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Ask Alicia: Your Gardening Questions Answered

*The warm weather has welcomed gardeners back out into their yards once again!
(And the questions coming into our office have been non-stop.) If you have a question or problem in
your garden, don't be afraid to ask. We are here to help!*

Q: I heard that putting moth balls in my vegetable garden will keep critters and insects out. Is this a good idea and will the produce be safe to eat?

A: Mothballs contain the chemical dichlorobenzene and are not labeled for use on food products. Mothballs are often suggested for repelling wildlife from gardens, but this is an illegal pesticide use and probably ineffective. Another thing to consider is that the mothballs themselves present an attractive nuisance to both children and pets. If eaten they are highly toxic and therefore should not be used for this purpose.

Q: I would like to grow peaches and apples. Can you recommend varieties that grow well here in Baker County?

A: Many fruit trees require a certain number of chill hours to bloom and produce fruit. In Baker County, we receive 540-660 chill hours each year, and in general, you should choose fruit trees that require chill hours slightly below or in that range. Some recommended varieties of peaches include: Floridaking (400 chill hrs), Flordacrest (350 chill hrs) and Gulfprince (400 chill hrs). Recommended apples include: Anna and Golden Dorset. You will need two apple trees for cross-pollination, and locals with apple-growing experience recommend growing two Anna or two Golden Dorset, not one of each since bloom time can be slightly different (a week or two difference can result in poor or no pollination at all). *For a full list of recommended fruit varieties for Baker County, visit our website.*

Q: I'm preparing my vegetable garden for spring planting. How much organic matter should I use and when should I use it?

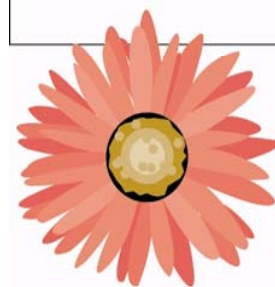
A: In general, it is recommended that you spread 25-100 pounds of organic compost or composted animal manure per 100 square feet of garden. Composted organics may be applied at planting time. Un-composted manures should be worked into the soil 90-120 days before planting: 90 days if manure does not touch edible plant portions and 120 days if manure does touch edible plant portions.

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).

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Highlights in

Horticulture

Baker County

March 2011

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Dear Extension Friends,

The strangely warm February weather has many of us confused and wondering if we should be gardening as though it is spring. My advice to you is stick with your usual gardening schedule and wait to do much fertilizing (other than fruit trees) because we could still be in for some late freezes. This issue is full of gardening tips for March, but if you can't find the answers you're looking for, don't hesitate to call.

Best Regards,

Alicia

Alicia R. Lamborn
Horticulture Extension Agent
Baker County Extension Service

Upcoming Horticulture Programs & Events

All programs will be held at the Baker County Extension Office (Agricultural Center).

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, or stop by the Extension Office. We now have enough participants registered to hold the course, but we would love to add your name to the list! Don't miss out on this special opportunity!



April 9 3rd Annual Spring Garden Fest 8:00am to 2:00pm. There will be plants and rain barrels for sale, educational gardening exhibits, a rain barrel raffle and plant give-aways. The festival is free and open to the entire community.



April 29 Baker County Arboretum Grand Opening (times TBA). Join us for the grand opening of our Arboretum and Teaching Garden, complete with garden tours and tree giveaway. Watch for more details next month!



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Lawns & Gardens

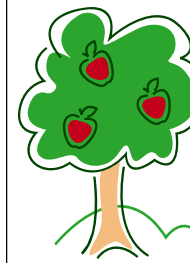


Lawns:

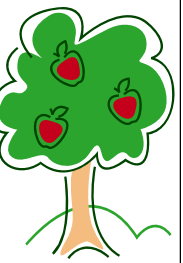
- ◆ If you find that some areas of the lawn did not survive the cold this year, prepare to replant by removing all of the old grass, raking the area to loosen the soil and replacing the lawn before the weeds take hold. If large areas need replacing, you have the option of either laying sod or reseeding. If you only have small patches to fill, then consider using plugs that will grow and fill in the area naturally.
- ◆ It's best to wait until the end of March or early April to fertilize the lawn, even if it has begun to come out of winter dormancy. Pushing out lots of new growth with fertilizer will only cause more damage if we get a late freeze.
- ◆ A soil test will determine which nutrients your lawn needs and in what amounts. If a soil test indicates that phosphorus is needed, you should apply a complete fertilizer (containing nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium) such as 16-4-8, 13-3-13, or similar recommended analysis. Otherwise, a 15-0-15, or similar fertilizer can be used.
- ◆ Consider using a controlled or slow-release fertilizer which releases some nitrogen right away and some slowly over time. This will give longer lasting results and help reduce nutrient leaching and pollution from storm water runoff. Just don't get discouraged and re-apply when you don't see a response. Response time can range from 60-90 days depending on the percentage of slow-release nitrogen in the product.
- ◆ Chronic weed problems are an indication of an unhealthy turf and while there are ways to manage weeds, spraying herbicides isn't always the answer. You should ultimately be considering how to better manage your turf. Overwatering, improper fertilizer use (amount and timing), and improper mowing all contribute to an unhealthy lawn. Instead of just spraying weeds this year, consider using plugs of turf to replace bare areas where weeds are filling in, and possibly altering your lawn management strategies. If you have questions or need advice in this area, we'll be happy to help!
- ◆ Have your mower blades sharpened this month in preparation of spring mowing. Dull blades make jagged, uneven cuts, creating a larger surface area for water to be lost and thus making your lawn less drought tolerant.
- ◆ Calibrate and check irrigation systems to make sure they are ready for spring. Check for leaks and make sure the heads are not spraying the driveway or street. To calibrate, place containers such as tuna cans, coffee cans, or rain gauges around the yard. Run the system for 15 minutes, calculate the average amount of water collected in each can, then determine how long it would take to apply 1/2 to 3/4 inch of water to the landscape.

Gardens:

- ◆ Vegetable gardens can be planted this month, along with annual and perennial seeds, or purchase transplants to get a jump on the season. Just be sure you have a way to protect them from late frosts and freezes. If you need advice on vegetable gardening, check out the *Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide* at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/vh021> or stop by the office to pick up a free copy and receive one-on-one advice.
- ◆ Plants that suffered a lot of winter damage will also need pruning to reshape the canopy. This is best done after new growth has begun. This will ensure that you are only trimming off dead tissue. Prune your azaleas, camellias, hydrangeas, and spirea after they finish blooming.
- ◆ If you are planting containerized trees and shrubs, be sure to purchase healthy plants that are appropriate for the designated site. Consider planting low maintenance, drought tolerant species that will not require excessive watering during periods of drought. Not sure what to plant? Visit our website to view our Florida-Friendly Plant Lists for Baker County.
- ◆ Fertilize spring flowering trees and shrubs only as needed. (Mature, established trees shouldn't need any fertilizer.) Also remember that any fertilizer you apply to your lawn is also used by your landscape plants since roots can extend far beyond the edge of the canopy.



Fruit Tree Calendar: March



The following fruit trees require attention this month. All fertilizer recommendations are for optimum growth of fruit trees. It is important to remember that you always have the option of applying less fertilizer, but the amount of fertilizer should not exceed these recommendations.

Figs: Fertilization may begin this month, although fig trees typically require light fertilization. Excess fertilization can promote excessive vegetative growth and low yield. If the total amount of vegetative growth is less than one foot in length, then it is appropriate to apply fertilizer. For young trees, 1/2 pound of 10-10-10 with micronutrients can be applied three to five times during the growing season, starting in March and ending by August 1st. For large trees, apply 2-4 pounds of 10-10-10 with micronutrients three to five times during the growing season (March to August).

Mulberries: Fruit begins to mature this month; other than harvesting fruit mulberries require almost no care.

Muscadine Grapes (Year 2): Fertilize late this month using 1 pound of 8-8-8 or 10-10-10; apply the fertilizer in bands about 1 foot to either side of the vine. *Note: It is sometimes beneficial to apply fertilizer that has micronutrients added.*

Muscadine Grapes (Year 3+): Fertilize late this month using up to 3 pounds of 8-8-8 or 10-10-10; apply the fertilizer in bands about 1 foot to either side of the vine. *Note: It is sometimes beneficial to apply fertilizer that has micronutrients added.*

Pecans (Newly Planted): A soil fertility test should be conducted prior to planting and no fertilizer should be placed in the planting hole during installation. *Year 1:* Fertilize early this month using 10-10-10 with micronutrients, 1 pound per tree. *Year 2:* Fertilize early this month using 10-10-10 with micronutrients, 2 pounds per tree. *Note: Fertilizer should contain Zinc (Zn) to prevent nutrient deficiencies. Do not apply fertilizer in a clump around the base of tree, instead spread out the fertilizer in a circle with a 3- to 5- foot diameter around the trunk of the tree. Avoid putting any fertilizer directly against the trunk.*

Persimmons: Apply first of three applications of fertilizer; fertilize using 1/2 to 1 pound of 10-10-10 with micronutrients per year of age. All three applications should not exceed 10-15 pounds per year.

Pomegranate: Fertilize this month using 8-8-8 or similar: young trees need 2.0 to 2.5 pounds per tree and mature trees need 4.5 to 6.5 pounds. *Note: Excessive or late applications of fertilizer tend to delay fruit maturity and reduce color and quality.*

To access our Month to Month Calendar: Fruits and Nuts, visit our website and look under 'Gardening Information'.

Water Less

Daylight Savings Time starts on the 2nd Sunday in March. This means our watering schedule may change also...

- ◆ Water only as needed and not between 10am and 4pm.
- ◆ Water no more than twice per week, no more than 1/2 to 3/4 inches of water, for no more than one hour per zone.
- ◆ Restrictions apply to private wells and pumps, and water from public and private utilities.
- ◆ Some exceptions apply. [Learn more at floridaswater.com](http://floridaswater.com)

