



Highlights in

Horticulture

Baker County

December 2007

Inside this issue:	
Questions for Barbara	2
Children in the Garden	2
What's Blooming?	2
Cold Weather Tips	2
Poinsettias	3
News about Trees	4

Dear Extension Friends,

I hope you will all be able to take some time to enjoy the holidays with family and friends this season. The gardening chores can be delayed if you just keep up with the watering. Hopefully, you are enjoying some fruits like satsuma or other citrus, persimmons, or pecans from your home orchard. Or maybe you are picking broccoli or greens or some vegetables or flowers from your garden this month. Perhaps some lucky friend or relative will receive a gift from your garden. My mom often gives me jars of her homegrown vegetables at Christmas. I can't imagine a more thoughtful gift than one you grew yourself. Just opening a jar of okra and tomatoes or black-eyed peas my mom grew makes me feel truly loved.

I'm sorry this newsletter is late as I rush to complete my first year of work in Baker County. This first year has been an experience! And I have enjoyed every minute. Thanks to all of you who called or stopped by with questions and comments about your plants, you made me feel needed! I hope you got any help you were looking for. If not, try again. I'd love to help.

Have a happy and safe holiday! See you in the new year.

Respectfully,

Barbara

Barbara A. Smith
Baker County Extension Agent - Horticulture

Mistletoe for Lovers



If you are hoping for a sprig of mistletoe to hold over your sweetheart's head, you might find some growing in a tree near you. Leaves have fallen from many of the trees where mistletoe likes to live and the darker-colored mistletoe leaves will be easy to spot this time of year. Mistletoe appears as a dark green tuft of leaves on an otherwise bare tree limb in trees like pecan, pear, & others. If you can reach the mistletoe, you may get the kiss you wished for.

Mistletoe for Gardeners



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). Once pruned out of your tree, mistletoe might even be marketed to those with more romantic notions.

Questions for Barbara:

- Q. My 5 year old maple tree died and when I dug it up, I found that a large root had grown in a circle around the trunk, strangling the tree. Could this have been prevented?
- A. You might have prevented this loss, if you had observed circling roots at planting and then cut through these potentially strangling roots. However, the problem of trees declining due to strangling roots is pervasive since most trees available for sale either are in containers or started life in containers. You could plant field grown trees and try to find trees that have been root pruned earlier to avoid these problems. When you plant trees from containers, check for circling roots both at time of purchase and at planting. If you find a root that circles around the pot or bends back toward the trunk, you need to cut that root at a point before the bend, so it will grow straight. Healthy tree roots grow down and outward.

CHILDREN IN THE GARDEN

**DON'T HIBERNATE THIS WINTER..
GROW YOUR OWN FOOD!**

It's time to plant some yummy vegetables to eat this winter.

You can plant carrots, sugarsnap peas, radishes, & cabbages now.

Also, broccoli, kale, spinach, leeks, onions, mustard and collard greens, snow peas, strawberries, beets, & Chinese cabbage. And in January, plant Irish potatoes, cauliflower, celery, English peas, escarole, & turnips. Ask us for your copy of FL Vegetable Gardening guide.



WHAT'S BLOOMING THIS MONTH?

Camellia sasanqua is blooming this month. This plant has a smaller flower, but many more blooms per plant than its cousin, the more familiar, *Camellia japonica*. It does well in part shade, but this one can also handle some direct sun, unlike *C. japonica*. This attractive, evergreen shrub comes in a range of flower colors from white to pink to red & multi-color. Growth habit is either upright or spreading, depending on the cultivar.



Cold Weather Tips for the Garden

- If a freeze is predicted, water plants 24-48 hours before a freeze, unless it rains before the freeze.
- Cover cold sensitive or blooming bedding plants with pine straw or leaves for protection. Renew mulch in perennial flower beds to protect dormant crowns during hard freezes.
- Citrus fruit is damaged when temperatures stay at 28 degrees or less for 4 hours. Harvest ripe fruit prior to a freeze that is predicted to be this hard. Fruit won't ripen once picked. Bank soil around graft union of young citrus to protect it from freezing. Use clean sand for this.
- Protect houseplants during cold spells below 50 degrees: move into house, greenhouse or porch. You can also construct a "tent" that can be heated with a light bulb using stakes and plastic, quilts, or sheets. If using plastic, don't let plant touch plastic sides of tent because cold transfers & damage will occur. Remove cover as soon as cold is past.
- You can also group containerized plants to conserve heat; push together and cover pots with mulch, or move under a sheltering tree or eave where radiant heat will be trapped after dark. Move pots apart after cold is past to prevent disease.
- Using irrigation to water plant leaves for freeze protection is tricky since you have to start irrigating as soon as the temperature reaches 32 degrees and keep it on until thaw is complete. There is a danger of too much water since it may be on for days resulting in root problems. Also, there is a danger of breakage due to ice buildup on limbs. This method of cold protection is used commercially where it can be carefully controlled and is best left to them.

Source: This newsletter contains information from UF's Solutions for Your Life website. www.solutionsforyourlife.com.

*The use of trade names in this newsletter is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee of warranty of the products names and does not signify they are approved to the exclusion of others of suitable comparison. Copying of this newsletter is allowed, with appropriate credit given to author, photographer, and Baker County Extension office.

Poinsettia, the Flowering Plant of the Season!



If you are considering the purchase of a *Poinsettia* to enjoy during the holidays, you may be wondering how to take care of it. Here are a few tips on getting the most from a *Poinsettia* during the holidays: Start with a quality plant. Check for damage before purchase. Avoid purchasing a *Poinsettia* plant that has been allowed to sit outside in a cold or windy area since such plants will have reduced quality when brought indoors. The beautiful bracts (the large colorful part of the flower) are easily damaged by crowding and rough handling during transport and at garden centers. One sign of a broken bract or stem is oozing white sap. Some people have an allergic reaction to this white latex sap. But *Poinsettias* are not poisonous, despite the myth. (Photo Credits: *Poinsettia* in full bloom, taken by Barbara A. Smith, December 2007)

Caring for your *Poinsettia* during the holiday season:

- Location - Keep *Poinsettia* plants in a warm location free of drafts and chilling. These tropical plants prefer nighttime temperatures of 65°F and daytime temperatures of 75-80°F, so they do fine while in the house for the holiday. Bright light, such as that from an east window is always best. However, avoid placing plants in extremely sunny, hot/dry conditions.
- Watering - Water your *Poinsettia* when the surface of the soil is dry to the touch. Remove any excess water from the saucer beneath the plant as *Poinsettias* do not like to have soggy soil. If the *Poinsettia* is wrapped in foil or has a foil sleeve, this should be removed for watering so excess water does not collect in the sleeve. Most people kill their *Poinsettias* with too much water.
- Humidity - *Poinsettias* like a little bit higher humidity than the average household but will do fine in most situations without additional humidity. Misting plants or placing them on gravel trays will prolong the color and life of the *Poinsettia*.
- Fertilization - It is not necessary to fertilize your *Poinsettia* during the holiday season. In fact, high levels of fertilizer will reduce the quality of the plant.

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

Phone (904) 259-3520
Fax (904) 259-9034
Email: smithba@ufl.edu
Website: <http://baker.ifas.ufl.edu>

Non-Profit Org.
US Postage
PAID
Permit No. 17
Macclenny, FL 32063

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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

NEWS ABOUT TREES

from the GREAT SOUTHERN TREE CONFERENCE at UF



Researchers at UF recently dug up live oak and magnolia trees they'd planted six years ago to look at the effects of planting depth on root growth. They found that if trees were planted with the top-most root buried by 2 inches of soil or more at planting time, new roots tended to grow upward into that soil (looking for air and moisture). These new roots are considered a **root defect** because they can become **circling roots** that strangle the trunk (trunk widens and presses against the roots over time). To grow healthy, wind-resistant trees, roots must grow down and outward from the tree. To aid healthy tree root growth, **plant a tree so the top-most root is visible at the soil surface**. This starts the tree out at or above soil level. Soil naturally sinks some after planting. Also, soil and

mulch wash from the surrounding area onto the rootball, raising the soil level over the rootball even more. Many times trees are planted too deeply in their pots when we get them. If this is a problem, dig down beside the trunk to locate the top-most root. This is the point where the trunk flares out, too. Remove any soil above this level. Plant tree with top-most root visible at the soil surface. For more on planting a landscape tree, see our Baker County Extension website: <http://baker.ifas.ufl.edu>.

Researchers also found that when planting landscape trees, the **root ball should not** be covered with mulch. A very thin, loose layer of pinestraw or leaves is okay. But begin the standard three inches of mulch out past the root ball. Heavy mulch over the rootball itself can keep out air (roots need air) and prevent water from getting to roots (especially if we only have a light rain). If mulch is very thick, it can cause roots to grow upward in the same way as planting a tree too deeply. And thick or wet mulch piled against the trunk of a tree can cause disease and insect problems. For more on this and other tree research by Dr. Ed Gilman, see UF's horticulture website: <http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu>.