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**IFAS EXTENSION**



Highlights in

*Horticulture*

Baker County

Dear Extension Friends,

October 2009

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Fall is finally here bringing slightly cooler weather which means many of us are once again enjoying yard work. Check out the fall bulb planting guide below and don't forget there is still time to order your daffodil bulbs from the Baker County Master Gardeners which will fund Jr. Master Gardener projects and gardening in the classroom.

Best Regards,

*Alicia*

Alicia R. Lamborn  
Horticulture Extension Agent  
Baker County Extension Service



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**HAPPY HALLOWEEN!**



**CHECK THIS OUT...**

**A CREATIVE BAKER COUNTY  
4-H'R CONVERTED HIS OLD  
JACK-O-LANTERN INTO AN  
EYE-CATCHING PLANTER THAT'S  
PERFECT FOR THE SEASON!**



**Fall Planting: Bulbs**

**Amaryllis** (*Hippeastrum spp.*) can be planted Sept-Jan in partial shade with tip at the soil surface and spaced 10-12 inches apart. White to deep red flowers will appear in spring. Soil should be amended with organic matter. Plants may be left in the ground for several years before digging, separating offsets, and replanting in September. Plants can be grown as potted plants, just plant so half of the bulb is out of the soil.

**Aztec Lily** (*Sprekelia formosissima*) can be planted any time of year in full sun, 3-4 inches deep and spaced 8 inches apart. Blood red flowers are eye catching in spring and summer. If you allow them to become crowded and dry out occasionally, plants will bloom several times during summer. Mulch well during winter to help the bulbs stay protected from freezes.

**Callas** (*Zantedeschia spp.*) can be planted Sept-Jan in full sun or partial shade, 3-4 inches deep and spaced 1-2 feet apart. Callas come in just about any color except blue and bloom in spring. They can be left in the ground or be dug up and stored once foliage dies back. Soil should be kept moist and watch for insect infestations.

**Daffodils** (*Narcissus spp.*) can be planted Sept-Oct in full sun (some species tolerate partial shade), planted 4 inches deep and 6-8 inches apart. Depending on the variety, plants bloom late winter or early spring and produce white, cream, yellow or orange flowers, or may produce flowers with multiple colors. There are several varieties that perform well in Baker County.

**Iris** (*Iris spp.*) rhizomes can be planted late summer or fall in semi-shade, planted 1 inch deep and 8 inches apart. There are 7 species of native iris plus the native Louisiana iris and their hybrids that perform well in Florida. There are many colors to choose from and you should expect them to emerge in spring. Avoid German and Japanese irises.

**Lilies** (*Lilium spp.*) such as Easter lily, Formosan lily, Madonna lily, regal lily, speciosum lily, and gold-banded lily and Florida's only native lily called the pine lily, grow well in Florida. All can be planted 4-6 inches deep, spaced 9-10 inches apart and in full sun to partial shade.

## Growing Ornamental Gourds

With the arrival of autumn, many of us have been enjoying the colorful and curious shaped ornamental gourds used in fall arrangements or as stand-alone decorations. These same gourds have been grown for thousands of years by cultures worldwide not only as ornaments, but also for their usefulness as utensils and storage containers.

Gourds are closely related to squash, melons and cucumbers, and can be divided into categories. **Cucurbita** gourds have yellow flowers and include types such as Aladdin, Egg, Apple, Orange, Pear, Flat Striped, Warty, Spoon, Crown of Thorns, Turk's Turban and Miniature. **Lagenaria** gourds have white flowers and include types such as Bottle, Dipper, Calabash (Penguin), Swan, Birdhouse, Longissima, Bushel, Caveman's Club and Hercules Bulb. Other **miscellaneous** gourds include Luffa and Serpent.

If you would like to save your recently purchased gourds for future years of use, they will need to go through a curing process first. Curing gourds may take one to six months depending on the type and size of the gourd. Surface drying is the first step and takes approximately one week. Internal drying is the second step and takes a minimum of four weeks. The fruit will need to be turned periodically to promote even curing. You will know when it's finished when the gourd becomes light in weight and the seeds rattle inside. Cured gourds can be painted, waxed, carved or decorated.

If you would like to grow your own gourds, you can try saving the seed from gourds you are currently using as decoration or you may purchase seed from a garden center or seed catalog. Just be aware that saving seeds from gourds could prove to be an interesting experience because gourds will cross-pollinate. If different varieties are grown nearby, the new gourd plants are likely to produce a cornucopia of fruit of different shapes, sizes and colors, none of which may resemble the fruit from which the seed was saved. You may on the other hand produce something unique and unusual.

Gourds require a sunny location with fertile, well-drained soil. Adding organic matter before planting is also beneficial. Since gourds demand a long growing season (100 to 180 days), seeds should be planted as soon as the danger of frost is past or started indoors. Since gourds are vines, they do best if grown on a trellis which also prevents the fruit from rotting. Plants should be spaced 12-24 inches apart at the base of the trellis. If planted in an open garden, allow 4 feet between vines in the row and 4 feet between rows. Plant each seed 1-2 inches deep.

Once your plants begin to blossom, you should not become concerned if they do not set fruit right away. Gourds produce separate male and female flowers (only the females will produce fruit) and several male flowers are produced before any female flowers. Gourds are ready to harvest when the stems dry and turn brown. They should be cut from the vine with a few inches of the stem attached. Take care not to bruise the gourds during harvest (this will increase the chance decay during the curing process) and be sure to clean them with soap and water before drying.

Gourds can be a lot of fun to grow and decorate, especially if you have a creative imagination. No two gourds are exactly alike, each having their own character. If you decide to try gourd decorating, be sure to enter your creations into the artwork and creative crafts division of the home arts competition at the Baker County Fair next fall.

Seeds of Many Gourd Varieties



Crown of Thorns



Turk's Turban



Decorated Penguin Gourd



Carved Spoon Gourd



Decorated Birdhouse Gourd

A Variety of Small Ornamental Gourds



Speckled Swan



Apple Gourd (clockwise from back: fresh-picked, dried & cured, decorated)



Carved Dipper Gourd



## Bats: Good Creatures of the Night



Halloween would not be complete without a few bats fluttering about in the skies, eager to zoom down with radar precision upon unsuspecting victims and suck their blood. But contrary to popular belief, this could not be further from the truth.

Bats have evoked fear in many human cultures for centuries due to various misconceptions, and the portrayal of bats as blood-sucking vampires in Hollywood movies. In fact, only three species of bats (of the 1,100 that exist worldwide) consume blood. These bats are only found in Central and South America, feeding mostly on livestock which generally do not even notice their presence. Another major misconception is that most bats carry rabies when, in fact, less than one-half of 1% carry the disease. Furthermore, rabies is not easily transmitted from bats to humans since infected bats very seldom become aggressive as other infected mammals do. Bats with rabies are more likely to be found on the ground, and for this reason a bat on the ground should never be picked up.

In some cultures, bats are considered in a much more positive light (and rightfully so). 75% of all bats on Earth consume insects so you can imagine what the world might be like if there were no bats to keep nocturnal insect populations in check. The rest of the bats living on Earth, found in tropical areas, are comprised mostly of fruit-eating bats (essential for seed dispersal in rainforests) and nectar-eating bats (contribute to the pollination of many flowering plants). Insect-eating bats also provide a valuable organic fertilizer in the form of bat guano (droppings).

There are thirteen different species of bats that live in Florida year-round, all of which sleep in roosts during the day and emerge at dusk to feed on insects throughout the night. During the summer, each bat may consume as much as two thirds of its body weight per night (this would be like a 150 pound human eating 100 pounds of food per day). Bats consume insects that are major pests of agricultural crops and play important roles in reducing crop damage from pests. Also, the southeastern Myotis bat living in Florida has been reported to consume more mosquitoes than any other bat in any other state (lucky us). And while bats consume large quantities of insects, they also provide insect control by repelling insects from the area (many insects avoid areas where they hear bat calls).

What can you do to attract bats? Bats roost in both naturally occurring and man-made structures which should be left undisturbed if you want to attract bats. In Baker County, bats are likely to find refuge in tree hollows, palm fronds, and clumps of Spanish moss, or man-made structures such as bridges, culverts, abandoned buildings and specially made bat houses. Unfortunately, many people destroy roosts out of fear of the spread of rabies, when there is no evidence that destruction of bats or their roosts would reduce the very low health hazard bats pose as vectors for the virus.

If you would like more information on bats, please visit <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> to access one of the many great publications on bats, including what to do if they get into your home and how to build your own bat house.

## More Creatures of the Night

Barn Owls, sometimes called "ghost owls" for their ghostly appearance and blood-curdling shriek, may seem like scary creatures of the night. These owls are strictly nocturnal predators, preying on mice, rats, shrews, moles, small rabbits and occasionally birds, reptiles and large insects. They spend the daylight hours resting in quiet protected areas and members of a pair frequently roost together. Barn Owls may exhibit a variety of threat displays when approached including wing spreading, head wagging, hissing, and bill snapping, but are otherwise good creatures of the night.



Another interesting creature of the night is one of our largest and most spectacular moths, the regal moth. Like most other moths, it is nocturnal but is sometimes observed at lights. The imposing larva (shown right), known as the hickory horned devil, is most often observed when it is full grown (about the size of a large hot dog) and comes down from the trees to wander in search of a site for pupation. Although this caterpillar has a fierce appearance and a scary name, it is harmless.

