



Highlights in

Horticulture

Baker County

December 2011

Dear Extension Friends,

This year's programs focused on Backyard Farming and while the year may be winding down, we are making big plans for next year! We will again be offering Master Gardener training for those interested in volunteering for the Extension Service, and will conduct a series of classes on lawn care, not to mention landscaping and tree identification techniques in the arboretum. We hope you can join us in 2012 since...

"An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest!"
- Benjamin Franklin

Best Regards,

Alicia

Alicia R. Lamborn
Horticulture Extension Agent
Baker County Extension Service



Have a wonderful and safe holiday season!

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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 Gardener Crash Course planned for Spring of 2012.

Ask Alicia: Holiday Cactus Problems

Q: My Christmas Cactus used to be covered in blooms each year, but now it seems to be struggling. What kind of tips can you give me to turn its health around?

A: The Christmas cactus (*Schlumbergera bridgesii*) is a member of a group sold as holiday cacti that includes the Thanksgiving cactus (*Schlumbergera truncata*) and the Easter cactus (*Rhipsalidopsis gaertneri*). All are available in a variety of colors including shades of red, purple, orange, pink, and creams, and have similar growing requirements. They are also very similar in appearance but have different bloom times, hence the names.

When growing a Christmas cactus, the biggest problems you may encounter include root rot (from overwatering) and flower bud drop. The plant may begin to drop unopened flower buds if an excessive number of buds were produced, if a sudden change in temperature or light occurs, or if the growing medium gets too dry. The Christmas cactus does best in light shade during the growing season from April to September. Starting in mid-winter, the plant can be acclimated to full sunlight. The Christmas cactus is tolerant of dry, slightly under-watered conditions, so it's best to water only when the soil surface is dry to the touch (but try not to let the soil dry out completely). Well-drained soil with good aeration is also a must.



The Christmas cactus flowers best when kept somewhat pot-bound, so repotting is necessary only about once every three years. However, if your plant tends to dry out and/or wilt frequently, then it is time to repot into a slightly larger container. For optimal flowering, the plant needs night temperatures between 55 and 65°F and long nights (continuous darkness) of thirteen hours or more. If street lights or indoor lighting are disrupting the required dark period, you will need to place the plant in a dark area each night from 5pm to 8am each day starting in mid-October. If you continue this long night treatment for six weeks and then return the plant to its normal spot, flower buds should begin to appear in about ten weeks from the start of the treatment.

Pruning your Christmas cactus after blooming is also recommended. To do this, remove a few sections of each stem by pinching them off with your fingers or cutting them with a sharp knife. (These sections can also be rooted in moist soil to make new plants.) This type of pruning will encourage the plant to branch out, producing more blooms the following season.

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.

New Master Gardeners 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!

Species Spotlight: Poinsettias



History: A native to Mexico, the poinsettia plant was originally used by the Aztecs during fall celebrations and to produce a red dye. The plant was later introduced to the U.S. in 1825 by Joel Poinsett, who at the time was an ambassador to Mexico. In the early 1900's, the Ecke family of southern California began growing poinsettias outdoors for use as landscape plants and for cut flower arrangements. Eventually the family started growing poinsettias in greenhouses and today is recognized as the leading breeder and producer of poinsettia plants in the United States.

Did You Know?: In their native habitat, poinsettias are flowering perennial shrubs that grow up to ten feet tall. When grown in greenhouses however, their size and flowering time can be manipulated, making them perfect for decorating our homes during the holiday season. Poinsettias are “short day” plants which means they naturally bloom in the fall and winter when day lengths are shorter. However, it is actually the extended period of darkness during the night that triggers flowering. If the dark period is interrupted by artificial light after October 1st, flowering will be delayed. This is how growers manipulate their poinsettia plants, enabling them to extend the growing season and sell poinsettias from the start of November all the way through December. For example, a variety that naturally flowers on December 12th (with no manipulation) can be “tricked” to flower in November if subjected to long dark periods. This can be done by using dark curtains to block out the sunlight entering the greenhouse starting in late afternoon each day. On the other hand, growers can delay flowering of this same variety by providing night interruption lighting in the greenhouse so that the plant is ready for the consumer the week of Christmas.

In contrary to popular belief, poinsettias are not poisonous, although some people are allergic to the white, milky sap the plant produces. The showy colored parts of poinsettias that many people refer to as flowers, are actually colored modified leaves called bracts. The actual flowers of the plant, called cyathia, are located in the center of the colored bracts.

Selecting a Poinsettia: When selecting a poinsettia choose a plant that looks full, has dark green foliage, and fully colored bracts. Then check the true flowers—the plant will last longer if the flowers are green or red-tipped and fresh looking. If you see yellow pollen or that some of the flowers are missing (fallen off) then choose a different plant. Also avoid plants with fallen or yellowed leaves, bracts with green edges, and plants that are wilted.

Due to intensive breeding, poinsettias are now available in a large variety of colors and color combinations, including pink, peach, burgundy, white, yellow, orange, and marbled colors as well. You can also find plants with varying leaf shapes and bract sizes, making them more unique. If you'd like to see first hand the hundreds of varieties created, be sure to visit the Poinsettia Show in Gainesville (details on pg 4).

Poinsettia Care

Inside: When caring for your potted poinsettias inside, keep them in a brightly lit area, away from drying or chilly drafts. They prefer daytime temperatures of about 75 to 80°F and a night temperature of 65°F. Water only when the surface of the soil is dry to the touch, removing excess water from the saucer or pot sleeve. Do not apply fertilizer. They will tolerate full sun on a porch or patio but must be protected from frost and freezes.

Outside: The best poinsettias for establishing in the landscape are ones that have been given good lighting and remained green and healthy. Plant your potted poinsettia as soon as danger of frost is past, being sure to choose a bright location that will not receive any artificial light at night. Also, cut off the fading bracts, leaving 4-6 inches of the stem on each branch. Keep the plant mulched and well watered until established. Fertilize monthly from May to September. Discontinue any pruning after September 10th since flower buds will begin to develop in October if conditions (temperature and day length) are optimal.

Some say that the traditional red varieties establish better than other colors. This is because when breeders focus on creating new and exciting colors, patterns, and unique features, any cold hardiness of the plant is usually lost. Therefore even covering the plant during freezes may not be enough in North Florida for it to survive. Purchasing plants that are blooming in mid-Nov. may increase your chances of having them bloom outside before the freezes come the following year. But because growers manipulate the blooming time of plants, one can never be sure unless the plant is labeled, indicating bloom time.

2011 Poinsettia Show & Sale

Thursday, December 8th 8am - 4pm & Friday, December 9th 10am - 3pm

Free & Open to the Public

University of Florida, Gainesville

1545 Fifield Hall, Environmental Horticulture Greenhouses (off Hull Rd.)

For more info & directions visit: <http://www.gatorpoinsettia.com/>

2011 Poinsettia Sale

Over 40 varieties will be offered for sale:

- Traditional red, pink and white
- Novelty poinsettias including Visions of Grandeur, Orange Spice, Winter Rose and Ice Punch
- 6 1/2" pots are the most popular and include colorful decorative pot covers
- Larger showpieces in 8" and 10" pots will also be available along with centerpiece bowls



National Poinsettia Cultivar Trials

Dr. Jim Barrett and his research team will be holding their annual show at the same time as the sale. This display includes more than 6,000 plants and is the largest show in North America. There will be 150 varieties on display this year. Many of these are the newest and most novel poinsettias. Every year, Dr. Barrett conducts a consumer survey to determine preferences of the public. Please feel welcome to participate in this survey while you are visiting the Poinsettia Sale!



Baker County Extension Service

1025 West Macclenny Avenue
Macclenny, FL 32063



Phone: (904) 259-3520

Email: alamborn@ufl.edu

Website: <http://baker.ifas.ufl.edu>

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).