



Highlights in

Horticulture

Baker County

April 2009

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Dear Extension Friends,

Spring is finally here! With the passing of cold weather comes warm, sunny days of playing in the garden and hopefully planting something new. As gardeners, we do have to worry about the spring drought to be sure we are providing enough water for our plants without being wasteful. Be sure to test your water use IQ on page 2, and don't hesitate to contact me with those gardening questions.

Best Regards,

Alicia

Alicia R. Lamborn
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Upcoming Programs and Events: April & May

- April 4th — **Spring Garden Fest** 8:00 am to 12:00 pm. The 1st Annual Spring Garden Fest has something for everyone...plants for sale, gardening demonstrations, Master Gardener plant clinic, and children's activities.
- April 23rd — **Butterfly Gardening** 6:00 pm to 7:00 pm. Florida is home to more than 180 species of butterflies. Learn about the butterfly life cycle and the many secrets to attracting more of these creatures into your yard. There is no charge for this class; please RSVP by Wednesday, April 22nd.
- April 30th — **Rain Barrel Workshop** 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm. Participants will learn about techniques to reduce water use in the landscape and build their own rain barrel for immediate use. All materials are provided for this "make and take" rain barrel workshop. \$38 fee for materials (per barrel) is due by Tuesday, April 21st by 5pm.
- May 7th — **Turfgrass Workshop** 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm. This class will teach participants about best management practices for maintaining turfgrass. \$3 registration fee for materials and refreshments due by Wednesday, May 6th at 5pm.

All programs and events listed above will take place at the Baker County Extension Office (Agriculture Center), 1025 W. Macclenny Ave. (Hwy 90), Macclenny, FL.
Please call 904-259-3520 or email alamborn@ufl.edu to register or for more information.

Test Your Water Use IQ...

New watering restrictions are now in effect (and are being enforced) for the St. Johns River Water Management District. Although a small portion of Baker County falls under the Suwannee River Water Management District, all of Baker County residents should follow these rules to reduce wasteful water use and conserve Florida's most important resource. The goal of these restrictions is to ensure the efficient use of water for landscape irrigation, while allowing enough water to maintain healthy landscapes year-round.

Test your knowledge by answering true or false to the following statements to see if you are using landscape water efficiently. Check yourself with the answers at the bottom of the next page. No cheating!

- T or F (1) Watering restrictions apply to "landscape irrigation", which is the outside watering of plants in a landscape such as shrubbery, trees, lawns, grass, ground covers, plants, vines, and gardens.
- T or F (2) Watering restrictions apply only to public and private utilities.
- T or F (3) Residents with odd numbered addresses (or no address) are allowed to water only on Wednesdays and Saturdays; residents with even numbered address may water only on Thursdays and Sundays; non-residential properties are allowed to water Tuesdays and Fridays.
- T or F (4) You should water only when necessary and not between the hours of 10 am and 4 pm.
- T or F (5) You may apply an unlimited amount of water, as long as you water during the right day and time.
- T or F (6) Newly installed automatic irrigation systems must have a rain sensor device or switch that overrides the system when adequate rainfall has occurred.
- T or F (7) There are absolutely no exceptions to these restrictions.
- T or F (8) It is okay to water plants as necessary (any time, any day) for plant establishment.
- T or F (9) If necessary, watering in of chemicals is permitted within 24 hours, as long as water application does not exceed one-quarter inch (unless more water is required by law, manufacturer, or best management practices).
- T or F (10) You must wait until your scheduled day to make repairs to your irrigation system.
- T or F (11) You may only water on your scheduled two days, even if you irrigate using micro-spray, micro-jet drip, bubbler irrigation, or reclaimed water system.
- T or F (12) Rainwater collected in a rain barrel may be used at anytime.
- T or F (13) A hand-held hose equipped with an adjustable spray nozzle can be used to irrigate plants anytime, except between the hours of 10 am and 4 pm.

More Water Saving Tips...



- ◆ Group landscape plants according to water needs.
- ◆ Install drought tolerant plants — visit <http://baker.ifas.ufl.edu> for fact sheets on Florida-Friendly Plants
- ◆ Don't water streets and sidewalks.
- ◆ Park your car in the grass if you need to wash it. This will water the lawn at the same time.
- ◆ When irrigating with a sprinkler, a rain gauge will tell you when its time to change watering zones. If you have an irrigation system, measure the amount of water that is collected in a 15 minute period and adjust your system accordingly.
- ◆ Mow at the highest recommended height for your turf species: St Augustinegrass, 3.5-4 inches; Bahia grass, 3-4 inches; Centipedegrass, 1.5-2 inches; Bermudagrass, 1-1.5 inches. When you increase the mowing height roots are trained to grow downward, resulting in stronger, more stress tolerant turfgrass due to their ability to access more water.



The Edible Garden – Tomatoes

The tomato is the most popular vegetable for planting in home gardens. This may be due to the many varieties available and the many successful methods used to culture tomatoes.

Tomatoes can be grouped into several categories, with the most general being either determinate (terminal flower blooms first, halting further elongation of the main axis) or indeterminate (lower flowers bloom first, allowing indefinite elongation of the main axis). They can also be broken down into bush-type and semi-vining, with fruit sizes being small, medium, large, and extra-large.

Tomatoes can be started in the garden or container by planting seeds or by setting transplants. Growing in solution (water culture), barrels, and even upside down from bags and buckets have been successful.

Staking tomato plants will keep the fruit off the ground, help conserve space in the garden, and make harvesting easier. Some varieties benefit from staking more than others, and methods of staking may vary. One method uses one-by-two wooden stakes, about six to eight feet long, driven about two feet into the soil, keeping them three to four inches from each plant. As the plant grows, tie them to the stake with soft twine or string below the fruit clusters. Tomato cages are also popular and last a long time. Be careful to avoid root injury when driving stakes into the ground, or stake before the plant is set.

Pruning tomatoes to remove the small shoots that develop between the leaf stems and the main plant stems will reduce the total number of fruit produced, but causes the fruit that are produced to be larger. It is best to prune by hand about once per week. Hold the shoot firmly, bend it to one side until it snaps, then pull the shoot off in the opposite direction (this is necessary to prevent injury). When you prune, leave two or three main stems for plant development and be careful not to injure fruit buds, which appear just above, or just below, the point where the leaves are attached to the leaf stems.

The tomato is host to several insect pests (hornworms, fruitworms, leafminers, stinkbugs, aphids, and whiteflies to name a few). Insecticidal soap and Bt are used by many organic gardeners with fair success. A general purpose garden insecticide applied according to label directions can also be used to control insect pests.

Other common problems that gardeners may encounter include blossom drop, blossom-end rot and fruit cracking. Blossom drop typically occurs when plants receive too much nitrogen and/or too much shade, but could also be caused by flower thrips (insect) or over-watering. Blossom-end rot is a nutritional disorder caused by a calcium deficiency. The best solution is to prevent deficiencies through proper fertilization, although sprays are available to correct this problem. Fruit cracking, caused by inconsistent irrigation, can be avoided if you stick with a good irrigation schedule. Heavy soakings once per week should be enough. If plants receive 1-2 inches of rainfall per week, then supplemental irrigation shouldn't be needed.

For more information, stop by the Extension office to pick up free publications on growing tomatoes in the Florida garden.



WATER IQ ANSWERS:

(1) True (2) False: restrictions also apply to private wells and pumps, and ground or surface water. (3) True (4) True (5) False: You may apply up to three-quarters of an inch of water per zone per day. (6) True (7) False (8) True: Irrigation of new landscape plants is allowed at any time of day on any day for the initial 30 days and every other day for the following 30 days (for one 60-day period total), provided that the irrigation is limited to the minimum amount necessary for plant establishment. (9) True (10) False: Irrigation systems may be operated any-time for maintenance and repair purposes, but should not exceed 20 minutes per hour per zone. (11) False: Using these systems to irrigate is allowed anytime. (12) True (13) True

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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).



Plant Spotlight: The Easter Lily

Native to the Ryukyu Islands of southern Japan, the Easter lily (*Lilium longiflorum*) is the most desirable plant on and around the time of Easter. But how did a lily that naturally blooms in summer in most of this country, become such a symbol of Easter? In the late 1800s, these bulbs were brought to a local nurseryman in Philadelphia who began forcing them into spring bloom, and selling them to florists. Many began buying this flower for Easter, which has since become a tradition.

So how are Easter lilies forced or “tricked” into bloom in time for Easter? Once greenhouse growers receive bulbs in the late fall, the bulbs are potted and placed in non-freezing cool temperatures. The bulbs must receive about 1000 hours of moist cold conditions in order to bloom, although additional light after they sprout can substitute for some cold. Once the lily bulbs sprout, they are closely monitored by growers in order to time them for Easter. This can be difficult, as Easter can vary from March 22 to April 25. Temperature is used to speed up or slow down the crop. As each plant can respond a bit differently, many plants traditionally have been moved back and forth between warm and cold greenhouse.

When buying a lily, look for a plant with flowers in various stages of bloom from buds to open or partially opened flowers. Foliage should be dense, rich green in color, and extend all the way down to the soil line (a good indication of a healthy root system). Look for a well-proportioned plant, one that is about two times as high as the pot. You also should check the flowers, foliage, and buds for signs of yellowing (improper culture), insects, or disease.

At home, keep your lily away from drafts and drying heat sources such as appliances or heating ducts. Bright, indirect light is best with daytime temperatures of 60 to 65 degrees F. Water the plant only when the soil feels dry to the touch, but don't overwater. To prolong the life of the blossoms, remove the yellow anthers (pollen-bearing pods) found in the center of each flower (if the nursery hasn't already removed them). If you get this staining pollen on fabrics, don't rub it off, but remove it with sticky tape. Also, keep these plants away from cats. Any part of this lily, as many of its relatives, can cause kidney failure and can be fatal. If you think a cat has eaten a leaf, call a veterinarian immediately as prompt treatment may be successful.

