

Highlights in

*Horticulture*

Baker County

April 2012

Dear Extension Friends,

Spring is officially here, although it seems like it came early this year. Hopefully that doesn't mean we are heading straight into summer! We are looking forward to a busy gardening month...hope you'll join us at the Spring Garden Festival and for our Florida Gardening Crash Course, filled with lots of helpful gardening information!

Best Regards,

*Alicia*

Alicia R. Lamborn  
Horticulture Extension Agent  
Baker County Extension Service

**Inside this issue:**

Attracting Birds is Easy With Bird Baths	2
Shaded Lawns Have Different Needs	2
Arboretum Receives Special Visitors	3
Stinging Caterpillars	4

***Florida Gardening Crash Course***

**Hurry! Deadline to Register is Monday, April 9th!**

This course is split into three sessions, held on the following dates from 6:00 pm — 8:00 pm  
**April 16th    April 23rd    April 30th**

*Topics include:*

Florida-Friendly Landscaping, Installing and Maintaining Trees & Shrubs, Annuals/Perennials/Bulbs, Basic Lawn Care, Managing Landscape Pests, Fruit and Vegetable Gardening, and Plant Propagation

**Cost: \$35 per person (\$50 for couples)**

Fee includes all workshop materials and handouts (binder included), Pest Management ID Guide (book), and light refreshments.



**Saturday, April 14th**  
**8 am — 2pm**  
**@ Ag Center**

***Garden Festival***

**Plant Vendors:**

Baker Co. Master Gardeners  
Jr. Master Gardener 4-H Club  
North Glen Farms  
FLAGA Iris Society

**Gardening Exhibits:**

Container Gardening, Butterfly Gardening, Rain Barrels & Compost Bins (for sale), Prize Winning Plants, Arboretum Tours, Tree Planting Demonstration @ 9am

Plant Giveaways Every 1/2 Hour  
Enter to Win a Rain Barrel

## Attracting Birds is Easy with Bird Baths

Bird baths are a great way to attract a variety of birds to your yard, without the expense of providing different types of feeders and seed. But bird bath design, placement and maintenance all play a role in how successful you will be at attracting these creatures to your yard. When selecting a bird bath, avoid baths with deep bowls. Instead look for baths with relatively flat bottoms that are no more than 3 inches deep. Birds have short legs which aren't designed for swimming like ducks, so keeping the water level low will make the birds feel comfortable when bathing. Another design element to look for is the height of pedestal upon which the bath sits. Now since most bird baths come in a standard height, this may not be as critical when making your selection, but keep in mind that the bowl should sit at least 3 feet off the ground. This will give the birds a "birds-eye view" of their surroundings and again, make them feel more comfortable when stopping for a drink. If your bird bath is shorter than 3 feet, consider stacking a few concrete landscaping squares under the pedestal to make up the difference.



Once you've found a suitable bath, you'll need to find a good spot to put it — away from areas where predators may hide. The recommendation is to keep the bath a minimum of 15 feet away from shrubs so that the predators (such as the neighborhood cat) can't lie in wait ready to sneak up on an unexpected bird. Once your bird bath is setup, all that's left is maintenance which is relatively simple. Just make sure you empty the bath 1-2 times per week to prevent mosquitoes from breeding and replace with fresh water for the birds. Replacing the water on a regular basis will also prevent algae build-up, but occasionally the bath will need a more thorough cleaning. For cement baths, clean with soap and warm water only (no chlorine). For metal baths, use soap and water or 1 part chlorine bleach to 10 parts water if the bath is exceptionally dirty.

Just by following these few simple tips, you're sure to have the company of some new feathered friends. For more information on landscaping for wildlife, visit [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic\\_landscaping\\_for\\_wildlife](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic_landscaping_for_wildlife) or call or stop by the Baker County Extension Office to request specific information.

## Lawns Growing in Shade Have Different Needs

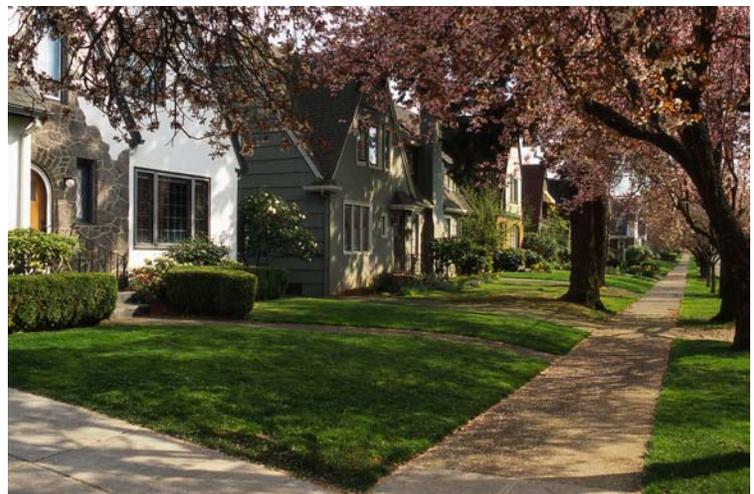
If portions of your lawn are shaded by trees, you may have noticed that your grass doesn't perform as well in these shaded areas. This is because most turfgrass species require full sun for optimum growth. In densely shaded areas, we recommend that an alternative shade-loving groundcover be used, such as Mondo grass. But for areas with light to moderate shade, planting a shade tolerant grass type and altering your maintenance habits may be enough to help these shaded areas thrive.

When it comes to turfgrass, good shade tolerance is a relative thing since no grass will do well in deep shade or if there are not enough hours of sunlight available. Even shade tolerant grasses need at least 4 hours of sunlight daily, and afternoon sun appears to be more important than morning sun in determining the number of hours needed. If you think planting shade tolerant turf will help, plant or plug holes in the lawn with one of the dwarf varieties of St. Augustine grass, which have shown to have the best shade tolerance. These include 'Delmar,' 'Seville' and 'Captiva'.

If you're not ready to start replacing the lawn, try altering your maintenance habits by following these simple tips:

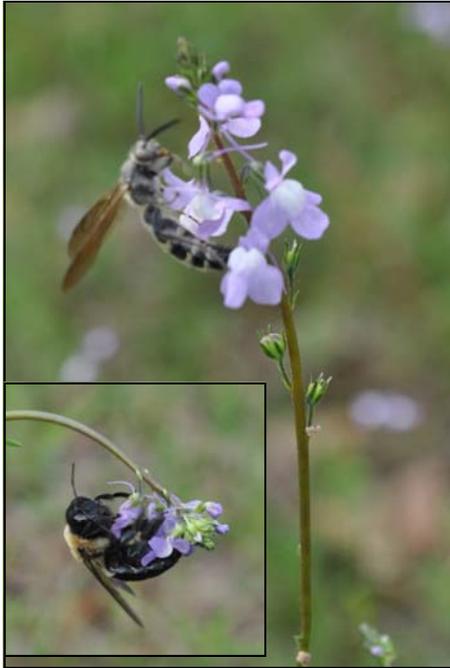
- ◆ Remove shade sources or trim branches to allow more light to reach the ground.
- ◆ Reduce traffic and other stresses in shaded areas.
- ◆ Increase mowing height—more shoot tissue for photosynthesis will help turf perform better.
- ◆ Reduce irrigation in shaded areas.
- ◆ Reduce fertilization—trying to promote shoot growth with high fertility will further stress the grass.

While many of us have the exact opposite instinct (increase irrigation and fertilization), following these recommendations has proven to be highly effective.



# *The Baker County Arboretum Receives Many Special Visitors in Early Spring*

Also called Blue Toadflax, *Linaria canadensis* is a wildflower that pops up during winter and begins blooming in early spring. It is often seen on roadsides, in open fields, and in residential landscapes with its small pink/lavender flowers displayed on 12-18 inch tall stems. Despite its name, toadflax is not related to true flax in any way but actually bears a close resemblance to the common garden snapdragon.



In the Arboretum, Toadflax is plentiful, making it an important food source for many pollinators including different types of bees (pictured left, with inset) and butterflies (Phaon Crescent Butterfly pictured right), and serves as a larval host plant for the Common Buckeye butterfly (larvae pictured below).



*All Photos by Alicia Lamborn*

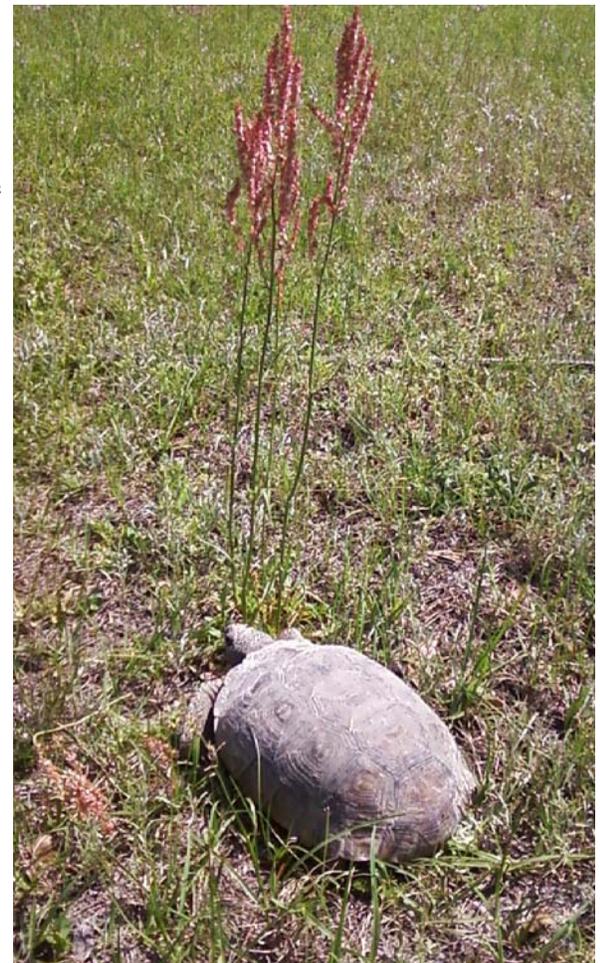
Another special visitor spotted in the Arboretum last month was a Gopher Tortoise. He (or she) was munching on a small patch of Red Sorrel, also known as Sourgrass or Indian Cane (pictured right).

You've probably noticed the Red Sorrel, with its tall masses of red flowers, growing in fields and occasionally in landscapes. While some consider this plant a weed, it does serve as a food source for wildlife.

Gopher tortoises live in well-drained sandy areas with a sparse tree canopy and abundant low growing vegetation which serves as their food source. They live in long burrows averaging 15 feet long and 6.5 feet deep, however the record length for a burrow is over 47 feet long.

The burrows maintain a fairly constant temperature and humidity throughout the year and protect the gopher tortoise and other species from temperature extremes, drought, forest fires, and predators.

Gopher Tortoises are amazing creatures, living 40 to 60 years in the wild and sharing its burrow with more than 350 other species, including burrowing owls, Florida mice, indigo snakes, opossums, rabbits, gopher frog, eastern diamondback rattlesnakes and gopher crickets. For this reason it is called a keystone species, so named because the upper stone in an arch, the keystone, supports the other stones to hold them in place. Animals which utilize the gopher tortoise burrows are known as commensal species. Since many commensal species depend on the burrows for survival, decreases in gopher tortoise populations result in a decline of other species.



# *Stinging Caterpillars: Mistaken Identity or Cause for Concern?*

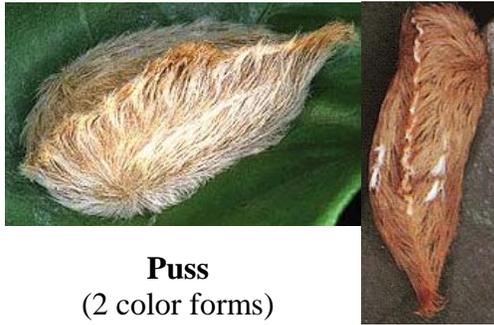
Stinging caterpillars are present in Florida and are definitely a cause for concern if you happen upon one. However, there are many cases of mistaken identities when it comes to scary looking caterpillars so we'd like to clear up any confusion when it comes to distinguishing the harmful from the harmless. In any case with nature's creatures, it may be best not to touch, harmless or not.



**Saddleback**



**Io Moth**



**Puss**  
(2 color forms)

The four major "stinging" caterpillars occurring in Florida are the puss caterpillar, saddleback caterpillar, Io moth caterpillar and hag caterpillar. Some less common ones also occur in the state. These caterpillars do not actually possess stingers, but instead have spines that are connected to poison glands. Some people experience severe reactions to the poison released by the spines and require medical attention. Others experience only an itching or burning sensation.

**First aid:** Place Scotch tape over the affected area and strip off repeatedly to remove spines. Apply ice packs to reduce the stinging sensation, and follow with a paste of baking soda and water. If the victim has a history of hay fever, asthma or allergy, or if allergic reactions develop, contact a physician immediately.

Source: D.E. Short, D.H. Habeck and J.L. Castner — University of Florida: Stinging and Venomous Caterpillars



**Hag**  
(2 color forms)



**Buck Moth**



**Flannel Moth**

**Spiny Oak-Slug**

For more information, visit:  
<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/in014>



**Baker County Extension Service**  
1025 West Macclenny Avenue  
Macclenny, FL 32063



Phone: (904) 259-3520

Email: [alamborn@ufl.edu](mailto:alamborn@ufl.edu)

Website: <http://baker.ifas.ufl.edu>

For Extension Programs offered around the state, see the IFAS Extension Web Calendar at <http://calendar.ifas.ufl.edu/calendar/index.htm>.

Extension programs are open to all people regardless of race, color, age, sex, handicap, or national origin. In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, any person needing a special accommodation to participate in any activity, should contact the Baker County Cooperative Extension Service at 1025 West Macclenny Avenue, Macclenny, FL 32063 or telephone (904) 259-3520 no later than ten (10) days prior to the event. Hearing impaired persons can access the foregoing telephone by contacting the Florida Relay Service at 1-800-955-8770 (voice) or 1-800-955-8771 (TDD).