



Highlights in

Horticulture

Baker County

February 2011

Dear Extension Friends,

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With all of the freezing weather lately, many of us have already started looking forward to Spring! But don't forget that now is the time for soil testing (lawns, landscapes, vegetable gardens) and planting trees, including fruit trees. Not sure what to plant? We can help! Just call or stop by our office for some free advice!

Best Regards,

Alicia

Alicia R. Lamborn
Horticulture Extension Agent
Baker County Extension Service

Crape Myrtles

Use a light touch when pruning crape myrtles — these plants don't deserve the harsh treatment that many gardeners insist on giving them each year!

Pruning: Crape myrtles should be pruned like any other tree—with care! Hard pruning (topping/heading) every year to control plant size is not recommended. This actually weakens the plant, promotes decay and causes the plant to produce fewer flowers which the weak, twiggy growth has trouble supporting. If pruning is necessary, only removing dead, diseased and rubbing limbs, and always prune back to a lateral branch instead of leaving a stub.

Transplanting: If your crape myrtle has outgrown its space, consider transplanting it to a better suited location. This should be done during the dormant season (winter) before new growth resumes. Just dig as much of the root-ball as possible, move to a new location and water well, keeping the soil moist until regular rains return in summer.

Varieties: Crape myrtles are available in all sizes—dwarf (under 4 ft), semi-dwarf (4-12 ft), intermediate (12-20 ft) and tree (over 20 ft). If you want your plant to stay small—select a dwarf variety which can be used for foundation plantings and even hanging baskets! For a list of named cultivars separated by size, visit <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/mg266> or stop by our office.



Want to learn more about pruning and restoring topped crape myrtles? Join us at the Extension office on Feb. 22nd @ 11am for a 1-hour lecture followed by a hands-on pruning exercise. Call 259-3520 for details.

Species Spotlight

Blueberries



This month we feature an edible species: blueberries!

Growing blueberries can be both rewarding and fun since they show fall color, followed by interesting flowers and delicious fruit. But if you haven't already planted, you'd better hurry - the best time to plant is from mid-December to mid-February!

Two types of blueberries are grown in Florida; rabbiteye and southern highbush. However, only low-chill cultivars of each are adapted to Florida. Most blueberry cultivars grown in Florida are self-unfruitful, requiring one or more other cultivars for good cross pollination. And choosing the right cultivars for our area is very important since some perform better than others. In general, rabbiteye cultivars are considered easier to grow in North Florida because they flower later, reducing the chance of flower drop from late freezes. They also require less organic matter, less mulching, and are more drought tolerant and vigorous than southern highbush cultivars. Rabbiteyes are best adapted to areas of Florida north of Ocala. Early season rabbiteyes include 'Beckyblue', 'Bonita', 'Climax', and 'Austin'. Most of the mid to late season rabbiteye cultivars are more productive, which include 'Brightwell', 'Powderblue', 'Tifblue', and 'Woodard', and others. However, the early season cultivars are useful in extending the rabbiteye harvest season.

Southern highbush blueberries are considered more difficult to grow because they flower early making them more susceptible to winter freezes. They are also less forgiving of soil requirements and are more prone to having root rot and stem blight problems. In general, southern highbush cultivars should be grown in central and south Florida, although some are adapted to areas as far north as Gainesville. Recommended highbush cultivars include 'Emerald', 'Gulf Coast', 'Jewel', 'Millennia', 'Sharpblue', 'Star', and 'Windsor', but cold protection may be required to grow these varieties in our area.

Blueberries thrive on acidic soils (soil pH of 4.0 to 5.5 is required) containing 1-3% organic matter. Incorporating peat moss prior to planting and later mulching with pine bark will increase soil organic matter and help lower pH. Bushes should be pruned at planting. Prune any weak, twiggy growth at the base of the plant, but leave the tallest, strongest cane unpruned. During the first growing season, all flowers should be removed before fruit set occurs. Since plants use a lot of energy producing fruit, removing the flowers will help promote strong vegetative growth and good plant establishment. Plant in a sunny location, away from the roots of trees. Plants located too close to hardwood trees will produce less fruit, except when planted near pine trees. Since blueberries can be damaged or killed from over fertilization, it is best to provide frequent but light applications of a 12-4-8 analysis fertilizer with 2% magnesium (Mg). A special formulation called "blueberry special" is available in Florida or another possibility is an "azalea-camellia" fertilizer that meets these requirements.

For more information on growing blueberries and other fruits check out the following online publications:

- ♦ **Blueberry Gardener's Guide** <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/mg359>
- ♦ **Fruit Varieties for Baker County** <http://baker.ifas.ufl.edu/Horticulture/fact%20sheets.html>
- ♦ **Month-by-Month Calendar: Fruits and Nuts** <http://baker.ifas.ufl.edu/Horticulture/fact%20sheets.html>

If you need more information (on any topic), stop by our office to visit our publication room which is filled with free information!

February Gardening Tips

- ◆ **Pruning:** Pruning of landscape trees is best done in February while plants are still dormant. Improve tree health by removing dead and diseased limbs. Improve tree structure by removing and/or reducing damaged or rubbing limbs and limbs with included bark. If severe pruning is needed, it should be carried out over several years. Always have a reason for pruning and never randomly remove branches. *Note: Plants that flower on the previous season's wood growth should be pruned just after flowering to prevent flower bud removal. These include fringetrees, redbuds, dogwoods, magnolias, pears, hollies, azaleas, anise, viburnum, Indian hawthorns, camellias, hydrangeas, banana shrub, sweetspire, forsythia, mockorange, honeysuckle, sweet shrub and quince.* Join us on Feb. 22nd @ 11am for a 1-hour pruning lecture followed by a hands-on exercise. Call 259-3520 for details.
- ◆ **Pruning Equipment:** Before pruning, give your equipment a good cleaning to make sure you aren't transferring diseases from one plant to another. Allow pruners to sit in a disinfecting solution after use. If you are pruning a diseased plant, disinfect between each cut. You can use an extra pair while the other is soaking. Disinfecting solutions include a 25% solution of household bleach or pine oil cleaner (Pine-Sol), a 50% solution of rubbing alcohol (70% isopropyl) or denatured ethanol (95%), a 10% solution of trisodium phosphate, quaternary ammonium salts (use as directed), or full strength household disinfectants (Lysol, etc.). Tools should be soaked for at least 5 minutes (or as directed on the product label) and rinsed with clean water or allowed to air dry before use. A longer soaking period may be needed for pruning tool surfaces that aren't smooth.
- ◆ **Canna Lilies:** Cut dead Canna Lily plants to the ground in late winter to reduce populations of the Canna Leafroller caterpillar. Disposing of the cut material with the overwintering pupae will reduce population levels of this insect in the spring.
- ◆ **Roses:** Hybrid teas, grandifloras and floribundas should receive a major pruning in late February/early March. Major yearly pruning consists of shortening main canes and lateral branches, and removing twigs and canes that are dead, diseased, injured, or spindly. This improves form, regulates height and improves air circulation and light penetration 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. Other types of roses are pruned only as needed. *Note: After pruning, dispose of pruned plant material, rake the area beneath the bush to remove dead and diseased leaves, and reapply mulch immediately to prevent fungal diseases.*



Soil Testing

Consider having your soil tested before liming, fertilizing or installing new plants this spring.



- ◆ Soil testing is available through the Baker County Extension Office and the University of Florida's Soil Testing Laboratory.
- ◆ A simple pH test will determine the pH of your soil and the amount of lime needed (if any) to adjust the soil's pH. The pH and lime requirement test is \$3.00.
- ◆ A soil fertility test will determine the pH and lime requirement of the soil, but will also tell you the amount of nutrients currently available to your plants. Based on the results, you will be given specific recommendations on how to fertilize for optimum plant growth. The soil fertility test is \$7.00.
- ◆ Of course, all recommendations are specific to your lawn, garden, or crop.
- ◆ You will also have the option of discussing your results with your county agent.

Stop by the Baker County Extension office today to pick up your free soil testing kit!

Baker County Extension Service

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Upcoming Horticulture Programs & Events: **February & March**

Programs will be held at the Baker County Extension Office (Agricultural Center) unless otherwise noted.



Feb. 5 **2011 Water Education Festival at MOSH** 10:00am to 4:00pm at the Museum of Science and History, Jacksonville. Bring the kids out for a fun filled day of games, crafts, and experiments that celebrate the importance of water and Florida's environment! There will also be a "touch tank" where you can interact with water animals and a water scavenger hunt for prizes! The Baker County Master Gardeners will be there showing off a floating water garden and will also have a water wise trivia challenge for you. **Admission is FREE!**



Feb. 11 **Winter Orchard Management** 8:00am to 4:30pm. This is the second course of a four part series held at the N. FL Research and Education Center—Suwannee Valley, 8202 CR 417, Live Oak, FL. Topics will include: pruning stone fruit and Muscadine grapes, market research and strategies, cold protection, pest control and cold-hardy citrus. \$80 registration fee due 1 week prior; bring a farm hand for \$50; late registration, add \$25. Registration forms available at the Baker County Extension Office or visit <http://nfrec.ifas.ufl.edu>. For more information, call 386-362-1725, ext. 109.



Feb. 21 **Vegetable Gardening Class** 6:00pm to 7:00pm. Save money and eat healthy by learning to grow your own vegetables! Topics covered: preparing the garden, plant selection, planting, watering, fertilizing. We will also discuss soil pH and the use of lime. Call (904)259-3520 to register by Friday, Feb. 18th.



Mar. 26 **Beekeeping Short Course** 9:00am to 5:00pm. Receive a complete perspective of the process/expense involved with keeping honey bees as a hobby. This hands-on short course involves working an active hive on Extension Center property. At the end of the course we will demonstrate how honey is "robbed" from the bees and participants will take home a jar of local honey. \$10 registration fee (\$15 per couple) covers all materials. Please visit our website (<http://baker.ifas.ufl.edu>) for further details and registration form. **We still need 11 participants (registered and paid) to hold the course, so sign up today!**

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 five (5) 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).