You’re likely going to notice a few changes in the newsletter. I’ve been given the honor to serve as the new Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Duval County. My goal in this new role is to offer my expertise to the community. So please do not hesitate to reach out to me for any questions or concerns you might have.

“A New Leaf” newsletter wouldn’t be the same without Terry DelValle; as such the plan is to transition the newsletter as well. Don’t worry, we’re still going to continue offering top notch guidance on your lawn and garden issues, and if there is something you’d like to see highlighted please feel free to reach out to me directly.

As you read through this new format you’ll notice each page will cover a major topic with further guidance, readings or important facts highlighted in the lower box on that page.

In this edition we discuss some current diseases showing up in the landscape, controlling an invasive weed and some things you can work on out in the garden. Check out the “What’s That?” box below; you may be seeing more of them soon!

Have a thought for a new name for the newsletter? We’re looking for one! Send your suggestion (only one per person, please); there will be a prize for the selected name! Please email me directly ckerr@coj.net

For more information contact: UF/IFAS Extension Duval County
Chris Kerr - CKerr@coj.net - (904) 255-7450
After working for 35 years with Duval County Extension, it’s time to move on and spend more time taking care of my own yard and garden. The joke among those of us that are Horticulture Extension Agents is to not judge us by our yards. There are never enough hours in the day to keep the garden and landscape in pristine condition. There are always weeds and tired plants to be removed, plant pests to manage, plants in pots that need to be planted, and new plants to trial.

I’ve enjoyed my time with Extension and working with the gardening community. Twenty years of creating 123 editions of A New Leaf newsletter has provided a great venue to reach our audience while sharing UF/IFAS horticulture information and marketing our educational programs. I know that our educational mission is in good hands as I pass the baton to Chris Kerr to continue these efforts. My next new hobby? I’ve always loved taking photos of plants and critters so I plan to improve my skills in the days to come. Happy gardening and I’m sure I’ll see you around at Extension programs in the future.

New Duval County Residential Horticulture Extension Agent

Dr. Christopher Kerr is our new Residential Horticulture Agent for Duval County. He brings a wealth of knowledge in plant nutrition and disease, entomology, invasive species management and integrated pest management (IPM). Chris has a broad background and has worked in a variety of fields, including mechanics, cook, health inspector and teacher, among others. He has been a resident of Florida since 1999; he earned a BA in Linguistics in 2009, MS in Entomology and Nematology in 2015 and a Doctor of Plant Medicine Degree in 2016, all from the University of Florida. Chris comes to us from the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Division of Plant Industry, where he served as the lead scientist for the Asian citrus psyllid and air potato biological control programs, oversaw the mass-rearing of several biological control agents and implemented multi-partner, region-wide release strategies. He has developed IPM strategies for controlling various pests and educational outreach on a variety of topics. Chris is excited to be a part of our team, and looks forward to serving the residents throughout Duval county. You can contact him directly with any comments or questions at CKerr@coj.net
Take-All Root Rot

The rains have finally come and along with it a range of summer fungal pathogens are showing up. One disease that has been popping up as a problem on local lawns is take-all root rot, *Gaeumannomyces graminis* var. *graminis*. Initially symptoms are not readily apparent, and visual symptoms will present as irregular yellowing/thinning patches in the lawn which usually appear two to three weeks after the fungus becomes active. If you pull a few plants up you may start to notice short, black, rotten roots that slough off easily. Inspection of the roots, stolons, and rhizomes under a microscope is the best way to diagnose this disease. You would look for black thread-like growth with larger lobed attachment structures, called hyphopodia, which is how this fungus penetrates and obtains nutrients from the grass. Unfortunately, this disease can be very difficult to manage once symptoms are present; prevention is key. Following proper lawn management methods, such as what is listed in the box below, will really reduce your chance for this pathogen. If you generally have issues with this disease, preventive applications of select fungicides can be applied according to the label, generally from June - August. The critical piece here is they must be applied preventively as fungicides do not effectively control the disease once symptoms manifest. Think you have a lawn disease? Bring in a sample to the Extension office and we can assist in identification and offer additional management guidance.

Proper Lawn Management is the Key!

The old adage “an ounce of prevention is worth more than a pound of cure” really is true; appropriate cultural controls will minimize most issues. For an established lawn, here are three areas to pay attention to:

**Irrigation**

It has been raining regularly lately, make sure your irrigation system is adjusted correctly. Calibrate your irrigation system, ensure your rain sensor is functioning and make sure you’re watering only when needed; no more than $\frac{1}{2} - \frac{3}{4}$” twice a week. Extended leaf wetness greatly increases the prevalence of many pathogens; if you need to irrigate, always water in the early morning.

**Mowing**

Dull mower-blades rip instead of cut and leave frayed grass; this reduces aesthetics, slows recovery and invites disease. Keep blades sharp and mow as often as needed to ensure no more than a third of the height is cut at a time. UF/IFAS recommends a mowing height of: 3-4” for bahia, $\frac{1}{2} - 1 \frac{1}{2}$” for bermuda, 1 $\frac{1}{2} - 2$” for centipede, 3 $\frac{1}{2} - 4$” for standard St. Augustine, and 2 – 2 $\frac{1}{2}$” for dwarf varieties of St. Augustine and zoysia.

**Fertility**

Both insufficient and excess fertilization can cause problems in the lawn; specific guidance depends heavily on the turf species, plant nutrient status, and soil fertility. The best way to determine how much and what type of fertilizer to apply (if any) is to have a soil test conducted; there are several labs in the area that can do this analysis. See page 7 of this newsletter for more information on soil sampling. The analysis report might look complicated, but don’t worry, we’ll help you interpret the results!
**SPHAEROPSIS on Holly:**

Sphaeropsis gall, also called witches broom, is nothing new to Florida. It has always been around, just not seen as frequently in NE Florida as it has been recently. Sphaeropsis occurs on several different ornamental plants in Florida such as citrus, hawthorn, bottle brush, crepe myrtle, Ligustrum, oleander, and cherry. However it can be very detrimental to hollies. All holly species are susceptible.

Once you see sphaeropsis gall, it will be easy to remember. Symptoms range from inconspicuous swellings of young twigs, to irregular galls on older wood. Multiple shoots arise from galled areas, causing a “witches broom” type of growth. Horizontal branches can “tip up” to grow nearly vertically. Also, clusters of stunted, sometimes leafless shoots or witches brooms may be seen. Leaves on galled branches often turn yellow and drop. Death of the stem soon follows.

Recent studies have looked at whether any one holly species is more susceptible to Sphaeropsis. These studies determined that *Ilex crenata*, *Ilex ‘Mary Nell’*, and *Ilex x attenuata*, when inoculated with the disease formed larger lesions. In the NE Florida landscape Sphaeropsis gall has become a severe problem on East Palatka and Savannah hollies in particular. This makes sense because they are *Ilex x attenuata* hybrids. Natural or mechanical wounds in the wood allow entry points for the organism. The disease is much more likely to be found on a commercial site where the trees are pruned more regularly. Pruning may allow it to spread rapidly by transferring the fungus and allowing an entry point into the plant.

There is no fungicide labeled for Sphaeropsis in Florida. If caught early, one solution, if presented with a slightly infected tree is to prune branches at least 6 inches below where symptoms are seen. After cutting, look at the cut end of the stem to see if any discoloration from the fungal growth in the wood. If there is any discoloration in the wood, the branch should be cut back even further. Severely infected plants should be removed and destroyed.

Because wet humid conditions favor the spread of this disease, prune during dry times, avoiding periods when rainfall is expected 24 hours before or after pruning. Since there is no listed fungicide, prevention is key.

The disease may also be spread through infected cuttings. Take cuttings only from known disease-free stock plants. Do not take cuttings from diseased holly trees.

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**Clean Pruning Tools are the Key:**

When pruning hollies, using clean sterile pruning equipment is the best method we have at this point to slow down the spread of disease. There have been several studies to determine what works best. Diluted alcohol, a 10% bleach solution, trisodium phosphate, and Lysol all work well. One of the studies also found that Lysol was least corrosive to tools and bleach was most corrosive. The method that is recommended is to have a small bucket of solution nearby and two pruning tools. Alternate pruning tools, leaving one to soak, and switch them when moving to the next plant. Some folks carry spray bottles with the solution in it spraying the tools between cuts. By disinfecting our tools we can avoid spreading disease in our landscape.
The air potato vine has been in the state of Florida for over 100 years at this point. It was first introduced back in 1905 to research its use in erosion control. Within the first season it was recognized as having extremely invasive attributes and the planting was destroyed. Unfortu-
nately, the plant had some aesthetic appeal due to its large heart–shaped leaves and hardy growth. This aided the spread of the vine throughout the region for landscaping purposes. Water, wind and human activity continue to contribute to this plants spread. The air potato vine can now be found throughout the state crowding out native vegetation. It’s particularly prevalent along the edges of waterways, previously disturbed sites, natural parks and, of course, throughout the urban environment.

Air potato is a perennial vine which creates large storage propagules, both below ground tubers and above-ground bulbils. That’s where it gets its name; the bulbils can look quite similar to potatoes. Don’t eat these or any part of the vine; they contain a range of toxins making it unadvisable to consume, and generally unpalatable to humans and animals alike. In fact, this was a major contributing factor to the aggressive spread of the air potato, no native organisms would feed on it. This gave the exotic invasive an edge over the native plant community.

The good news is, this plant can be managed using an integrated pest management approach. The USDA, FDACS-DPI and UF/IFAS have partnered together to release a biological control agent, *Lilioceris cheni*, from the plant’s native range to combat the vine. The beetle does a great job of feeding heavily on the plant’s foliage and limiting its competitiveness and reproductive capacity.

However, the beetle alone isn’t enough to eradicate the plant from a site. Other control tactics include removing bulbils, digging out tubers, and appropriately timed herbicide applications. If you want to apply an herbicide to air potato infestations Glyphosate and Tryclopyr work the best, but they need to be applied when the vine is moving resources back to the tuber; in our area late August to early September would offer the best control.

### Additional Resources

**Want free beetles for your property?** Put in a request at [https://www.freshfromflorida.com/APB](https://www.freshfromflorida.com/APB)

Interested in more? Join our in-depth training event on July 5th from 9:30-11:00am. Click here to register [https://www.eventbrite.com/e/air-potato-vine-management-tickets-63993244517](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/air-potato-vine-management-tickets-63993244517)

**More Reading**

Natural Area Weeds: Air Potato (*Dioscorea bulbifera*). ([edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ag112](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ag112))


Featured Creatures: Air Potato Leaf Beetle. ([entnemdept.ufl.edu/creatures/beneficial/beetles/air_potato_leaf_beetle.htm](http://entnemdept.ufl.edu/creatures/beneficial/beetles/air_potato_leaf_beetle.htm))
If you are new to Florida, or just new to gardening, you may be realizing that Florida gardening seasons don’t conform to those you may be reading about in nationally marketed gardening books and magazines. Even though tomatoes may be considered a summer delicacy in the Midwest, many of the larger-fruited cultivars in our spring crop have already stopped producing because of our high summer nighttime temperatures. We can garden year-round, but to garden in the summertime, we need to know which plants can take the heat and keep producing. Luckily, we have several tasty, Southern summer options.

**Sweet potatoes**: A member of the morning glory family, sweet potatoes require a long, hot growing season to produce those tasty orange tubers. They love our sandy soil, and they don’t need much fertilizer. As the vines start growing, they cover a large area. If they get out-of-control, leaves can be harvested and eaten as greens. Sweet potatoes should be cured in a warm dark place for a couple weeks after harvest before being stored in a cool location.

**Okra**: A member of the mallow family, okra loves the heat and humidity. Similar to its close relative, hibiscus, it has large beautiful flowers, a bonus for a tasty summer vegetable. If you haven’t planted yet get okra in the ground soon. Plants can start to be harvested in 60-70 days. One thing to note though, harvest when still young and tender. If left to grow longer than a few inches, pods become too tough to chew. Once they get started, you may have to harvest daily. Wear gloves and long sleeves since okra has prickly hairs, and keep harvesting to keep the plant productive.

**Southern Peas**: An annual legume, southern peas thrive in the summer. They’re drought tolerant, love the heat, and fix nitrogen. Southern peas (cowpeas, black-eyed peas, field peas, crowder peas) have so many names because there are so many varieties. Peas are ready to harvest in 2-4 months and can be cooked and eaten fresh or after drying.

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### Summer Vegetables by Beth Marlowe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summer Vegetables</th>
<th>When to Plant</th>
<th>pH</th>
<th>Major Pests</th>
<th>Days to Harvest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sweet Potato</strong></td>
<td>May-June</td>
<td>5.0 - 6.8</td>
<td>sweet-potato weevil, wireworms</td>
<td>85-130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Okra</strong></td>
<td>March-June</td>
<td>6.0 - 6.8</td>
<td>stink bugs, ants</td>
<td>60-70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Southern Pea</strong></td>
<td>March-July</td>
<td>5.5 - 6.5</td>
<td>cowpea curculio, stink bugs, cowpea aphids</td>
<td>75-90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**More Reading**

Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide. ([edis.ifas.ufl.edu/vh021](edis.ifas.ufl.edu/vh021))
As the hottest part of the summer approaches, our will to get out into the vegetable garden can wane. The spring tomato crop has largely come to an end as the temperatures warm. Cucumbers and other squash may have succumbed to the May heat and drought, or perhaps disease and insect problems began to overwhelm the fruits of our labor. If we’re not growing one of the few crops that really love the heat (okra, southern pea or sweet potato), we may think there’s nothing to do in the vegetable garden over the summer. However, there are a few simple tasks that we can accomplish now that will offer us a lot of benefit for the next fall and spring gardens: testing our soils for pH and nutrient levels, increasing organic matter, and solarizing our gardens.

**Soil Testing:** Even if you have tested your soil in the past, it’s a good to test your soil every 2-3 years, or when concerns arise. Soil pH testing will tell you if adjustments are needed to ensure the vegetables you have planned for the fall garden will thrive. Duval County residents can have their soil pH tested free of charge at the Duval County Extension Office. Alternatively, you can receive a more complete analysis of your soil’s major and minor nutrients along with getting an accurate liming requirement for $7 by submitting a sample to the UF/IFAS Extension Soil Testing Lab. This added information can help you determine the amount of nutrients needed, based on what you want to grow, and the extension office can assist in interpreting the information.

**Add Organic Matter:** Organic matter helps sandy soil hold moisture and nutrients longer, and it helps clay soil drain better. It also adds nutrients and microbes that benefit soil and plant health. On a relatively cool morning or evening, incorporate compost or worm castings from your vermicomposting bin. Apply a 2-3-inch layer and work this into the top six inches of soil with a tiller or shovel about 4-6 weeks before you want to plant your next crop.

**Solarize:** Use all of this sun and heat to your advantage. Solarizing your soil reduces weeds, pathogens and nematodes by trapping solar radiation. To accomplish this, you need to raise the temperature above 105° F for an extended period. To solarize, cover your bed with clear plastic; it should be a single sheet capable of covering the entire space. Bury the edges and plan to leave this cover on for four to six weeks to ensure adequate control.

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**Additional Resources**

- Soil Sampling and Testing for the Home Landscape or Vegetable Garden ([https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ ss494](https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ss494))


- UF/IFAS Extension Soil Testing Lab ([http://soilslab.ifas.ufl.edu/](http://soilslab.ifas.ufl.edu/))

- Introduction to Soil Solarization ([https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/in856](https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/in856))
Upcoming July/August Classes
For all classes Call 255-7450 to register and prepay

Canning Classes: $20 per person, pre-payment & pre-registration required.
- Monday, Jul. 15th - Corn Relish - 9 am-12 pm
- Saturday, Jul. 20th - Sombrero BBQ Sauce - 9 am-1 pm
- Saturday, Aug. 17th - Fiery Peach Salsa - 9 am-12 pm
- Monday, Aug. 19th - Peach Pie Filling - 9 am-12 pm

Friday, July 5, 9:30-11:00 am, Air Potato Vine: ID & Management, Duval County Extension Office. Cost is $5.

Friday, July 5, 2:00-3:30 pm, Rain Gardens, Pablo Creek Library, 13295 Beach Boulevard. Learn what plants are suitable for periods of dry feet and/or wet feet. Free program, but pre-registration is requested.

Saturday, July 13, Noon - 12:45 pm, Pollinators, Wild Birds Unlimited, 6001 Argyle Forest Blvd, Suite #36.

Tuesday, July 16, 9:30 am-2:00 pm, Camp Florida-Friendly, (adults only), Gardening Ways You Didn’t Imagine. Do you know the many ways of gardening? Come find out. Take home a hydro-prop-cycle plant. Cost is $15.

Wednesday, July 17, 10:00-11:30 am. Planning Your Fall Vegetable Garden. Duval County Extension Office. Free program but pre-registration is required.

Thursday, July 18, 9:30 am-2:00 pm, Camp Florida-Friendly (adults only), Water Conservation, it’s a “make & take” rain barrel workshop. Cost $55 to University of Florida. Pre-register and prepay by July 10, 2019.

Thursday, August 15, 10:00 am-1:00 pm, Wildflowers, Weeds and Wind. Mandarin Garden Club 2892 Loretto Road. Cost is $10.

Saturday, August 17, 9:00 am-12:00 pm. Vegetable Seed Starting. Learn how to start your own seeds for the fall vegetable garden at this “make & take” workshop. Cost is $15.

What’s That?
It’s the azalea lace bug! This pest causes a type of damage called “stippling” on azaleas, which is caused by the bug piercing into and consuming the tissue contents. This removes the chlorophyll from that site causing the loss of color. Damage can be confused with other causes so examine the underside of the leaves, look for the insect pictured or the brown excrement and shed skin casts. Azaleas growing in full sun are more prone to attack by the azalea lace bug. Monitoring is key; identify their presence early and treat as needed. Simple soap and oil treatments are usually sufficient, but be sure to adequately cover the undersides of the leaves!

Further Reading:
Featured Creatures: Azalea Lace Bug, Stephanitis pyrioides (https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/in677)