

Highlights in

Horticulture

Baker County

February 2015

Dear Extension Friends,

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Stay in touch with everything the Baker County Extension Office has to offer! Renew your newsletter subscriptions for monthly gardening tips, expert advice, and be the first to hear about upcoming classes and events. Follow us on Facebook for even more gardening info, news, and event reminders.

Best Regards,



Alicia R. Lamborn
Horticulture Extension Agent
Baker County Extension Service



<https://www.facebook.com/UFIFASBakerCountyGardenSpot>

Upcoming Gardening Classes & Events

- February 20 Growing Backyard Blueberries & Blackberries, 10:00am to 12:00pm, Baker County Extension Office, Macclenny, FL.** Topics include variety selection, preparing to plant, care and maintenance, and pest management. \$2 registration fee due by February 13th.
- March 6 Florida-Friendly Landscaping: Digging Deeper into Your Lawn, 10:00am to 12:00pm, Baker County Extension Office, Macclenny, FL.** This event includes a class on basic lawn care, a personalized yard visit to discuss lawn problems, a soil test with consultation, and a follow up evaluation. \$10 registration fee due by Tuesday, March 3rd. Call 904-259-3520 for more information.
- March 20 Spring Has Sprung—Master Gardener Plant Clinic, 11:00 am to 2:00 pm, Baker County Extension Office (Parking Lot), Macclenny, FL.** Need a plant identified, a garden problem solved, or just want to learn something new? Stop by the office to celebrate the first day of spring with the Master Gardeners and enjoy garden demonstrations, free information, and a vegetable seed giveaway!
- April 18 Spring Garden Festival, 9:00am to 2:00pm, Baker County Extension Office, Macclenny, FL.** For vendor information, please contact our office at 904-259-3520.

Ask Alicia: Citrus

Q: What types of citrus can we grow in North Florida that will survive our freezing temperatures?

A: Since temperatures usually dip down into the teens each year here in Baker County, it is safest to grow only the most cold hardy citrus which includes Satsuma Mandarin Oranges, Meyer Lemons, Kumquats, and Calamondins. There are others, but they are considered marginal for our area.

Q: How do you prune citrus trees?

A: Suckers growing from the base of the tree (below the graft union) should be removed. These shoots will not produce desirable fruit and will only interfere with tree development. Sometimes trees will also produce vigorous vertical shoots in the upper canopy called water sprouts. These are slow to produce fruit and interfere with more productive limbs, so their removal is also desirable. Other than



that, citrus trees do not require much in the way of pruning for production. In fact, removing too much foliage will actually reduce fruit production. Prune as needed to control shape, remove freeze damaged

limbs and rubbing branches, and reduce the length of limbs that produce such heavy loads of fruit that branches are breaking from the weight (although thinning fruit can help prevent limb breakage also).

Q: My grapefruit tree was loaded with fruit this year, but the fruit were much smaller than usual. Can I pick some of the young fruit from the tree next time to make the others larger?

A: Sacrificing a few for the good of the many is common when referring to fruit on trees. While there isn't a rule for thinning citrus fruit like our stone fruit trees, they sometimes benefit from a little fruit thinning early in the season as the crop is first developing. This will help ensure larger fruit and may help prevent damage to branches that get pulled down from the weight of a heavy crop.

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February Garden Calendar

What to Plant:

Bedding plants: Try Dianthus.

Although usually considered a cool-season annual, given the right conditions Dianthus can survive our summers to bloom again the following winter. These bushy plants have small single, semi-double, or frilled flowers in shades of pink, purple, lavender, red, salmon and white. Plant them in full sun or partial shade and well-drained soil. They don't like wet conditions, so be careful not to over-irrigate.



Bulbs: Try Agapanthus. Plant rhizomes in full sun or partial shade, 12 inches apart with the tips just below the soil surface. Provide adequate water for establishment and protect them from cold with mulch. You'll have beautiful blue or white flowers starting in summer and continuing into fall. Rhizomes can be divided, but this plant blooms more freely when crowded.

Trees & Shrubs: Check out our website for lists of Florida-Friendly Landscaping plant species, including what to plant for wet areas. Just remember to research the mature size and growing conditions before planting to prevent problems later. See: <http://baker.ifas.ufl.edu/Horticulture/fact%20sheets.html>

Vegetables: It's potato planting time! Valentine's Day seems to be everyone's favorite time to plant. Buy healthy seed pieces from a local nursery and plant 3 inches deep. Do not add lime to the potato planting bed. For more details on planting potatoes and other vegetables see: *Potato Planting* <http://baker.ifas.ufl.edu/Horticulture/documents/Potatoes.pdf> and *Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide* <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/VH021>

What to Do:

Roses: Prune roses this month to remove damaged canes and improve the overall form. After pruning, fertilize and apply a fresh layer of mulch. See: *Growing Roses in Florida* <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep339>

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Grow Potatoes in Perlite

by Terry DelValle, UF/IFAS Extension Duval County



Have you tried growing vegetables using hydroponic techniques? An easy method is to use perlite as the media and add a nutrient solution. This is an excellent way to try growing vegetables and avoid some of the problems of traditional gardening.

To get started, find a sturdy container. Any size or shape container will work, but it should be at least ten inches deep. Rubbermaid or other brand storage containers work great. Light colored containers are best as they reflect light and will not build up heat on hot sunny days. Drill small holes around the perimeter of the container two inches above the base and two inches apart (not on the bottom) to allow excess water to drain out of the container. Purchase a bag of perlite and fill the container leaving 1 inch of space for watering at the top. Fill the container outside because perlite creates a dust that may cause respiratory problems.



Before wetting the perlite, place the container in an area that will get a minimum of 6 hours of sunlight, preferably morning sun. Avoid areas that could get too much rain from roof runoff. Once water is added, the container will be heavy and difficult to move. Add water until it saturates the container, obvious as it starts to come out of the holes. Potatoes work great in this media, but other crops like lettuce, radishes and carrots will thrive as well.



If planting potatoes, try to find certified seed potatoes that are early maturing varieties (70 to 90 days). If not, plant your favorite potatoes from the local grocery store. Large potatoes can be cut into sections leaving 2 or 3 eyes (buds) per seed piece. Cut into sections and let them dry out for a day before planting. Plant the seed pieces with the cut surface facing down about an inch below the surface and four to six inches apart.

While you're waiting for the potatoes to emerge, check to make sure the perlite doesn't dry out. Cover

the storage container with the lid until the plants come up to conserve water, but check them each day and remove the lid as soon as leaves pop up. Don't overwater because the seed pieces could rot. After about 2 weeks, sprouts should be visible. If you haven't seen green shoots by week 3, check to make sure seed pieces are producing roots.

Once plants have emerged, begin a regular water and fertilizer schedule. Depending on the weather, plants will need water every 3 to 5 days. As plants get larger water demands may increase so if plants are wilting, increase the frequency. The perlite has no fertilizer content so a liquid fertilizer is required. To make up the fertilizer solution, add 1 teaspoon of a 20-20-20 soluble fertilizer that contains micronutrients to a gallon of water. Initially add the fertilizer solution until the material comes out of the drainage holes. Then rotate water with the fertilizer solution and apply as needed. This will vary with weather conditions and the size of the plants. Once the plants reach about 18 inches in height, switch to a fertilizer with a higher potassium content (10-10-20) to encourage tuber development.

If the perlite is washed away and developing potatoes are exposed to light, cover them up so they don't turn green. In about 70 days from planting, potatoes will be ready for harvest. If you want larger potatoes, let them continue to grow. The tops of potatoes will typically turn brown and die when plants are mature.

Then comes the fun part – the harvesting. When harvesting potatoes, clean them carefully and allow them to air dry. They are amazingly clean when growing in perlite compared to soil.



Potatoes can be stored for several months after harvest.

The container can be reused, but the perlite should be removed and the container should be cleaned thoroughly. The perlite might make it for another crop, but it's safer to replace it with each crop.

Ask Alicia: Citrus

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Q: Why does my orange tree only produce sour fruit?

A: Citrus trees grown from seed usually produce sour fruit. If your tree wasn't grown from seed, it perhaps got damaged by cold weather one year and has regrown shoots from below the graft union, resulting in sour fruit.



Q: How do you graft citrus?

A: Many people have been asking about grafting, budding, and propagation of citrus in general over the last few months. But unfortunately, I haven't been able to give them much of an answer. This is because it is unlawful for homeowners to propagate (raise) citrus plants due to the many pests and diseases that now threaten our Florida citrus industry. Movement of citrus plants or plant parts into or out of Florida is also prohibited. You may move certified citrus plants within Florida if purchased at a registered nursery except in citrus black spot quarantine areas.

For more information on the laws concerning residential citrus, visit:

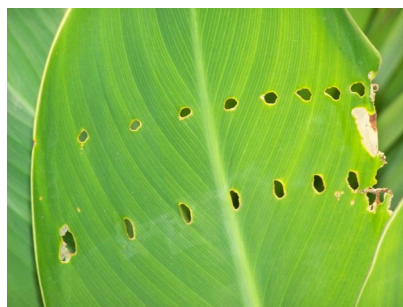
<http://www.freshfromflorida.com/Consumer-Resources/Residential-Citrus-Save-Our-Citrus>

February Garden Calendar

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Lawns: Get ready to apply a pre-emergent weed killer (not a "weed and feed" fertilizer) to prevent warm-season weeds. The general rule of thumb is to apply around March 1st in North Florida, when temperatures rise to 65°F for 4–5 consecutive days. Timing is important for good control and generally coincides with blooming of landscape plants such as azalea and dogwood. See: *Weed Management in Home Lawns* <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep141>

Fruit Trees: A variety of fruits require fertilization this month. See: *Month By Month Calendar: Fruits & Nuts* http://baker.ifas.ufl.edu/Horticulture/documents/MonthlyCalendar_FruitsandNuts_004.pdf



Canna Leafroller damage.

Canna Lilies: Cut dead Canna Lily plants to the ground in late winter to reduce populations of the Canna Leafroller caterpillar. Disposing of the cut material with the overwintering pupae will reduce population levels of this insect in the spring.

Soil Testing: Soil testing should be done this month if you are planting a spring vegetable garden, installing new plants, or planning to fertilize your lawn. Soil testing is available through the Baker County Extension Service and costs \$3 to \$7, depending on the thoroughness of the test. Testing early will allow you time to receive the results, make changes to pH as necessary, find the right fertilizer, and prepare the garden for planting.



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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 ten (10) 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).