UF UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA | IFAS EXTENSION

Highlights in Horticulture

Baker County

March 2015

Inside this issue:

Dear Extension Friends,

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

Alicia R. Lamborn
Horticulture Extension Agent
Baker County Extension Service

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Upcoming Gardening Classes & Events

March 6 — Postponed

Florida-Friendly Landscaping: Digging Deeper into Your Lawn, *2:00pm to 4:00pm, 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.
Class has been postponed—new date to be announced soon.

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.* The festival will feature plants for sale and gardening exhibits. Visitors are also invited to take a walk through the arboretum and gardens. For vendor information, please call 904-259-3520.

Interesting Facts on Rhododendrons

By: Dr. Kyle Brown, Baker County Master Gardener Volunteer

Did you know that azaleas are northeast Florida's favorite flowering shrub?

Everybody knows that!

Well, did you know that there is an azalea relative in China, a tree that grows 100 feet tall and sets mountainsides ablaze with color (pictured right) when it blooms?

Want to know more? Here are some interesting facts about the genus *Rhododendron* which includes our popular azaleas:

- The name means "rose tree" and is derived from ancient Greek (*rhodon* rose and *dendron* tree) and while many do have rosy red flowers their flower colors range from white to yellow, pink to maroon red, and blue to purple. Most bloom with showy clusters of flowers.

- There are 1,024 species ranging around the globe including North America, Europe, Asia, the Malaysian Archipelago and Australia. The richest area of species is the Sino-Himalayan region from Nepal to western China. There are three hundred tropical species found from Thailand down to Queensland, Australia.

- Individual plant size ranges from 4" dwarf alpine species to the 100 foot tall trees in China. Leaf size varies from 1/3 to 3/4 of an inch in the alpine species to almost 40 inches in a Chinese species. Flower size ranges from less than one inch to several inches across.

Rhododendrons from southeast Asia grow as epiphytes, rooting in moss on the trunks of trees. Photo credit: http://blogs.hsc.edu

- Perhaps the most bizarre of all rhododendrons are the epiphytic tropical species (pictured left) found growing upon other plants in mountain rain forests.

Rhododendrons truly are a wonderfully diverse and beautiful group of ornamental plants!

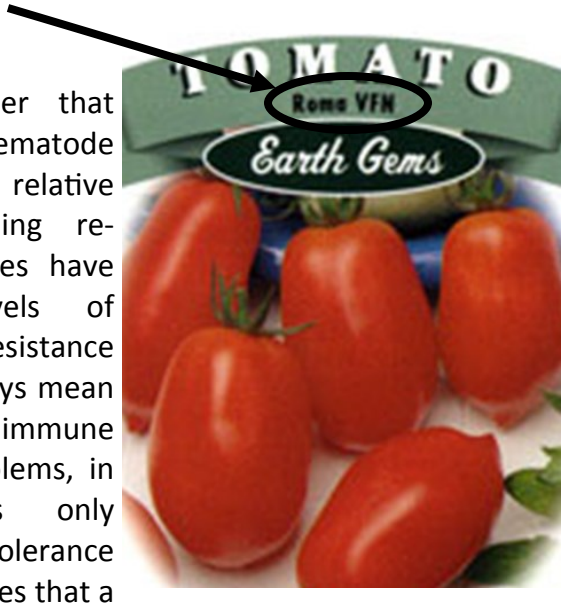
R. pauciflorum growing in a hanging basket. Photo by Richard Cavender, Sherwood, OR

Vegetable Gardens: Planting for Pest Resistance

When selecting plants for your vegetable garden, be sure to look for varieties that are disease/pest resistant. You may not actually see the words "disease resistant" on the seed packet or on the plant tags, but you will know that the plant is pest resistant when you see a series of letters. These letters each stand for a different pest, indicating the plant is resistant to those pests. Just be aware that letter codes sometimes vary slightly in meaning depending on the source. It never hurts to check the seed company's list of codes to be sure you are getting the disease resistance you desire. Here are some examples:

V = Verticillium Wilt Disease
F = Fusarium Wilt Disease
N = Nematodes
A = Alternaria Stem Canker
T = Tobacco Mosaic Virus
TSWV = Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus

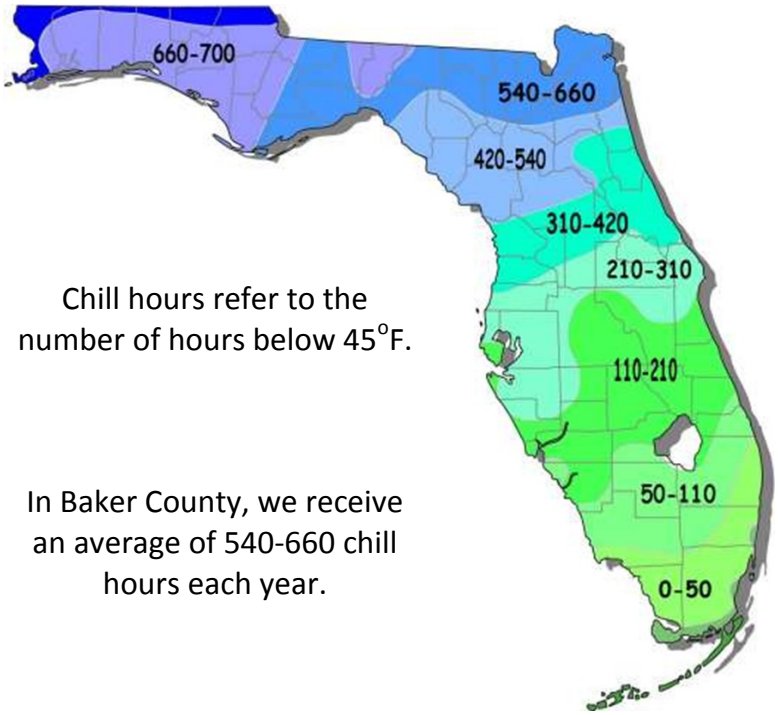
So Roma tomatoes labeled "VFN" are resistant to Verticillium Wilt, Fusarium Wilt, and Nematodes.



Just remember that disease and nematode resistance are relative terms, meaning resistant varieties have differing levels of resistance. Resistance does not always mean the plants are immune to these problems, in some cases only tolerant. Tolerance usually indicates that a particular variety of vegetable may produce fruit of acceptable yield and quality while exhibiting moderate to high levels of disease. Either way, you can't go wrong with having a little extra protection when it comes to pests in the vegetable garden.

Select Fruit Trees Based on Chilling Hours

Many fruiting trees and shrubs require a certain amount of chilling (chill hours) to produce fruit.



Chill hours refer to the number of hours below 45°F.

In Baker County, we receive an average of 540-660 chill hours each year.

When shopping for fruits, be sure to select cultivars that have a chilling requirement less than the average chilling calculated for a given area so that their chilling requirement is met in almost all winters.

With insufficient chilling, plants do not flower and leaf out satisfactorily during the spring, and growth can be weak and erratic.

Today, there are many low-chill cultivars of deciduous fruits that have been developed by plant breeders including apples, blueberries, blackberries, peaches, nectarines, and plums.

For a list of low-chill cultivars and other fruit varieties suitable for planting in Baker County, visit:
http://baker.ifas.ufl.edu/Horticulture/documents/FruitVarietiesforBakerCounty-2015.pdf

If you need additional information on growing fruits, we have many free publications available from our office which can also be found at:
http://www.solutionsforyourlife.com/

March Garden Calendar

Vegetable Gardens: Warm season vegetables such as beans, cucumbers, eggplant, okra, peas, peppers, squash and tomatoes can be planted this month. Plant in the garden after the danger of frost is past or start seed in a protected location for transplanting later. For suggested vegetable varieties and more, see the Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/vh021

Fruits: Depending on your management strategy, figs, grapes, persimmons, pomegranates and newly planted pecans may require fertilizer this month. For info on what type of fertilizer to apply and how much, visit http://baker.ifas.ufl.edu/Horticulture/documents/MonthlyCalendar_FruitsandNuts_002.pdf

Perennials: Dead branches and foliage help keep crowns of perennials warm during winter freezes. Begin cutting these back as the new spring growth starts to emerge. Ornamental grasses can also be cut or burned back almost to ground level. Burning often will rejuvenate large grass clumps and remove years of old dead stems that have accumulated. Read more at: http://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/giam/maintenance_and_care/establishing/pruning_orngrass.html

Lawns: Now is not the time to apply fertilizer, including weed-n-feed which contains fertilizer. Apply fertilizer no sooner than mid-April after new growth has started. If needed, apply a pre-emergence herbicide to control annual weeds. A general rule of thumb for pre-emergence herbicide application in north Florida is to apply around March 1 (when day temperatures reach 65° to 70°F for four or five consecutive days) to control spring-germinating weeds. This application timing generally coincides with blooming of azaleas and dogwoods. To obtain season-long control, an additional application should follow 6 to 9 weeks after the initial one. Always read and follow product label directions. Learn more about weed management at: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep141

Mowers: Have your mower blades sharpened this month in preparation of spring mowing. Dull blades make jagged, uneven cuts that increase water loss from leaf blades, resulting in a more drought stressed lawn.

Irrigation: Calibrate and check irrigation systems to make sure they are ready for spring. Check for leaks, broken heads and heads that are spraying the driveway or street. To calibrate, place containers such as tuna cans or rain/sprinkler gauges around the yard. Run the system for 15 minutes to see how much water is collected in the containers, then determine how long it would take to apply 1/2 to 3/4 inch of water to the landscape. This is how long you should run your irrigation system each time you water your lawn and landscape. For more information, see: sprinkler repairs http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ae451 and calibration http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ lh026.

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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.