

Highlights in

*Horticulture*

Baker County

February 2012

Dear Extension Friends,

February has arrived, although you sure wouldn't know it just by stepping outside. The weather certainly has everyone confused...including the plants! Many of you have been asking about pruning so this month's issue includes two articles on the topic. I hope you find them helpful. If you have a plant or gardening question, please don't hesitate to ask. You can call, come by the office, or send me an email (contact information on page 4). Until then, have a great gardening day!

Best Regards,

*Alicia*

Alicia R. Lamborn  
Horticulture Extension Agent  
Baker County Extension Service

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***Master Gardener Office Hours***



Do you have questions about your lawn, trees, flowers, vegetables, or landscape pests?

Let The Master Gardeners Help You!

They can identify your plants and insects, answer your questions, or offer you suggestions.

Office Hours:

Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9am to Noon

**Backyard Composting 101**

**Presented by: Cindy Jenkins,  
Baker Co. Master Gardener**



**When: Thursday, February 9th @ 10am**

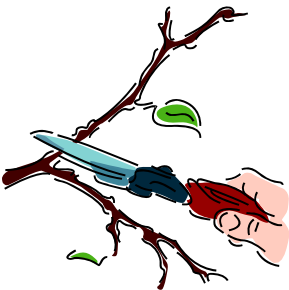
**Where: Glen St. Mary Nursery Mathis House**

**This class is free & open to the public.  
Please bring a covered dish to share if you plan to stay for lunch.**

**Call (904) 259-3520 for directions.**

# Florida-Friendly Tip of the Month: Reduce Your Pruning Load

February is a good time to prune most landscape trees and shrubs (with a few exceptions listed below). But if the warm weather continues, you may want to hold off until late February since pruning can sometimes trigger new growth which could later get zapped by cold weather. Just make sure that you always have a reason for pruning and never randomly remove branches. We recommend keeping the pruning chores to a minimum by doing things the environmentally friendly way...



- 1 — Select slow-growing plants.
- 2 — Place plants far enough from driveways, buildings and other plants to allow them to reach maturity without encountering obstructions that require hauling out the pruners.
- 3 — Forget the clipped, formal look. Soft, flowing, natural lines are attractive and easy to maintain.

You can also reduce your pruning load by following these simple steps as a guideline for every pruning job you tackle:

- ◆ Remove all dead, diseased or injured branches. \*To prevent spreading diseases between plants (or limb to limb), disinfect your pruning tools between cuts. For more information on disinfecting pruning tools visit <http://baker.ifas.ufl.edu/Horticulture/documents/DisinfectingPruningTools.pdf>
- ◆ Remove or reduce branches that cross or touch each other and any that look out of place.
- ◆ If a shrub is too tall, selectively cut twigs and branches back to different lengths (either back to a bud or to ground level). Instead of using hedge shears, cut each branch individually to different lengths with hand pruners. This maintains a neat informal shrub with a natural shape.
- ◆ If severe pruning is needed, it should be carried out over several years.

Formal hedges should only be sheared during the growing season. 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.



## Species Spotlight: Cauliflower



Cauliflower is a difficult crop to grow in Florida since it thrives best in cool, moist weather but does not stand much freezing or extreme heat. The young plants may be set in North Florida gardens from January-February and August-October, for it is only the matured heads that are not resistant to freezing weather. Growth stress due to improper fertility or climatic extremes may induce "buttoning" which is the formation of a head while the plant is too small.

Unless self-blanching varieties are planted, cauliflower should be blanched to get a white head. Blanching is done by tying the outside leaves together (over the head) as soon as the head has reached a diameter of 2-3 inches. The heads should be examined every day or two to make sure they do not pass the proper stage of maturity before harvest. Harvest the heads when they are still compact.

Source: *Vegetable Gardening in Florida* by James M. Stephens. This book is available for purchase through the IFAS Extension Bookstore at <http://ifasbooks.ifas.ufl.edu/>

# What's Old is New Again

Occasionally our large, mature shrubs become too large or the bottoms/interior of the plant become thin with little foliage. But instead of ripping those shrubs out and planting new ones, consider another option called rejuvenation. Rejuvenation involves cutting back a shrub or hedge to approximately half its size, leaving the plant with little or no foliage. While this may sound drastic, it is actually very effective in making what's old, new again.

While this technique should not be used on conifers (junipers, yews, cedars, etc.), it can be used on other common landscape shrubs. If you are considering rejuvenation for your shrubs, timing is everything. In general, rejuvenation should be performed in late winter or early spring (late February to March), just before growth begins but while the plants are still dormant. There are also two ways to perform rejuvenation of shrubs:

The first involves complete foliage removal, leaving the main framework to re-grow new branches and shoots:



The second option involves hard pruning over a 3-year period by cutting back all stems at ground level, using the following directions:

1<sup>st</sup> year = remove 1/3 of the old, mature stems.

2<sup>nd</sup> year = remove 1/2 of the remaining old stems and head back long shoots growing from the previous year's pruning cuts.

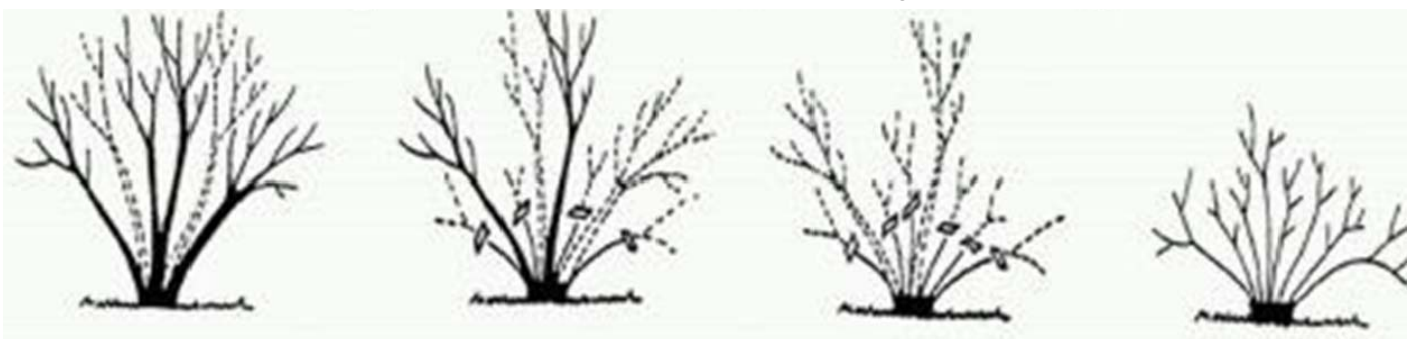
3<sup>rd</sup> year = remove remaining old wood and head back the long new shoots.

**1st Year**  
(1/3)

**2nd Year**  
(1/2 + shoots)

**3rd Year**  
(remaining + shoots)

**Growth at End  
of 3rd Season**



Rejuvenating a Hedge: For formal hedges, prune them into the same shape, allow new shoots to develop several inches long, then resume regular shearing to develop the hedge. For informal hedges, cut stems back to different lengths to preserve the open, natural appearance.

For more information on pruning, visit Dr. Edward Gilman's website: <http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/woody>

# Valentine's Day Topiary Project

*Looking for a new Valentine's Day project? Try creating a living, growing work of art that can be enjoyed through all seasons! Your Valentine is sure to love it!*

## **Topiary:**

A topiary is a plant clipped or trimmed into a clearly defined shape. While gardeners typically practice the art of topiary with trees and shrubs, we'll show you an easier method that anyone can be successful with, involving a pre-formed shape and a small climbing vine.

## **Materials You'll Need:**

- A Decorative Flower Pot (doesn't have to be fancy—look for inexpensive ones in your local dollar store or floral section and drill holes as needed)
- Gravel (decorative river rocks found in a store's craft section will also work)
- Potting Soil
- A Wire Coat Hanger
- Pliers
- Sphagnum Moss (available in craft stores and garden centers)
- Fishing Line
- A Small Climbing Plant (such as Ivy or Creeping Fig)



**Directions:** You may find that working with a partner is much easier and takes less time.

- Fill the bottom of your container (approximately 1/4 full) with gravel or rocks. This will help anchor the wire coat hanger used to create the topiary.
- Next, straighten the coat hanger hook. For smaller containers, you may want to bend the hook so that it forms an 'L' instead of a 'U'. Then bend the coat hanger into any form or shape you like, using pliers as needed. A heart shape isn't too difficult and is perfect for a Valentine's Day gift.
- Wet the sphagnum moss and bunch it (wrap it) around the wire. Do a little at a time and as the moss is being attached, begin looping the fishing line around the moss to secure it. (This is where a little help goes a long way.) As you continue to attach the moss, make sure you wrap enough fishing line to hold it all in place so that the coat hanger wire doesn't show through. Cover the entire coat hanger with moss except for the straightened hook (or 'L') at the bottom and insert this portion into the gravel.
- Next, insert your plant, fill the container with soil and water thoroughly. Now you can begin wrapping stems around your heart frame. If needed, you can use paper clips to attach the plant to the moss by cutting them in half to make small 'U' shaped pins. As the plant continues to grow, continue to wrap the stems around the frame and before you know it, you'll have a beautiful living sculpture!



## **Baker County Extension Service**

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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 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).