

Sansevieria hyacinthoides (African bowstring hemp) (cabi.org).





Q: Dear Master Gardener Volunteer:

We have a Christmas palm and a foxtail palm planted since April. They are yellow instead of dark green. I just last week put some foliar fertilizer on the fronds until dripping off and fertilized the soil as well. Still yellow. What can I do?

A: Foliar fertilizer for palms isn't enough to overcome a nutritional deficiency caused by high pH soil and insufficient/inferior fertilizer. It takes quite a while to reverse a palm nutrient deficiency, and you may not see the benefits for several months to a year. The old, deficient fronds will not recover, however, with proper nutrition a new, healthy canopy will replace the bad fronds over time. I'm including a link to information about the correct palm fertilizer you should be using for the optimum health of your palms.

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep516>

*Master Gardener Volunteer Karen Holleran
answers your email questions.*

*Send questions and/or photos for identification or for
diagnosis of residential gardening problems to
ManateeMG@gmail.com.*

*Or call us during office hours 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. at
941-722-4524 and ask for a Master Gardener Volunteer.*



Q: Please refer to the above photo of my Dracaena and advise. This plant is 6-7 years old, has not been repotted, is on a covered porch with a few hours of sun each day, fed Grow Gain once a week, watered one other time per week, no visible pests. Miniature arboricola planted in the same pot about 3 years ago. The plant was healthy until these growths started to appear about 3 months ago and is now rapidly declining.

A: It appears that these are adventitious roots, a means for the plant to reproduce itself. It could be the result of the weekly fertilizer feeding, it could just be the nature of the beast, or it could have root rot and is sending out these regenerative growths as replacements.

Since it's declining, cut the stem in pieces with the root (growth) and an inch or two of the trunk above it and repot the pieces. New leaves and shoots will grow from that. Is the arboricola still in the pot? You can leave the old stump - cutting it may regenerate it from the original root if the roots aren't rotted. And watering it two times a week may be creating an unfavorable environment for the plant. *Dracaenas* like to dry out a bit before watering again.



Succulents: Low-Maintenance Beauty

By Maureen Hirthler, Master Gardener Volunteer

Interested in a rock garden feature? Looking for something to brighten up patio pavers? Perhaps you'd enjoy a cute container filled with plants? Welcome to the world of succulents.

Succulents are plants that store water in fleshy leaves, making them very drought tolerant. With over 10,000 species worldwide, there is a huge variety of plants from which to choose. Although we usually think of them as green, they can be different shades of blue, gray, yellow, and even red. Some are small, others large; some single, others clumped. Many produce new plantlets called "pups."

First, decide what you want to do with succulents. If you make an outdoor rock garden, you will have crooks and crannies to fill with succulents, including some of the taller species. Plant (and by that, I mean stick in the rocks with a little sand) a variety of specimens for an interesting look. Nature will take care of watering. You can also tuck succulents into the sandy gaps between patio pavers, which brings a green living atmosphere to your outdoor spaces.

Containers are often the best places for succulents and the most fun. You can find novelty pots—camels, cows, elves and fairies, and beach scenes. Kitchen items like cups, ramekins, and shallow dishes also look great. Be sure to check thrift shops and yard sales for inexpensive things. If you want, buy a relatively shallow container in a favorite color.

Containers should have good drainage holes. Succulents like early morning light and cannot tolerate our Florida sun, so choose an appropriate location for your container.

Succulents naturally grow in rock and sand. For containers, 75% of the mix needs to be inorganic—sand, rock, pumice, or large perlite. The organic part can be potting soil or compost. For small containers, pebbles alone may be enough.

Research some of the more available succulents and enjoy designing your container garden. Mix different forms, colors, and textures in one planter. Tall aloe or kalanchoe can provide center interest. Echeveria form lovely rosettes and have leaves with a variety of colors and edgings.

Sempervivum form very tight rosettes in many shades. You can even intersperse a few small cacti. Finally, sedums give a different look, and can cascade over the edges of containers.

Over-watering is the most common cause of succulent failure. Water once a month at most. Succulents are also susceptible to the usual pests—aphids, mealybugs, etc. Use insecticidal soap or oil sprays, following label instructions, and avoiding times of bright sunlight.

Prune your plants during the growing season and remove pups if the container seems too crowded. Start another garden or give the pups away. You may fertilize with half strength ornamental fertilizer once in the spring.

Succulents do best when dry and ignored. You can't say that about too many other gardens!

Additional information can be found at:
<https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/ornamentals/succulents.html>

BIRDS ON THE WING

By Kathy Oliver

Residential Horticulture
Program Assistant



Migratory birds take to the air in fall and by January have settled into their wintering grounds. Many of our year-round resident bird populations, including waterfowl, birds of prey, and sandhill cranes, swell greatly with the influx of seasonal visitors.

Migration is large-scale movement of animals triggered by changes in day length, temperatures, and food availability. Although exact mechanisms are not well known, birds seem to navigate using magnetic fields, sun- and star-light, and landmarks. They often follow pathways that have stopover sites with crucial food resources.

Many smaller birds migrate at night in large flocks to avoid predators. These flocks are often visible and tracked on weather radars. Cornell Lab of Ornithology has real-time migration tracker maps for the United States on their BirdCast webpage <https://birdcast.info/migration-tools/live-migration-maps/>.

While Florida is a prime wintering spot, some neotropical migrants seek even warmer latitudes. These species breed in Canada and the United States and spend the winter in tropical areas further south. Peninsulas (think warmer ambient air) tend to concentrate migrating birds, and Florida lies at the southern end of the Atlantic Flyway. Neotropical migrants passing through here generally go to the Caribbean or South America. The Florida Keys serve as launching pads - birds rest at this southernmost point before starting long-distance flights over water.

It is astounding that small birds such as hummingbirds, warblers, and swallows - weighing mere ounces in some cases - make these journeys of hundreds of miles twice a year. Their energy needs are huge, and many birds gorge on seeds and berries to fatten up beforehand. In addition to physical stress, migrants are subject to bad weather, predators, degraded habitats, and scarcity of food during migration. Tropical storms and frontal systems passing through may lead to "fallouts", exhausted birds landing *en masse*, especially along coastlines and on barrier islands. Sites such as Fort DeSoto Park in Pinellas County are birding hotspots on these occasions.

The federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act protects all native bird species regardless of whether they migrate. And 2020 marks the 20th Anniversary of the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act, passed by Congress in July of 2000. The goals of this act include perpetuating healthy bird populations, providing financial resources for bird conservation, and fostering international cooperation.

With neotropical migrants residing in two different parts of the world, conservation efforts can be complicated. Habitat loss is the greatest threat to bird populations around the globe, and it could impact breeding grounds, wintering locales, or stopover sites along migratory routes. If protection efforts fail in any of these critical sites, the species is imperiled.

A study published in the *Journal of Science* reports a 13% decline in biomass of birds detected on weather radars over the past 10 years. The largest declines were in birds migrating along the Atlantic flyway. Overall, bird populations have dropped nearly 30% from 1970s levels.

With this crisis looming, birds need our help more than ever. Here are some steps you can take:

- Plant native plants in yards and neighborhoods. In addition to providing fruits and nuts, native plants host insects that birds utilize for food.
- Participate in citizen science bird monitoring programs such as eBird, Breeding Bird Surveys, Christmas Bird Counts, and the Great Backyard Bird Count.
- Assess home and office for risk of bird & glass collisions and implement practices such as installing vertical stripes or other pattern elements on windows. The North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) estimates that glass collisions kill half a billion birds annually.
- Keep cats indoors. This is a biggie. Felines kill an estimated 2.4 billion birds annually according to NABCI.
- Reduce use of chemicals in environment.

RESOURCES: Cornell Lab of Ornithology, All About Birds <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/>, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Migratory Bird Program <https://www.fws.gov/birds/index.php>.

Firescaping:

Selecting Landscape Plants to Reduce Fire Risk

By Amy Stripe, Master Gardener Volunteer

Florida ranks second highest in the nation for wildfires, with over 2,000 in 2020. Our dry season (November through April) and warmer temperatures make us vulnerable to fire. Couple this with the fact that almost one-third of our population now lives in “interface” areas, where wildlands butt up against suburban developments, and you have a perfect formula for a wildfire that can destroy your home. Among many other landscaping measures, ornamental plant selection and their care can make a difference in protecting your property from fire.

Lightening is arguably the number one cause of wildfires. Having a tall tree or palm near your house is a risk, but there are many other factors involved, as ANY plant will burn under the right conditions.

Environmental factors such as ambient temperature, humidity, precipitation, time of day and year, and size of “fuel load” will affect flammability. “Fuel” is plant material that will burn. It can be living tissue or dead material.

Water in leaves and their size and shape help dictate flammability. Thin, needle-like leaves or leaflets are more flammable than wide, flat, or thick leaves. So, most conifers (with needles) and



palms (with leaflets) are riskier. In fact, firefighters refer to Mexican fan palms (*Washingtonia robusta*) as “death traps” in wildland settings. The presence of oil resin or waxes also increases flammability [e.g., wax myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*), saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*), hollies.] The native Yaupon hollies (*Ilex vomitoria*) are called “gasoline trees” in the trade! More flammable plants include those with peeling bark (e.g., gumbo limbo (*Bursera simaruba*), melaleuca (*M. quinquenervia*)) and non-self-cleaning trees (e.g., sand pines (*Pinus clausa*)). Unhealthy plants with more dead leaves and branches provide a bigger fuel load.

On the other hand, open and loose branched trees and shrubs [such as crapemyrtles (*Lagerstroemia* spp.)] reduce fire risk, and deciduous plants are considered less flammable than evergreens because they have a higher moisture content. These are safer bets for plants placed near your house. Proper maintenance of plants such as removing dead and low hanging branches, proper irrigation, and weed management creates a more defensible yard.

For more information on firescaping your landscape, plant choices, and information about fire in Florida, go to:

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu.174> or <https://Fdacs.gov> (search for “defensible space around homes”).





An Edible Bromeliad? Who Knew?

By Jim Haupt, Master Gardener Volunteer

Plants are given botanical and common names and assigned to a plant family based on physical features, growth habits, and other characteristics. In the Amaryllidaceae family, for example, we can easily recognize similar features amongst onions, leeks, and shallots. On the other hand, bromeliads belong to a large family with some members having features not commonly associated with the ones found in our landscapes.

Bromeliads are members of the Bromeliaceae, a plant family which comprises over 3,000 species indigenous to tropical and subtropical America. Some are terrestrial (grow in soil.) Others are epiphytic, clinging to trees or are mounted on branches or boards. Epiphytes are not parasitic but instead use their hosts for structural and nutritional support. All bromeliads have tiny, but diverse scales that absorb water and nutrients from the air to feed themselves. Microscopic scales are found on some, while interesting scale patterns and leaf bands heighten the beauty of others. Bromeliads are easy to maintain, adding vibrant colors for most light conditions.

Some Bromeliads are not just beautiful but also edible. The pineapple (*Ananus comosus*) is the most economically important bromeliad and the only one found in upside down cakes and banana splits. From their appearance, one might think they are native to Hawaii, but they originated in the tropical Americas and the Caribbean. Like other bromeliads, the pineapple plant produces “offsets” or pups. The prominent green top of the fruit or any young suckers at the base of the plant may be removed and planted in soil. For production purposes and to offset costs, pineapples are typically grown in the ground. Because of its two-tone, spiky leaves, and large edible fruit, the pineapple has become a fun addition to Florida landscapes.

Editor's note: I plant pineapple tops throughout the year. It may take 12 to 18 months before they produce fruit, but they are the sweetest, most beautiful pineapples I have ever eaten. It is well worth the effort, although fending off predators, such as raccoons, could be the subject of a future article in The Bench!

Your Winter Lawn

By John Dawson, Master Gardener Volunteer

My new neighbors from “up north” who moved here this summer, asked me when do I “winterize” my mower, and what do I put down on the lawn to get ready for winter? I told them things are different down here. Up north, we grew cool-season grasses; down here we grow warm-season grasses, such as centipedegrass, St. Augustinegrass, bahiagrass, bermudagrass, zoysiagrass, carpetgrass, and seashore paspalum.

Warm-season turf grasses (see graphics at the end of this article) have very different growth patterns than northern cool-season turf grasses such as fescue, rye, and blue grass. Notice that cool-season grasses experience a burst of growth in the fall, that’s why cool-season grasses are “winterized” to protect this growth spurt.

Warm season turf grasses grow faster throughout the warmer and hotter weather of summer, which also tends to be wetter. There is no burst of root and blade growth in the fall. That’s why warm-season grasses do not need to be “winterized”.

Also notice the browning grass in winter for the warm-season growth calendar: during our driest months, our turf grasses can go dormant and leaves may turn brown. This is normal and healthy for warm-season grasses. The plants are still alive and will green up as spring approaches.

There are always those folks who insist on a year-round green lawn, and they generally overseed their lawns with a cool-season grass. Ryegrass is popular because of its fast growth and low cost. It should be sown once daytime highs have fallen to the low- to mid-70s. Grasses used for overseeding will die off as temperatures rise in the spring.

Shorter days, lower light intensity, and cooler temperatures result in slower-growing warm-season turf grass lawns. If the weather is warm enough, grass keeps sprouting. Generally, the cutoff point comes when daytime temperatures drop below 50°F.

In Central Florida, do not fertilize lawns between late October and the end of March. Early October is the last time you should apply fertilizer to your lawn for the year. A high-potassium (K), low or no nitrogen (N) fertilizer is best. This formulation helps to impart some stress tolerance to cold or freezing temperatures and may enhance spring green up.

Applying high nitrogen fertilizer when your lawn is trying to go dormant for the winter is like drinking caffeine before going to bed! Nitrogen interferes with the dormancy process, forcing the lawn to “wake up” (produce new tender growth) at the wrong time of the year. This would also set up your lawn for possible cold damage. Tender new growth is more susceptible to cold injury and is likely to be damaged by the first frost or freeze. Such damage goes unnoticed until the following spring when sections of the lawn fail to green up.

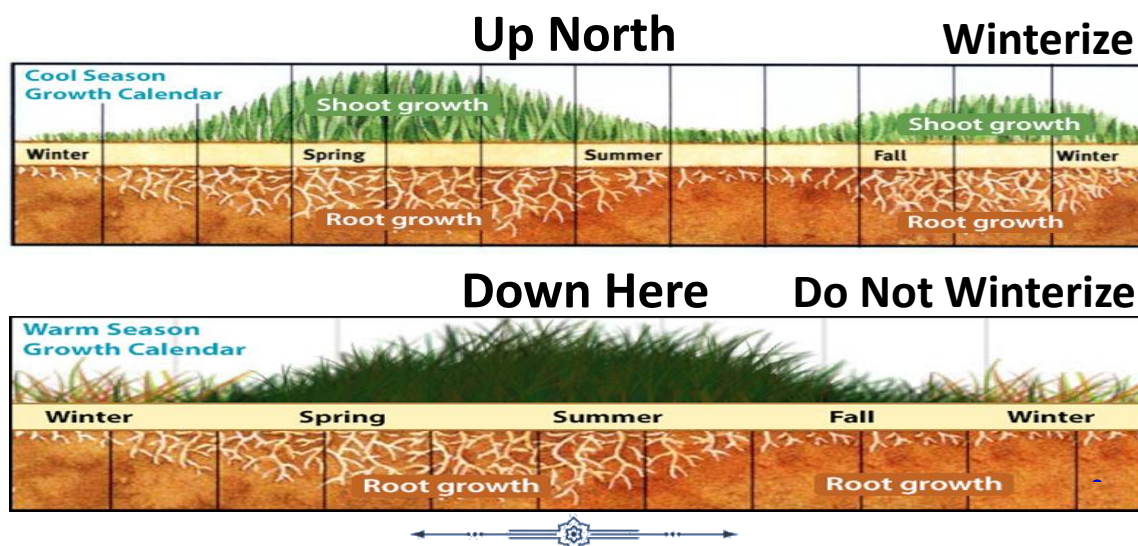
During our cool season, mow your lawn at the high end of the recommended height range for your type of grass. Higher mowing optimizes leaf blade area for photosynthesis; if watered correctly, roots will be deeper and more robust.

During the winter (our dry season), your lawn doesn't need as much water because the growth is dormant. If your lawn has been over seeded, water as you would from March through May. Irrigate no more than a half-inch to 3/4-inch per zone during any season. The idea is to train the roots to follow the water as it percolates down through the soil. Irrigating during the dormant season should be extended to 10 to 14 day intervals instead of weekly.

As for my mower, I no longer “winterize” it, but I do maintain scheduled maintenance and take care to sharpen the blades at least twice a year.

If temperatures suddenly falling below 20 degrees Fahrenheit (unlikely, but not impossible) your lawn may be permanently damaged. The grass may initially appear wilted, and then turn to a faded white or dark

brown color. Excess foot and vehicle traffic may worsen the effects of cold damage, so stay off possibly damaged turf until the soil and plants have completely thawed. Transplanting small plugs of grass from your lawn in a pot can help determine if your grass is simply dormant or dead. Place the pot in a warm spot indoors where it will receive sunlight and see if the grass begins to grow.



JANUARY CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Date	Time	Event
1 st Sunday of the month	10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.	Master Gardener Mobile Plant Clinic at Lakewood Ranch Farmer's Market (8330 Lakewood Ranch Blvd.) - Come visit the Master Gardener Volunteers who are available to share their knowledge on horticulture and assist community residents with horticulture questions.
1 st Thursday of the month	9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.	Master Gardener Mobile Plant Clinic at St. George's Episcopal Church (912 63rd Ave. West, Bradenton) Come visit the Master Gardener Volunteers who are available to share their knowledge on horticulture and assist community residents with horticulture questions.
Saturday January 9	9:00-11:00 a.m.	Extension Master Gardener Nature and Plant ID Tour – Emerson Point Preserve - Casually stroll through to enjoy the beautiful Emerson Point Preserve and learn about Florida's native plants and inhabitants of a coastal environment. Suitable for all ages. Click here to register.
Saturday January 9	9:00-11:00 a.m.	Extension Master Gardener Nature and Plant ID Tour - Riverview Pointe Preserve – DeSoto National Memorial – Stroll through Riverview Pointe Preserve to learn more about Florida's native plants and inhabitants of a coastal habitat. Suitable for all ages. The hike begins in the parking area of the DeSoto National Memorial Park and enters into the Riverview Preserve at 8250 DeSoto Memorial Highway, Bradenton. Click here to register.
Tuesday January 12	12:00-1:00 p.m.	Realistic Lawns – Zoom Webinar - Join our Residential Horticulture Agent for a discussion on what to expect from your Florida Lawn. Topics covered will include; selection, establishment, maintenance and alternative groundcovers. Click here to register.
Saturday January 16		Florida Arbor Day 2021 – Join UF/IFAS and Manatee County Parks and Natural Resources for a community scavenger hunt for trees. Beginning January 16, participants have 2 weeks to find tagged trees at Emerson Point Preserve (5801 17 St W) and Conservatory Park (8027 Conservatory Dr). Scavenger hunt will be submitted via online form. Prizes for winners!
Saturday January 16	9:00-11:00 a.m.	Extension Master Gardener Nature and Plant ID Tour – Rye Preserve - Take a hike through upland habitats along Rye Branch and learn about Florida native plants, natural history, and early settlement of the area. Drinking water, sturdy shoes, and hiking sticks are recommended. Click here to register.
Wednesday January 27	10:30-11:30 a.m.	Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ for Snowbirds – this webinar will cover the 9 Principles of FFL as well as reveal the plants that will be in bloom and look their best during the months when you live in Florida. Click here to register.
Saturday January 30	9:00-11:00 a.m.	Extension Master Gardener Nature and Plant ID Tour – Perico Preserve – Explore one of Manatee County's newest preserves and learn about Florida's native plants, how they benefit wildlife, and how they can be used in the home landscape. Learn about the wide variety of ecosystems on display and how the preserve was transformed into what it is today. Suitable for all ages. Click here to register.