



Highlights in

Horticulture

Baker County

January 2012

Dear Extension Friends,

Each new year gives us new hope and a chance to start fresh! We have big plans for classes and workshops this year, including Master Gardener Volunteer Training, a Florida Gardening Crash Course, a lawn care workshop series, and classes held in the arboretum. So make a new year's resolution to come out and join us for some fun learning! And don't forget to renew your subscription to continue receiving this newsletter and stay informed through 2012!

Best Regards,

Alicia

Alicia R. Lamborn
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2012 Master Gardener Training Starts Soon!

Applications accepted until January 31st.

The Master Gardener program is a national program of volunteers who help the Extension Service by extending unbiased, research-based horticultural information to people in our community who need that information. This is a great opportunity for anyone who enjoys helping others and wants to volunteer for our community.

In Baker County, Master Gardener volunteers work in the Extension office answering homeowner questions, creating educational materials, and work with the Horticulture Extension Agent to plan educational programs. Volunteers also help plant and maintain demonstration gardens at the office and conduct gardening programs for adults and youth.

The training will take place at the Baker County Extension Office on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:00am to 1:00pm starting February 14th through March 29th. The cost for all training materials is \$60 (\$65 for couples).

For more detailed information on the Master Gardener Program, please visit our website (baker.ifas.ufl.edu) or stop by the Extension office for an application packet. If you are interested in the training, but do not wish to volunteer for the Extension Service then consider taking our Florida Gardening Crash Course planned for Spring of 2012.

Species Spotlight: Camellias

Camellias are a well-loved Southern favorite, flowering in the fall and winter when their display of colorful blooms is most appreciated. During the remainder of the year their evergreen foliage, interesting shapes and textures, and relatively slow growth make camellias excellent landscape plants. Thousands of camellia varieties are available from nurseries, including varieties with single tiered or double flowers available in pure white to a wide range of colors and color combinations. Regardless of what color suits you, varieties that bloom from November through January are best suited for Florida since our climate often prevents early and late blooming varieties from flowering properly.

The most commonly grown species of Camellias are the Sasanqua Camellia (*C. sasanqua*) and the Japonica Camellia (*C. japonica*). In general, Sasanquas blossom before Japonicas and have smaller flowers and leaves. While both prefer broken shade, Sasanquas can tolerate full sun if provided with adequate irrigation. Other than that, their requirements are pretty well the same, preferring rich, moist soil (although adaptable to other soils as long as it is well-drained), well-watered conditions until established, an acid-forming complete fertilizer (similar to azalea fertilizers), and a proper location such as under pine trees or on the north or west side of buildings where they are injured less by cold temperatures.

Camellias are best planted from November to February so the roots can become established before the summer heat. Plants should be spaced according to their mature size, usually at least five feet apart. Organic mulch should also be used to help retain soil moisture and reduce temperature fluctuations in the root zone. When fertilizing your camellia, no more than three applications per year are necessary: just before spring growth begins (February), after the first flush of growth (April/May), and mid-summer (July). Since late summer/fall fertilization can cause tender growth to be injured by early cold periods, it's better to skip the last application than apply it too late in the year. In general, a 1/4 cup of 12-4-8 or 16-4-8 should be applied over a 25 square foot area around each plant per application. If multiples are planted together, apply no more than 1 cup of fertilizer per 100 square feet of planting area.

Water the plants before and after you fertilize and remember to apply only light amounts of fertilizer since over-fertilization can cause leaf damage and/or spindly growth that spoils that natural compact appearance of the plant. Because of their naturally beautiful forms, they do not require much pruning but can be lightly pruned as needed during early spring after flowering. Compact forms work great as foundation plantings, while taller forms make stunning specimen plants in mixed beds. Just be sure to do your homework before purchasing and planting. These plants are long-lived which makes finding the right spot for them extremely important since you just might be enjoying them for the next 100 years!



The Yuletide Sasanqua Camellia (above) has single, fiery red blooms centered with bright yellow stamens, making it a beautiful eye-catching addition to the winter landscape. The Mine-No-Yuki Sasanqua Camellia (below) has semi-double flowers that are rather prolific, covering the foliage like a blanket of snow.



Photos by Alicia Lamborn

If you love camellias...don't miss the Camellia Show in Gainesville on January 7th & 8th

This two day event features prize-winning camellias of all sizes, shapes, and colors, with judged exhibits of japonicas, reticulatas, hybrids, and species. This show is geared toward educating the public and building an appreciation of camellias. For more information on the show please visit the Gainesville Camellia Societies' website at:

www.americancamellias.org

You Should Be Liken' Your Lichen

Lichens become more noticeable this time of year as deciduous plants lose their leaves for winter, leaving many gardeners concerned about the health of their trees and shrubs. Lichens are usually gray or greenish gray and grow in different forms. Some have a feathery, moss-like appearance, while others have a ruffled type of growth, or even a leaf-like form with flat sheets of growth held tightly to the bark or leaves.

These unusual creatures often get mistaken for a harmful fungus or algae that kill our beloved plants. But the truth is that lichens are actually a combination of both an alga and a fungus growing together, each one helping the other. Since the fungus is unable to produce food through photosynthesis, it is dependent on its algal partner which can produce enough food for both to survive. In turn, the alga receives water and nutrients from the fungus.

Thus, lichens growing on plants are not parasites and do not harm the trees in any way. They are only using the plant as a home. In fact, lichens will grow almost anywhere: on soil, rocks, wood fences, brick houses, plants, and on other lichens. Usually lichens are most prevalent on plants which are unthrifty or declining in health for one reason or another. As the canopy of the plant becomes sparse, more sunlight is able to reach the inside branches, which makes a perfect location for lichens to grow.



Photo by Alicia Lamborn



Weathering the Winter



So far, North Florida has been experiencing a fairly mild winter. But since it isn't likely to last till spring, here are some tips for weathering your plants through winter:

- If a freeze is predicted, water plants 24-48 hours before a freeze (unless it rains). Keep in mind however, that prolonged periods of saturated soil can cause root rot problems.
- Overhead irrigation should not be used for freeze protection. This method is tricky and is best left to professional growers since many people end up doing more damage than good. Instead, cover your cold sensitive landscape plants with blankets or plastic to trap heat inside. If you decide to use this method, make sure your cover is long enough to reach the ground and use a stake (cut bamboo sticks work well) to keep your cover from touching your plant. Some contact is unavoidable, but too much can transfer heat resulting in burnt foliage. When using plastic, remove as soon as the freeze has ended to avoid cooking your plants.
- Citrus fruit is damaged when temperatures stay at 28 degrees or less for 4 hours so be sure to harvest ripe fruit (fruit won't ripen once picked) prior to a hard freeze. You will want to protect the graft union during a hard freeze to prevent damage, especially if you have young citrus. To do this, you can bank clean sand around the base of the tree, use a special tree wrap product, or use foam pipe insulators. Young trees prone to bark splitting also benefit from the tree wrap products (available in garden centers).
- If you're growing strawberries in the ground, these plants can take the freezing temperatures but will likely lose any flowers and fruit unless covered. If growing them in containers, consider moving them to a protected location to prevent cold damage to the roots, flowers and developing fruit.
- Most perennials can handle freezing temperatures but if a hard freeze is predicted, pile fallen leaves and pine straw on top to provide extra protection to the crown and roots without smothering your plant.

Announcements & Notices

Get Your 2012 UF/IFAS Extension Calendar



Stop by the Extension Office to pick up a free 2012 calendar filled with colorful photos and solutions for your life!

Available while supplies last.

Baker Co. Extension Horticulture Program: Facts and Figures

Did you know?... With the help of Master Gardener volunteers, the Extension Horticulture Program helped approximately 16% of the county population during 2011! Please let us know how we can help you in 2012!

Phone Calls: 810

Office Visits: 853

Field Consultations: 1222

Class/Workshop Participants: 612

Email Consultations: 28

Newsletter Recipients: 582

Website Visits: 54,936

Master Gardeners...at your service!

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



Let The Master Gardeners Help You!



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

January Office Hours:

Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9am to Noon

If you would like their assistance, just give them a call or schedule an appointment. And if they don't know the answer, they will research it for you!



Baker County Extension Service

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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 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).