15 - 9:00 PM. Three Continuing Education Units (CEU’s) will be awarded for participation in this program. The cost will be $5 per person. See next month’s newsletter for specific program topics.

Gardening Guide for January

- Spray dormant fruit trees and woody ornamentals that are having scale problems. Apply a dormant oil spray according to label directions. Read the label carefully, since oil sprays should not be used on some plants.
- Prune your dormant shade and fruit trees. Recent research shows pruning paint has no effect on insect or disease attack. You do not have to use it unless you think your trees look better with the wounds painted.
- Prune roses if they were not pruned in December. If you prune plants heavily, you will get fewer blooms but they will be larger and on longer stems.
- If a hard freeze is forecast, water your lawn and ornamental plants 24 to 48 hours before the freeze to increase cold tolerance. Using water to ice down plants for cold protection is not recommended for home landscapes. We usually get more damage than if we did nothing for the plants. Do not run sprinklers during a freeze, or you may seriously damage your plants and lawn.
- Plant seed indoors or in the greenhouse for March planting of vegetables and annuals. Be sure you are planting varieties long enough stems.

IFAS PUBLICATIONS

The following publications were recently delivered to our office, stop by or call for a free copy. You can also obtain all UF/IFAS publications online at www.solutionsforyourlife.com

- SS-AGR-176 Fertilizing and Liming Forage Crops
- SS-AGR-161 Forage Planting and Establishment Methods
- HS708 Minigardening (Growing Vegetable in Containers)
- WEC-66 Moles
- CIR 802 Managing Florida Ponds for Fishing
- Fact Sheet FA-27 Dissolved Oxygen for Fish Production

Wood Pile Pests

The outdoor wood pile is a favorite home during the winter months for many critters that can inflict a painful bite or sting. To avoid this always pull the logs off with a stick or poker to make sure nothing is under them. Always wear gloves when handling the logs. Drop the log hard on the ground several times to dislodge anything that might be on it before carrying it. Always carry the logs with your arms wrapped around them or placed on your chest. Finally don’t bring the wood in until it is time to burn it. Many animals such as scorpions stay just under the bark and don’t move when it is cold outside, but bring them into a warm house and suddenly one can become "infested" with scorpions.
Christmas is over...what can I do with these plants?

Barbara Smith, Horticulture Agent, Baker County Extension Service

After you catch your breath following the holidays, consider how to care for your poinsettias. It will grow outdoors here however; you will need to wait till spring to plant the poinsettia. For now, allow it to stay in a bright spot in the house or on the porch where temperatures are above 65° F. Keep your plant out of drafts including those from the heating- system vents. Water when the soil surface is dry to the touch; careful not to overwater! Empty any water from the saucer or foil wrap under the pot, also. It’s easier to kill a poinsettia with too much water than too little. Don’t fertilize until the weather warms up in spring.

Unlike poinsettias of the past, the new varieties now available to consumers do not drop their colorful bracts for many months; so you can enjoy their beauty till spring. When the cold weather is gone, you can safely relocate your poinsettia plant:

■ Prune off the old bracts and cut back your poinsettia to 12-18 inches tall.

■ Move outdoors, first to a shady spot and then into full sun, gradually over a period of two weeks. This allows the plant to adjust to light and temperatures after being indoors for the winter.

■ Choose a site with well drained soil. Poinsettias do best in moist (not wet), well-drained, fertile soil, but will grow in a wide range of soils.

■ Make sure there are no streetlights or security flood lights in the planting area. Poinsettias will not bloom unless they have dark nights during bloom setting.

Once you’ve found a satisfactory planting spot, dig a hole one foot wider and 6 inches deeper than the root ball. Plant the poinsettia so that it winds up at the same depth as it grew in the pot. Fill around the root ball with soil, and water in thoroughly. Add mulch to the soil surface to conserve moisture and help prevent weeds.

For more information on poinsettias, including how to get them to re-bloom, call the Baker County Extension office and ask for CIR628, Poinsettias for Florida, Indoors and Outdoors. This publication is also available online at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ MG352.

Now, about that tree.....most containerized Christmas trees can be planted outdoors in January. Christmas trees that will grow well in Baker County landscapes include Red Cedar, Arizona Cypress, Leyland Cypress, Virginia Pine, and Sand Pine.

Soon after the New Year’s holiday has passed, you should move your tree outside into a sunny spot and keep it watered until you get a chance to plant it on your property. When choosing a planting site, look for full sun, good drainage, and enough space to allow your tree to reach full maturity. This Florida Friendly method of putting the right plant in the right place ensures that your tree will survive in the location you choose. Here are some guidelines for planting container grown trees:

■ Dig the planting hole two to three times wider, and as deep as the root ball.

■ Place the root ball into the planting hole and backfill the bottom half of the space around the root ball with existing soil. Tamp the soil to settle it around the root ball, but not so heavily as to compact the soil.

■ Finish filling the hole with loose, unamended soil and gently tamp again. Settle the soil by pushing a hose with running water in and out of the backfill soil all around the hole.

■ Create a three-inch-high water ring around the edge of the root ball to hold irrigation water. Fill the ring with water.

■ Put a two to three-inch-layer of mulch on the soil surface around the tree, staying about 3 inches away from the tree trunk.

For more information on specific trees, contact Barbara Smith, your new horticulture agent, at the Baker County Extension office. Information also available online at University of Florida’s extension website, Solutions for Your Life, at http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu.

Beef Cattle Management Calendar

■ Soil test and apply lime for summer crops.

■ Check for lice and treat if necessary.

■ Check for wild radish and other weeds in cool season pastures, call for control recommendations.

■ Begin grazing winter clover pastures when they are 6 inches tall. Rye should be 12-18 inches high.

■ Keep mineral feeders full.

■ Watch for grass tetany on winter pastures and increase magnesium in mineral supplements if grass tetany has been a problem in the past.

■ Give bulls extra feed and care so they will be in condition for breeding season.

■ Observe cow herd for calving difficulties.

■ Vaccinate cows and heifers prior to the breed-
Transplanting Trees and Shrubs

January is the ideal time to transplant most trees and shrubs. The plants are dormant or semi-dormant and in many cases won’t feel the adverse effects of moving them at this time. When transplanting, it is best to make the new hole several times wider than the root ball of the plant, but not deeper than the root ball (the wider the hole the faster the plant normally establishes). Be sure to have the bottom of the hole firm so that the plant will rest on the bottom and not sink once planted. It is probably best not to add organic matter to the hole when transplanting, let the plant get used to the soil it must survive in from the beginning. After transplanting, applying mulch over the top of the ground will aid in moisture retention, reduce soil temperature, and provide some nutrients.

If you are moving a plant from one location to another, it’s best to irrigate the plant for 12-24 hours before digging. Then if possible place something under the root ball so you can slide the plant from one area to another without letting all the soil fall away. Research has found that it is not necessary to prune or remove the top of the plant before transplanting shrubs from one location to another, the plant will shed some of the leaves naturally. It is still best to root prune the plant several weeks before moving by cutting the roots with a spade several inches from the root area you plan to dig.