



Highlights in

*Horticulture*

Baker County

February 2013

Dear Extension Friends,

It is technically winter, but the plants sure think it's spring! Let's hope we get some more cold weather this month before everything breaks bud, leaving our fabulous display of spring color vulnerable to a late freeze. Some lawns also appear to be only semi-dormant, but giving them extra water is not recommended. Wait until the time changes in spring before touching those irrigation timers! In fact, I encourage you to turn those timers off and only turn them on manually during dry spells. Need more gardening tips? Just give us a call or stop by and see us sometime!

Best Regards,

*Alicia*

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**Did You Know?**

*Here's a fun fact about plants that you may not have known...*

Capers — those small, green pea-shaped ingredients found in Italian and other Mediterranean dishes — are actually unopened flower buds!

Produced on the caperbush, a shrubby perennial plant that grows 3-5 feet high, capers are picked daily since the youngest flower buds (about the size of peas) have the highest quality. They are pickled in vinegar, or sometimes in salted vinegar, and used in sauces, primarily by Europeans.

Little if any is grown in the United States, even in home gardens. But you can pick some up in your local grocery store (usually found near the olives) if you'd like to try something new and tasty on spaghetti night.



# Species Spotlight:

## Catalpa “The Fish Bait Tree”

*There are two native species of Catalpa in North America - Northern Catalpa (Catalpa speciosa) and Southern Catalpa (Catalpa bignonioides). Both attract catalpa “worms” that are highly prized by fisherman as bait.*

As the name implies, the Southern Catalpa tree is better suited for areas of the South, but is somewhat of an uncommon site here in Baker County. While the Northern species is a large tree (50-90 feet tall), the Southern Catalpa is smaller (30-40 feet tall) having a loose oval shape.

Catalpas are easily recognized by their large green, heart-shaped leaves, showy panicles of white flowers (with yellow and purple markings) produced in spring and early summer, and distinctive long dangling fruits which resemble a slender bean pod. Sometimes called the Indian bean tree, the long pods can grow up to two feet long and are quite interesting, making for a unique ornamental tree. The only downside is that leaves may scorch and drop from the tree in very dry summers.

A sunny exposure and a well-drained, moist, rich soil are preferred for best growth of Catalpa but this moderately-long lived tree (60 years or so) is very adaptable and tough, tolerating drought and a range of soils from acid to calcareous. The tree is useful in areas where quick growth is desired, growing rapidly at first but slowing down with age as the crown begins to round out and tree increases in spread.

Although used in the past for a variety of wood-based products, today catalpa is used for shade trees and for attracting a special caterpillar, referred to as the catalpa worm. This worm is the larva of the catalpa sphinx moth, which lays its eggs on the tree. The caterpillars then help themselves to a feast of leaves (often defoliating the tree) and although unsightly, there appears to be no adverse consequences to the tree.

The large caterpillar is yellow with black lines and markings, and is prized for fish bait because the skin is very tough and the caterpillar is juicy. The caterpillar can even be frozen or preserved for use as a fish bait at a later time.



Image: Chris Evans, Illinois Wildlife Action Plan, Bugwood.org



Image: Charles T. Bryson, USDA Agricultural Research Service, Bugwood.org



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*Catalpa worms vary in coloration and markings; full grown caterpillars have prominent horns. Adult moths are gray-brown.*

Images by: Lacy L. Hyche, Auburn University, Bugwood.org



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Image: Franklin Bonner, USFS (ret.), Bugwood.org

### **Where have all the catalpa worms gone?**

This question has arisen several times in the past few years and quite frankly, I don't have a definitive answer. Perhaps the worms were over-harvested in our area and not enough lived to turn into moths and begin the cycle once again? We do know that populations of insects fluctuate, so perhaps we are in a natural population lull? Perhaps many of the older trees in the area have died off and not enough were replaced to build the population back up to what it once was in Baker County? Regardless of the true reason for their disappearance here, these questions are all things to consider. For now, maybe we can all do our part and plant a tree in preparation for their return.

# Crabgrass and Sandspurs

*If you had trouble with either of these weeds last year, now is the time to do something about it!*

Crabgrass germinates in early spring when soil temperatures are 50–55°F or greater, growing under close mowing conditions, particularly where turf stands are weak. Healthy turf is therefore the best way to prevent infestations.

For crabgrass control, follow general weed management practices to maintain healthy turf. These include:

- (1) mowing at the recommended height for selected turfgrass species
- (2) removing clippings when seedheads of grassy weeds are present
- (3) applying proper fertilization at the correct time for selected turfgrass species
- (4) using soil testing to determine nutrient needs and lime requirements
- (5) applying pre-emergence herbicides before the crabgrass germinates



Image: Joseph M. DiTomaso, University of California - Davis, Bugwood.org

Where there has been a history of crabgrass infestation, apply a pre-emergence herbicide in late winter or early spring before soil temperatures remain above 50°F for 24 consecutive hours. A general rule of thumb for pre-emergence herbicide application for crabgrass control is February 1 in south Florida, February 15 in central Florida, and March 1 in north Florida. In addition to initial treatment, a follow-up application made 60 days after the initial treatment is very important. Postemergence control is limited. Currently there are no labeled postemergence herbicides for selective control of crabgrass in St. Augustinegrass turf.

Southern Sandspur (sometimes called sandbur) is another annual that germinates in spring and often goes unnoticed in the yard until the seedheads form. The seedheads are composed of spiny burs which easily stick to shoes and clothing, and are very painful when stepped on (you know what I'm talking about)! The seedheads appear throughout the year in South Florida and during the summer and fall in North Florida.

Like crabgrass and other weeds, maintaining healthy turf is the first step for managing sandspurs. And like many warm-season annual weeds, treatment with pre-emergent herbicides can make a difference when applied in late winter or early spring.



Image: Richard Old, XID Services, Inc., Bugwood.org

## Pre-emergent herbicide options for Florida Bermudagrass, St. Augustinegrass, Centipedegrass, Bahiagrass, and Zoysiagrass, when both crabgrass and sandspurs are present:

- ◆ **Benfen** (do not apply to immature turf)
- ◆ **Pendimethalin**
- ◆ **Dithiopyr** (do not use within 45 days of seeding or sprigging)

(Always refer to product label for specific uses, application rates and grass tolerance. In addition to the chemicals listed, other herbicide options are available for crabgrass alone, or sandspurs alone. For more information please contact the Baker County Extension Office, your local county agent, and/or visit <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep395>.)

Excerpts from: Partridge-Telenko, D. E., Unruh, B. and Brecke, B. J. (2009). Crabgrass Biology and Management in Turf. University of Florida. <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep395>



## **Planting a New Lawn This Year? Get Your Soil Tested First!**

*When selecting a new type of grass for your lawn, there is more to consider than just the type of grass you want.*

A simple soil test that costs less than \$10 could save you hundreds of dollars later by determining which grass type will thrive in your soil.



Some grass types tolerate a wide range of soil types but others have more specific needs. When it comes to soil pH, some grasses prefer acidic pH (5.5) while others near neutral pH (6.5-7.0).

For instance, here in Baker County, centipedegrass is a popular choice and when the pH is low enough, centipede makes a nice lawn. However, if your soil pH turns out to be near neutral or alkaline, your newly planted centipede lawn is not likely to thrive. That's why it's best to check the pH first and match the plant (lawn) to the site conditions.

Soil testing kits are available from the Extension Office and tests range from \$3—\$7 plus shipping.

When you stop in to get your kit, be sure to let us know you are planting a new lawn so that we can help you fill out the form correctly.

Then when your results come in, give us a call to schedule a one-on-one consultation.



## **Resources & Reference Books of Interest**

Want to expand your knowledge on a particular subject? Your local Extension office has the resources! Here are a few that may be of interest to you this time of year:

### Landscaping:

#### **Crape Myrtle Pruning**

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep399>

#### **Growing Roses in Florida**

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep339>

#### **Basic Principles of Landscape Design**

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/mg086>

#### **Preparing to Plant a Florida Lawn**

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/lh012>

### Edibles:

#### **Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide**

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/vh021>

#### **The Muscadine Grape**

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/hs100>

#### **Blueberry Gardener's Guide**

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/mg359>

#### **Propagating Fruit Plants in Florida (Book)**

Covers grafting, budding, layering, & cuttings

Only \$6 from [ifasbooks.com](http://ifasbooks.com)



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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).