Dear Extension Friend

Hello. I'm the new Horticulture Agent here in Baker County and I'm starting to settle in. I really appreciate those folks who came by to give me a Baker County Welcome.

Thanks. I enjoyed the opportunity to meet many of you when you brought questions to the extension office about crops you are growing. I hope to help you with future gardening problems as you go about getting ready for spring toward the end of this month.

I am still planning programs for 2007 and will have some exciting new presentations and workshops lined up soon. I will be dealing mostly with Homeowner Horticulture and the Master Gardener Program, but any horticulture question is fair game. I look forward to working with you all.

If you have questions, issues, or concerns, please call either Mike Sweat or me.

Respectfully,

Barbara Smith
Horticulture Extension Agent

Upcoming Programs for Home Gardeners

Feb 7th  Planting a Container Garden
Horticulture Agent, Barbara Smith, is holding a workshop from 9:30 am—11:30 am on planting up a perennial flower garden in a container. You will learn the ins and outs of container gardening in general. Also, this will be an opportunity to see some of the latest perennial flowers available in retail nurseries these days. Master Gardeners of Baker County will also be participating and our guest speaker will be Doris Klemm of Harmony Gardens Nursery in Gainesville. This will be a hands-on workshop, so dress down and bring your gloves. Everyone is invited. Call the Baker County Extension Office at 904-259-3520 if you are planning to come so we can plan our materials and publications.

Feb 7th Winter Production Practices for Peaches, Nectarines and Plums,
is a two-hour field day with presentations and demonstrations covering pruning, weed management, fertilization, and pest identification and control for these fruit crops in North Florida. This workshop will be held on Wednesday, Feb. 7, from 1-3 pm at the North FL Research and Education Center — Suwannee Valley, 7580 County Road 136, Live Oak. Contact Dr. James Ferguson if more information is needed.

March 17th Honeybee Short Course
This is an all day course that will cover ‘Current Topics in Beekeeping’ before lunch (provided) & ‘Practical Beekeeping’ in the afternoon. This course will be held at the Clay County Agricultural Center, 2463 State Road 16 W, Green Cove Springs on Saturday, March 17th. Cost is $25 per person or $30 for husband and wife. Registration deadline is March 13, 2007. For more information contact the Clay County Extension Office. Phone: 904-284-6355.
Garden Site Prep

By the end of February we should have our last killing frost behind us. Four to six weeks prior to planting your spring vegetable garden, till the ground where you plan to plant. If you have not had your soil pH checked in the past couple of years, you may want to consider doing so. Call the Baker County Cooperative Extension Office (904-259-3520) for information on soil testing. Soil testing can tell you what the acid level (pH) and levels of nutrients are in your soil. A slightly acid (6.5) pH allows the widest range of nutrients to be available and this will lead to better utilization of fertilizer. Now is also a good time to incorporate organic matter like compost or manure into your garden plot. Adding organic materials will improve the tilth and condition of the soil; increase the soil’s ability to hold water and nutrients; support the soil’s microbiological activity; contribute nutrients; and help plants survive injury caused by nematodes. If you have an existing garden, fertilize the plants every 3-4 weeks with a complete fertilizer like 6-6-6, 8-8-8 or 10-10-10. If you are using slow release, natural or organic fertilizers, the cool weather will slow the release of the nutrients even more. Watch for pest problems like insects and diseases. Remove insects and any plant parts that may be diseased to reduce stress and spread to the rest of the garden.

Fruits and Nuts

This is the best time to plant dormant fruit trees. Select varieties most suited for this area. For peaches, plums, pears, persimmons, apples and figs, apply about 1 lb. of 10-10-10 fertilizer per tree during May of the first season after planting. Each February in succeeding years, apply about 1 lb. of 10-10-10 fertilizer for each year of age of the tree until a maximum of 10 to 15 lbs. per tree is reached. Excessive nitrogen fertilizer results in vigorous growth that requires excessive pruning and drastically reduces the number of fruit buds formed. Also, overly vigorous pear trees are often attacked by the bacterial disease, fire blight, so be careful when fertilizing pears. For pecan and chestnuts, apply 1 lb. of 10-10-10 fertilizer per tree the first season. This application should be made in May. After the first season, apply 10-10-10 fertilizer each February at the rate of 2 lbs. for each year of age of pecan trees with the maximum of 50 lbs. per tree. Chestnuts require about 1 lb. for each year of age with a maximum of 15 lbs. per tree. Blueberries are very sensitive to nitrogen and can be killed easily – particularly when they are young. Exercise caution when fertilizing young plants. An annual application of 2 ounces of acid fertilizer (such as for camellias and azaleas) per plant in February is ample fertilizer on 2 year old plants. Blueberries should not be pruned until after harvest. Mature blackberry vines should receive three applications of 1/3 lb. of a complete fertilizer (i.e., 10-10-10) with the first application in late February, the second shortly after harvest, and the third in late August. Grapes (bunch and muscadine) should be fertilized at the rate of 1 lb. of 10-10-10 for each year of age with a maximum of 5 lbs. per plant applied in late February. Wait to begin fertilizing citrus trees until late spring. Pruning mature healthy citrus reduces yield in proportion to the amount of foliage removed. Prune only to manage the developing canopy or to remove cold damaged parts, when growth has resumed. Proper pruning and training of fruit trees is necessary to obtain maximum yield of high quality fruit. Pruning should be done toward the end of winter to avoid promoting premature growth that could be damaged by freezes. For more information on how to maintain and prune fruit trees, ask for Fact Sheet HS-82, “Pruning and Training Deciduous Fruit Trees for the Dooryard”. Spraying an application of Horticultural Oil spray (dormant oil) while the tree is in dormancy is an effective way to control scale problems for the coming year, and to clean up any current scale problems.

Lawns

Recent cold weather may have slowed down lawn growth. In cooler weather, water approximately every 10-14 days, applying 3/4 inch at a time. Even if grass is growing, do not fertilize yet. Wait until March for that. Another cold snap could damage new growth stimulated by fertilization. Rake the lawn now to remove fallen plant debris in preparation for next month’s spring growth and to make it easier when you do fertilize in March. You can use the raked debris as mulch under your landscape plants.

If you need to plant or replant your lawn, wait until after the last freeze (March-April) to put down seed or sod.

If you had a problem with annual spring weeds in the past you can apply a pre-emergence herbicide in late February or early March to stop these weeds as they germinate. More information is available from the extension office.

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Upon request, for individuals with documented print related disabilities, this publication is available in alternative format. Contact the Baker County Extension Service for more information.

For individuals with disabilities requiring special accommodations, please contact the Baker County Extension Service at least 5 working days prior to the program in order for proper consideration to be given to the request.

For TDD service, call the Florida Relay Service Center at 1-800-955-8771
Invasive Plant of the Month

Be on the lookout this month for this problem tree. Chinese Tallow Tree (Triadica sebiferum, aka Sapium sebiferum) is sometimes called Popcorn Tree because of the white seeds resembling kernels of popcorn that remain on the tree through the winter after the red fall foliage is gone. New growth on Chinese tallow begins as early as February and yellow tassel-like flowers appear March through May. Now is a good time to spot this tree in your landscape.

The big problem with Chinese Tallow is that it grows and spreads rapidly, is difficult to kill, and tends to take over large areas by out-competing native plants. It thrives equally well in dry or wet soils, & on the shores of rivers, lakes, and ponds. It spreads when seeds are carried by birds or by water to a new site where seedlings quickly sprout. If you have this tree on your property, we recommend removal. Seedlings can be pulled by hand and larger trees should be cut. Immediately paint the surface of the cut stump with herbicide to kill the root and prevent re-sprouting. Make this final cut as close to the ground as possible and as level as possible to facilitate application of herbicide to prevent sprouting.

Homeowners with only one or a few trees should use Brush-B-Gon or Brush Killer herbicide available from retail nursery supply stores. Property owners with large numbers of trees can use the more concentrated Garlon 3A or Garlon 4 which are available only in 2.5-gallon or larger containers from farm supply stores. Renovate 3 is available in 1 quart containers and can be applied to trees that are standing in water. These products must be diluted before use. If you don’t mind leaving a dead tree standing, you can use the basal bark application method of herbicide. Garlon 4 can be diluted at a rate of 1 part herbicide to 5 parts oil and applied to the bark at the base of trees with stems less than 6 inches in diameter. Oil manufactured for this purpose is available from farm supply stores. Pathfinder II is a ready to use product for basal bark application. Read and follow the label on all herbicide containers.

Replace this invasive tree with a non-invasive one that has fall color like a maple, dogwood, sweet gum, or crape myrtle. Fact sheets that provide additional information on landscape plants can be viewed at http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/trees/index.htm. You may also call the Baker County Extension office (904-259-3520) for help. Ask for Barbara Smith, the horticulture agent.

Stinkhorns

Have you noticed a strange looking, putrid smelling fungus in your lawn or mulched plant beds?

Stinkhorn is the name of the fungus you see (or maybe smell) emerging from the mulch. Good name, huh? Clathrus columnatus is the botanic name for the fungus. It is not harmful to plants since it lives on decaying organic matter. But, it can be a smelly nuisance.

You may see white mycelium strands in the organic matter first or a white “egg” structure in the lawn or mulch. The “arms” of the stinkhorn emerge from this “egg” structure. Later, the spores start to ripen and that’s when the smell starts. You will see a grey-black viscous material on the underside of the upper part of the stinkhorn structure. This smells like rotting meat. Flies visit the stinkhorn and the viscous material gets stuck to the insect’s body, facilitating fungus spore dispersal. Stinkhorn can also spread without spores via transportation of the mycelium (looks like white fibers) through mulch or other decaying organic matter that is transported from one spot to another.

Spraying will not effectively control stinkhorn. Control is by removal of the fungal structures from the area. If you see the white “egg” developing (may be hidden in lawn, leaves, or mulch), pick it up and put it in your trash or somewhere else on the property where it can go about the business of breaking down organic matter without offending anyone. The same treatment applies to the pinkish-orange-colored fully developed stinkhorn fungus. However, when removing this smelly stage, you will want to put a plastic baggie on your hand first and maybe a clothespin on your nose!
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Trees and Shrubs

If you have cold damaged landscape plants, be careful not to prune off freeze damage too soon. Wait until after plants bud or leaf out in March so you can pinpoint where the freeze damage stops. Prune out split, damaged, or dead branches just below damaged area. Never prune plants during a growth flush (leafing out). And as a general rule: only prune 1/3 of growth at any one pruning. For more information on pruning, request Circular 853, Pruning Landscape Trees and Shrubs. Winter and spring flowering plants such as azalea, camellia, gardenia, spirea, Indian hawthorn, wisteria, dogwood, fringe tree, redbud, some hydrangeas and magnolias such as star and saucer should be pruned soon after flowering but before flower buds form for next year. Plants that produce flowers in the summer or fall can be pruned now. They include abelia, hibiscus, oleander, crape myrtle & cassia.

February is an excellent time to give your roses a major pruning. Major yearly pruning consists of removing some healthy top growth as well as twigs and branches that are dead, diseased, injured, unsightly or thin and spindly. Shortening main canes and lateral branches, removing small twigs and some of the oldest canes improves the plant’s form. It also regulates height and produces better light conditions within the plant. Leave at least half the length of each main cane that is one to three years old. The first flowers can be expected eight to nine weeks after pruning.

Evergreens like viburnum, podocarpus, holly, boxwood, ligustrum, juniper and wax myrtle can be pruned any time during the year. Fertilize camellias and remove spent flower buds. Wait until they are done blooming before you prune.

If you noticed azalea or camellia flowers turning brown and dropping off too quickly or in unusual numbers this year, the problem could be petal blight. There are steps you can take now to help prevent that from happening next year. This involves removing the source of next year’s outbreak, those fallen petals, leaves, and mulch under the plant. This debris creates an environment in which the fungal spores will survive. If you had petal blight on azaleas or camellias this year, rake away litter under the plants and apply a fresh layer of mulch. This will help prevent germination of the blight fungus spores next year.

Think before you prune your crape myrtles. This is the time of year when people prune their crape myrtle trees if necessary. Severe pruning (crape murder) has been shown to reduce the number of blooms and delay blooming. Only prune if the tree is growing far too large for the area, and to clean up twiggy growth.

You may have noticed mistletoe growing in the crown of pecan, pear, and other trees this winter. It appears as a dark green tuft on an otherwise bare tree limb. Mistletoe is a parasite and pulls nutrients from the host tree. It causes dieback of branch tips and causes the most damage during periods of drought. Prune out mistletoe infestations at least 12 inches below the point of attachment. (Most herbicides cannot be used on mistletoe without causing damage to the host tree).

This month, continue to plant trees and shrubs that are bare-root, balled & burlapped, or in containers. Containerized plants may be planted any time of year. Choose the right plant for the right place and purpose. For planting and transplanting tips, get Circular 858, ‘Selecting and Planting Trees and Shrubs’ from the Baker County Extension office or online at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu.