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Changes Are Coming!!!

by Terry DelValle

Daylight savings time ends on November 4, so make sure to turn your clocks back and adjust your irrigation systems to one day a week, if needed.

Winter arrives on December 21 which hopefully will bring us relief from the heat. According to the NOAA Climate Prediction Center, we are moving into a weak El Nino weather pattern. This typically means above average rainfall to the state of Florida during fall through spring. It also means cooler than normal temperatures and increased chance of severe weather.

Another change that is occurring is in staffing at the Duval Extension Office. Mary Puckett, who was our Urban Gardening Coordinator, retired at the end of August. And myself, Terry DeValle, Urban Horticulture Extension Agent, will retire at the end of November. So expect some exciting changes to take place over the next few months.

Upcoming November/December Classes

October 31—November 11: Greater Jacksonville Agricultural Fair, 510 Fairground Place. For more information, see back page of this newsletter.

December 5, Winter Workshop, 10 am to noon. Hands-on Forsythe Pot for cuttings propagation. Also learn techniques of growing edibles and what’s in season. Cost $15. Deadline to register and pay; November 27. Register early! Maximum is 25 people for hands-on. Click here to register https://www.eventbrite.com/e/winter-workshop-in-duval-county-tickets-51812298981

Mistletoe by Terry DeValle

American or oak mistletoe (Phorandendron serotinum) grows on deciduous trees and is common on pecan, oak and hickory. Mistletoe is a plant that is used in many Christmas and New Year's celebrations, and is frequently seen in the landscape, becoming more noticeable as deciduous trees lose their leaves.

It produces a white berry that has a sticky seed that is spread by birds and mammals to other trees. The seed germinates and sends out a root that anchors into the vascular system of the tree. Mistletoe is green and produces some of its own food, but is also a parasite, benefiting from water and nutrients from the host plant. It doesn’t kill the tree, but may weaken branches. If you use mistletoe as part of your holiday celebration, keep in mind that it is poisonous. Between 1985 and 1992, the US poison control centers listed 1,754 cases of accidental poisoning to children and pets. Wash your hands with soapy water after handling. If using mistletoe is a tradition in your family, maybe it would be better to purchase a plastic or silk imitation.
Things to do in November/December by Terry DelValle

Flowers

- **Divide and replant** overgrown perennials, except for those that are in bloom.
- **Continue** short-day/long-night treatment for poinsettias, which began in October, for blooms at Christmas. Make sure poinsettias are not exposed to exterior lights at night because this interferes with flowering.

Fruits and Nuts

- **Harvest persimmons** as they ripen. Astringent varieties must be left on the tree until they fully ripen, but non-astringent types can be harvested when firm.
- **Harvest season for citrus** begins with Satsumas leading the way. These fruit are often ready even though peels are not completely orange, so test one for sweetness.
- **Harvest pecans** as they ripen and beat the squirrels to these tasty nuts. If you don’t have a tree, check local farmers markets for locally-grown pecans.

Lawns

- **Adjust sprinklers** to one day a week on November 4, the start of Eastern Standard Time. Home addresses that end in an odd number or homes with no address can irrigate on Saturday, and those with even addresses on Sunday. Non-residential properties irrigate on Tuesday. Turn sprinkler systems off when rainfall is adequate.
- **Keep up with lawn mowing**, if needed, and mow high going into the winter. This will help develop a strong root system that is more cold hardy. Use up all the gasoline in the lawn mower or drain at the end of the mowing season to avoid mower problems next spring.
- **Don’t add nitrogen** fertilizers to lawns. Nitrogen stimulates new growth, and you want your lawn to go dormant. If you missed the fall application, consider applying a fertilizer that contains potassium, like a 0-0-16.
- **Got weeds?** Cool season weeds are popping up in plant beds and lawns. Hand pull or spot treat with a post-emergence herbicide labeled for your lawn or plant beds. It’s a good time to control tough perennial weeds like torpedograss, as they go dormant during the winter. Multiple sprays will be required. Sandspurs are producing seed now but it’s not the time to treat. Wait until March 1 or mid-February (if it’s warm) to treat with a preemergence herbicide to prevent seeds from germinating. For info on lawns, go to [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep387](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep387).
- **Monitor lawns** for large patch fungus (brown patch), take-all root rot, and pythium. Treat with a recommended fungicide if present. For more info: [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/lh064](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/lh064).

Trees & Shrubs

- **Don’t irrigate** established woody shrubs unless there is insufficient rainfall. At most, irrigate every two to three weeks if it’s dry.
- **Rake and bag leaves** from deciduous plants if they had a leaf spot disease, to reduce disease problems next year. Otherwise, use leaves to mulch plant beds and vegetable gardens, or in compost piles.
- **Install new ornamentals** in the landscape now to give them a chance to establish roots before the heat kicks in next spring. Keep watered if weather is dry. Remember to plant them about 10% above the existing soil grade in the landscape.
- **Avoid heavy pruning** because it will stimulate new growth that is susceptible to the cold. It is okay to prune dead wood, diseased wood, and suckers coming from the plant base anytime of the year. Spring blooming plants should be pruned shortly after bloom and summer/fall blooming plants like Althea should be pruned in late winter.

Vegetable Garden

- **Scout daily for pests** especially caterpillars and aphids. Insecticidal soaps and oils will control most soft-bodied insects. Bt (Dipel or Thuricide) is a good treatment for small caterpillars. Switch to spinosad for larger caterpillars. Before spraying, check to see if you have beneficial insects like lady bug larvae (pictured).
The weather is finally cooling down, so it’s time to get those fall gardens planted. This is the season for arugula,* beets,* broccoli,* Brussels sprouts, cabbage,* carrots,* cauliflower, Chinese cabbage,* collards,* English peas, kale,* kohlrabi,* leek,* lettuce, mustard,* onions,* parsley,* radish,* spinach, and turnips. Add to the list for December those with an * listed above. A lot of vegetables are attractive, so consider using plants like Swiss chard or leaf lettuce in place of annuals in the landscape. Check the vegetable gardening guide for more detailed information: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/VH/VH02100.pdf.

Plant strawberries in November. Varieties include 'Chandler,' 'Camarosa,' 'Sweet Charlie' and Festival.' Plant in double rows and raised beds. Commercial growers cover soil with black plastic, but some home gardeners prefer to use an organic mulch like pine straw to prevent weeds and conserve moisture. Strawberries also grow well in containers. For more information on growing strawberries, check here: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/hs403.

There are many annuals for cool weather. For both November and December, plant alyssum, baby’s breath, calendula, carnation (China doll), delphinium, dianthus, dusty miller, foxglove (digitalis), hollyhock, larkspur, lobelia, ornamental cabbage, ornamental kale, pansy, petunia, Shasta daisy, snapdragon, verbena and violas. Remove old flowers on snaps, petunias, and pansies to encourage new blooms.

Calendula is a cool season annual with attractive flowers. They also serve as a trap crop for aphids so it can be planted around lettuce and other cool season crops.

Bulb-type plants include African lily (Agapanthus), amaryllis, anemone, Aztec lily, calla, crinum, daylily, freesia, hurricane lily, hyacinth, Iris spp., ixia, kaffir lily, Lily spp., Moraea (African lily), narcissus, pineapple lily, shell ginger, snowflake (Nov. only), society garlic, spider lily, Star-of-Bethlehem, Ornithogalum spp., walking iris, ranunculus (buttercup), tritonia, tulip (Dec. only), voodoo lily (Dec. only), watsonia, and zephyr lily.

I collected my first milkweed seeds from my native milkweed plant, Asclepias tuberosa. I kept a close eye on the seed pod and waited for it to mature, which was obvious as the pod began to split.

Then I brought the seed pod inside and allowed it to dry in a well-ventilated shady area. After a week of drying, I extracted the seeds along with the fluff. When mature, seeds should be brown. The fluff is what creates small umbrellas enabling seeds to easily move around to different locations. Most seeds immediately separated from the fluff and the others detached readily.

Next comes the storage part. Once dry, place seed inside a plastic bag or a medicine vial and store in the refrigerator. For best success, milkweed seed need a cold treatment of at least a month before planting. Leave them in the refrigerator until you are ready to plant. Some websites suggest a moist stratification but I’ve had good luck without adding the moisture. Always include the name of the seed and the date collected on the container. Although they are unique in appearance, it’s easy to loose track of seed ID and age.

Calendula can be used as a cut flower and is salt tolerant.

‘Carex’ Cabbage

Collecting Milkweed Seed by Terry DeValle
Interesting Plants for the Fall Landscape  

by Terry DelValle

Part of being a gardener is trying different and new plants. It keeps the creative juices flowing, and it’s fun to discover something unusual that adds beauty to the landscape. Our newest acquisition is bolo bolo, *Clappertonia ficifolia*, which is native to tropical Africa. During a visit to the Quincy Research Station in June, Dr. Gary Knox gave us a plant to test in the Jacksonville area. We were all in awe of the beautiful mauve flowers with their bright yellow stamens. By the way, it is also available in white. Since then it has thrived and never fails to disappoint us with lovely flowers every morning. Flowers stay open until around mid day and close in the heat of the day. Bola bola is a woody shrub that will reach around 4 to 8 feet tall. It is for zones 9a to 11, so we may get some cold damage if we experience a hard freeze. It prefers moist soil, so we planted it in a bed that has moist soil, and it is thriving.

Yellow elder, *Tecoma stans*, is another plant that is a show stopper because of the bright yellow tubular flowers against the backdrop of dark green foliage. Flowers form throughout the warmer months and bees busily work the flowers, completely disappearing as they dive deep in search of pollen. Yellow elder is from Central and South America and is suggested for zones 7-11. There are different varieties and they vary in size from 3 to 4 feet tall to small trees reaching 25 feet in height, so do a little homework before purchasing and planting. Yellow elder likes well-drained soil and full sun for best flower production. It forms viable seeds so it could be a little weedy in the spring.

Petite Pinky™ Spicy Jatropha, *Jatropha integerrima ‘Compacta Pink’* is another one turning heads at our office. This one is part of a Monrovia trial planting at several Extension Offices in northeast Florida. Petite Pinky™ is for zones 9-11 and it is marginally cold-tolerant in our area. Initially, we started with three plants three years ago and each year, plants have died to the ground. One plant didn’t recover after the 1st year but the other two came back from the roots each year, although they were slow to recover (similar to gingers). Plants will reach 4 to 6 feet tall and 3 to 5 feet wide. Ours has never reached this size but it might if it was planted in a protected location. It is very showy with clusters of pink tubular flowers that cover the branch tips during the summer and fall months. New foliage growth has a bronze cast which matures as attractive glossy green leaves. Use as a container plant, a specimen plant, or a border plant in protected areas.

During a recent visit to the Mandarin demonstration gardens, I noticed the native Florida anise, *Illicium floridanum*, was full of blooms. That was a surprise because it’s normally a spring bloomer. This is a great evergreen option for moist areas that have partial shade to shade. Plants will reach 6 to 15 feet in height and 8 feet wide so can be used as a shrub or a small tree. Flowers are red to cranberry in color but do not have a pleasant odor (fishy). Leaves are dark green and leathery and have a characteristic anise smell when crushed. It is an underutilized plant that is winter hardy and requires minimal care if matched to the landscape.
Now is a good time to stock up on some winter squash at local stores or farmers’ markets. There are different types of winter squash that come in an assortment of colors and shapes. All are members of the Cucurbit family so are closely related to pumpkins, and many can be used as a substitute when making pumpkin pies. The most common types of winter squash are acorn, butternut, spaghetti, and Hubbard. These are typically planted in either March or August, and depending on the variety, are harvested 2 to 3 ½ months later.

When selecting, inspect the fruit carefully. The squash rind should have a dull (not shiny) sheen. If the rind is shiny it was harvested too early, before it was mature. Check the rind to make sure it’s firm and free of soft spots, cuts or punctures. Fruit should be heavy for the size with an intact stem about 1” long.

Winter squash are higher in calories and fiber than summer squash. They do have high nutrient content, most notably potassium, niacin, iron and beta carotene which the body converts into Vitamin A. Because of the firmer drier flesh, winter squash take longer to cook. If you’ve never cooked these before, there are lots of recipes on the internet that include soufflés, breads, and soups. A more simplistic method of cooking is to cut the fruit in half, remove the seeds and stringy center, place cut side down with a little water at the base, and bake uncovered in the oven or convection oven for 45 minutes to 1 ½ hours, or microwave on full power for 6 to 7 minutes. Cooking time will vary depending on size and variety. They are delicious with the addition of a little butter, brown sugar, nutmeg, ginger, cinnamon or cloves. If you have trouble cutting them, try putting them in the oven at 400ºF for 12 minutes, or in the microwave for a minute or two, and then make your cut, but be careful of escaping steam.

Acorn squash is one of the more common types available in stores, and used to be the favorite until butternut squash arrived. Fruit are round with ridges running from top to bottom. Most are dark green in color, and resemble an acorn that tapers on the basal end. Fruit size ranges from 1 to 3 pounds depending on the variety. Flesh is pale yellow to gold with a sweet, nutty taste.

Butternut squash are a 3 to 5-pound cylindrical fruit with a bulbous base that resembles a pear on steroids. The outer skin tan and the flesh has a bright orange color. The flesh has a fine texture (not stringy) and has the sweetest taste of the winter squash types.

‘La Estrella’ is a new compact hybrid Calabaza variety developed by UF/IFAS. The fruit weighs about 6 to 10 pounds and are an attractive green and tan color, suitable for fall decorations. Seed are available through Rupp Seed Company.

Spaghetti squash has an oblong shape with smooth yellowish-orange skin and ranges in size from 4 to 8 pounds. When cooked, the inside flesh resembles yellow spaghetti-like strands, which can be topped with your favorite sauce. They are served in area restaurants as a replacement for rice or potatoes.

Hubbard squash can be blue-gray in color or bright orange. Some are irregular and long, whereas others have a tear-drop shape. Most have a bumpy skin with a yellow to orange flesh. A favorite heirloom variety is ‘Blue Hubbard’ which ranges in size from 10 to 15 pounds, so it can be used to feed the masses.

Another squash that is available in local stores is Delicata. This unique fruit is 7-9 inches long, 3 inches wide, and is cream colored with long green stripes running from the top to the end. Fruit have a mild nutty taste a little like corn. Delicata have a thinner skin so do not keep as long as some of the others.

The Seminole pumpkin is another type and is similar in taste to the butternut squash, but is a little sweeter. They are easy to grow in our heat and humidity and are very prolific.
Herbs that like it Cool by Mary Puckett and Terry DelValle

Now's a good time to try cooking some different types so you'll know what to plant next year.

Want to add some flavor to your dishes and cut back on the salt? Luckily, there are many herbs that can be planted as we move into cooler weather. Some of these grow easily from seed, or you can buy container plants from local nurseries to have an instant garden.

Chamomile
There are two types of chamomile: Roman (*Chamaemelum nobile*, true chamomile) and German (*Matricaria chamomilla*, sweet false). Roman is a perennial and grows more like a ground cover. It can not take our wet and humid conditions.

German chamomile is what we grow in North and Central Florida. German chamomile is an annual that grows 2 or 3 feet, is milder, with a sweeter fragrance. It is cold tolerant and is usually not available until after October. Provide full sun in cooler months and when it gets too leggy from the heat, discard it.

Cilantro/Coriander *Coriandrum sativum*
Cilantro is an annual that is easily grown from seed. The leaves referred to as cilantro are used as an herb, and are popular in Mexican, Chinese, and Mediterranean dishes. The dried seeds, called coriander, are used as a spice.

Cilantro prefers full sun and well-drained soil. Known as Chinese parsley, it is in the carrot family and has a tap root. Cilantro requires moisture, but if soil is not well drained, the tap root will not tolerate sitting in water. This cool season herb will not grow in the summer because it requires cold nights.

Oregano *Origanum*
Oregano is a perennial that can be grown all year. If you are purchasing a plant, make sure to taste a leaf to ensure it has good flavor. The flavor comes from the parent plant, not the seed. It is best started by cuttings or crown division to make sure you get the flavor you want. This plant prefers full sun and well-drained soil. Leaves can be snipped as needed, and it actually does best with frequent cutting or the stems will get woody. Use in Italian dishes, meats, breads, and with shellfish.

Salad Burnet *Sanguisorba minor*
Salad Burnet is in the Rose family and is native to eastern North America. The plant thrives during our winters and blooms in the spring. However, it does not enjoy our humidity. The plant is low-growing, has arching stems and attractive foliage. The saw-toothed leaves have a wonderful cucumber flavor so it’s great in salads, vinegars, herb butters, and dressings.

Thyme *Thymus vulgaris*
Thyme is a perennial plant that can be grown year-round. It’s main requirement is good drainage, so make sure to keep it on the dry side. Once established, it is quite drought tolerant. It helps if planted in a raised bed or container to ensure proper drainage. If planted in the ground, it will likely die at the first good rain. It does well in cinder blocks which raise it up off the ground and provide good air circulation. It also benefits from the lime in the cement. Prune frequently or the plants will get woody. There are many different flavors such as lemon, lime, caraway and oregano. Add to stews, soups, stuffing and rice, or brew as a tea with rosemary and mint.

Other herbs you might try include chives, onion chives, fennel, lavender, mint, rosemary, and sage.
Soon it will be time to brave the crowds and select a Christmas tree. Here are some hints to help you keep your tree attractive throughout the season.

First, you should select the right place for your tree. It should be convenient to an electrical source. It also should be in a spot that does not get direct sun. Nor should it be below an air duct that will blow warm dry air on it when your heater comes on. Make sure it is not near a fireplace, and that it is out of the normal traffic patterns. Measure your ceiling height as well as the height of your tree topper. Nothing is more frustrating than having a tree that is too tall.

Now it is time to find a tree. As you are choosing a vendor, consider these things: the unwrapped trees should be stored in the shade or in a cooler to remain fresh. The unwrapped displayed trees should be in water. A fresh tree will have soft pliable branches. Scotch, white pine, Douglas and Balsam fir have naturally good needle-holding qualities, while spruce trees tend to lose needles quickly. Run your hand through the branches. Very few needles should come off in your hand. The sap on the tree stump should be sticky and moist, not hard or caked. The vendor should make a fresh cut on the base of the tree. If you are traveling with the tree on top of your vehicle consider taking a route home that enables you to drive a little slower. The wind from driving at high speeds can dry the tree out quickly. When you get home, place the tree in a bucket of water until you are ready to set it up. After the tree is set up and decorated, make sure that you fill up the water reservoir and replenish the tree’s water daily. A properly cared-for tree should last throughout the season.

For the freshest Christmas tree you may decide to choose a Florida-grown tree from one of the Christmas tree farms in northeast Florida. According to the Florida Christmas Tree Association there are three in the area. They are:

- **Roger's Christmas Tree Farm**
  6047 Jones Road, Jacksonville

- **Rudolph’s Christmas Tree Farm**
  11965 O.C.Horne Road, Sanderson

- **Songer's Christmas Tree Farm**
  5255 Carter Spencer Road, Middleburg

For more information on Florida’s Christmas tree farms go to [www.flchristmastrees.com](http://www.flchristmastrees.com)

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**‘Sugar Belle’ Tolerant to Greening**

by Larry Figart, Urban Forestry Extension Agent

There are many of us that are wondering whether or not it is a good idea to plant a citrus tree, or even to replace the citrus tree we just lost to citrus greening. I was about to give up on citrus in northeast Florida until Gary England, a UF/IFAS Citrus Specialist told me about a variety called ‘Sugar Belle’. It was originally released in 2009 as a new variety that could help commercial citrus growers produce a tangerine comparable to the popular fruit coming out of California. ‘Sugar Belle’ is a cross between ‘Minneola’ and ‘Spanish Clementine’. It matures early so it will not be damaged by early freezes. In addition, its fruit quality has been described as “a mandarin orange with a tangy punch”. The really good news is that this variety has also been shown to be tolerant of citrus greening. This means that it can still get the disease but can stay productive even with the disease. However, you may have to search a bit to find one. It is very popular and is selling very well.
Learn About Gardening at the Jax Fair by Terry DelValle

Don’t miss the Greater Jacksonville Agricultural Fair beginning on Oct. 31 and continuing through Nov. 11, at 501 Fairgrounds Place, next to The TIAA Bank Field.

Sure, we know there are rides, games, animals and music to entertain the kids, but don’t forget to visit the Exhibit Building. Master Gardeners will be on hand in front of the Extension Learning House to answer gardening questions. There will be lots of educational publications available to help you with your landscape and garden. Tour the exhibits on Growing Peppers, Urban Grow Buckets, Hydroponics, Forestry in Duval County, and Butterflies for Florida and test your wild-life knowledge by identifying venomous snakes.

Get the kids involved in a fun craft by making a radish seed necklace to take home and plant once the seed germinates. Will you be able to find all the answers to the scavenger hunt?

Visit the beautifully decorated Country Store to see what Master Gardeners have canned using local products through the entire year. Squash pickles, fig preserves, pickled okra, blueberry lemon jam, and so many more are available at the store.

The Jax Beekeepers Association will be selling local honey, and can offer advice on starting your own hive. Check out their hive at the fair and find the queen bee.

Hours for the Exhibit Building on weekdays, unless otherwise noted, are from 5 pm to 10 pm; 3 pm to 10 pm on Friday 11/02; noon to 10 pm on Friday 11/09; 10 am to 10 pm on Saturdays and Sundays. For details go to http://www.jacksonvillefair.com/.