



February 2022

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The Garden Connection

Planting Trees

Rachel Coggins, SRCMGV

February and March are excellent months to plant trees in your yard. Trees are mostly dormant during the winter, and planting them when it's cold, gives your tree time to establish roots before it begins to set out leaves, flowers, or fruit.

Replacing our forest with homes is the price we have paid for expansion. Planting trees in our yards will make a difference for so many reasons. Here are a few of those reasons.

1. Trees absorb water, up to 150 gallons per day. Trees make a critical difference when we have too much water and when we don't. Trees help with flood protection by absorbing the water. Their roots pierce the earth, making it porous enough for water to be absorbed into the ground, feeding the aquifers below. In dry times, trees hold water available for the plants around them.
2. Trees help clean the air. They absorb harmful pollutants and release oxygen, and they absorb carbon dioxide, the culprit primarily credited with global warming.
3. Trees feed people. We are blessed in our area to grow fruit and nut trees that can offset some of our grocery bills. When they become ripe, I love sharing my Meyer lemons, and my friends love them too.



Little Gem Magnolia

Photo credit: Lois Scott



For more information contact: UF/IFAS Extension Santa Rosa County

Josh Criss via email at joshua.criss@ufl.edu ▪ (850) 623-3868

4. Trees are homes for wildlife: birds, butterflies, squirrel and beneficial insects.
5. Biodiversity is the answer to healthy living. Supporting wildlife is critical for their continued existence.
6. Trees are critical to developing healthy soil. The roots punch through the hard fill-dirt surrounding your house and pull up essential nutrients far below. As leaves biodegrade, they form rich humus necessary for soil development.
7. Trees will cool and protect your home. In the summer, leaves will shade the ground, making it much cooler. When strong winds come, the trees take the brunt of it and shield your home. Trees are beautiful!!

I hope you will plant trees in your yard this year. According to author John Leary, in his book, *One Shot: "Trees are Our Last Chance for Survival"* From a global perspective, they are that important. Always consider the growth size of the tree and an appropriate distance from the house.

See the following websites for more information :

In order to open the link, Hold the Control Key down and click on the link .

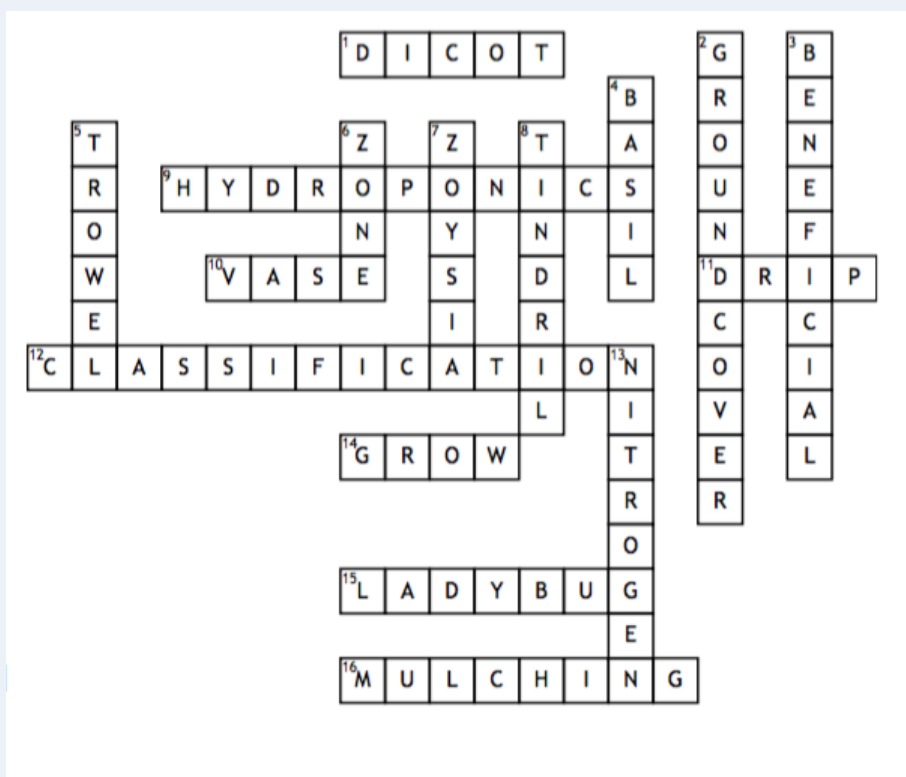
<https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/trees-and-shrubs/trees/> . I

It has an extensive list of trees that grow in our area of Florida. There are hotlinks to each tree with a picture, a description, and information about each.

A detailed description of how to plant a tree can be found here:

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf%5CEP%5CEP31400.pdf>

January Crossword Solution



Looking Forward to Springtime Trips

Peggy Barnard, SRCMGV

Soon, the cold days of winter will be behind us. Now is a good time to start planning a day trip with family and friends. We are fortunate to live in an area with so many state parks and preserves within a short drive. I have a few suggestions to start your list.

Blackwater River State Park

It is just a short drive to this beautiful nature park. I could not think of a better way to spend a beautiful spring day than picnicking at one of the shaded picnic tables, or hiking on one of the three trails. When the temperature is warm there is nothing more relaxing than canoeing, swimming, tubing, or kayaking on the translucent brown waters with the unspoiled white sand bars. When you visit this park be sure to take in all the birds, plants and wildlife. It will not disappoint. There are camping facilities available if you choose to spend more than one day.

Check the website for availability .www.floridastateparks.org

5 Rivers – Alabama Delta Resource Center

My next suggestion will take us over the state line to Alabama at the 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center. The five rivers, Mobile, Spanish, Tensaw, Apalachee, and Blakely come together at the mouth of the Mobile Bay and there you will find the Alabama Delta Resource Center. If you have never been there before it is quite a treat. The center is an incredible facility featuring with a wonderful exhibit hall, learning center, theater, welcome center, and gift shop. The facility offers walking trails, conference center, and reception hall.

Depending on weather, and COVID restrictions, there is a private company near the resource center that offers a guided pontoon ride for a fee and with reservations. It is a fascinating tour highlighting the history of the delta and getting you close to wildlife. For more information on this see

www.outdooralabama.com



Animal Exhibit at the Alabama
Delta Resource Center
Photo: Peggy Barnard

Florida Caverns State Park

A few hours to the east of us near Marianna Florida, is a great state park that has caverns. Florida Caverns is the only state park that offers guided educational tours through a large cave system.

This beautiful cave system offers fascinating rock formations, natural beauty, and you may see a few bats. Lights have been added to the caves to enhance the experience.

The guides are very knowledgeable on the history of the caves and park. To experience this cave system, tickets are available at the gift shop and are available on a first come, first serve basis.



This park has more to offer than just caverns. There are great trails for walking, pavilions for picnicking, a camping area for tents and RV's, and stables for horses.

The Chipola River runs through the park which offers great swimming, canoeing and kayaking. You will find nature at its finest with all the beautiful birds, wildflowers, and peacefulness of a great state park.



More information can be found at

www.floridastateparks.org>

Get out and enjoy these beautiful treasures.

Around our house... Mike Burba, SRCMGV

As I write February's column, we sit in our house waiting for our first hard freeze in four years to pass. Our most vulnerable plant, the Meyer lemon, is covered with an old bed sheet to protect its delicate flowers and buds. But stay strong. By the time you read this, Punxsutawney Phil will have made his annual weather prediction up on Gobbler's Knob, and we will all be able to confidently plan our Spring activities. One last thing before getting to the subjects for this month's article. Hope everyone removed their crapemyrtle water sprouts, but if you have not, this cold spell may allow more time to prune while they are still dormant. One of our neighbors just had theirs pruned. (Figure 1)

February is the month for lovers, Valentine's Day and pruning your roses. A good rule of thumb in Northwest Florida is to hard prune roses around Valentine's Day, or after the probability of a freeze is gone. Don't be afraid to shorten canes and branches. More specific information is available at your local Extension office or search "roses" on the "Ask IFAS" website for some informative documents. [Ask IFAS - Powered by EDIS \(ufl.edu\)](#)

I took a good look at our lawn, and it told me to start thinking about warmer weather and getting ready to fix it. The turfgrass is mostly brown (dormant) and the winter annual weeds are enjoying their ideal growing conditions along with some perennials. You may have them at your house too. See figures below and go searching. Pull them out and bring them to the Extension office for positive identification. Those in south Santa Rosa County may take them on Tuesday mornings to the county's South Annex located at 5841 Gulf Breeze Parkway near the zoo on Hwy 98.

Homeowners are beginning to ask about applying fertilizers to their lawns, but the turfgrass is not ready yet. Wait until the month of April in North Florida; or let it tell you it's ready when it grows enough to need mowing. Do not use a Weed & Feed product before consulting with the Extension office. The timing of its effectiveness may be off between the weeds and turfgrass so you might be wasting money and unnecessarily polluting the environment. We also encourage spot-treating with herbicides where weeds are growing and not parts of lawns without weeds. This is not possible with Weed & Feed products.

Growing turfgrass and controlling weeds is often challenging in Florida. It can't be stressed enough, contact the Extension office to discuss the best practices learned throughout decades of research at the University of Florida research centers. Follow this link <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/> to the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension "Ask IFAS" website. Documents located there contain detailed, research-based information published in an easily understandable manner. Follow embedded links in EDIS documents for more detailed information and/or contact your local Extension office for more help.



1. Crapemyrtle tree severely topped.



Left: Henbit Deadnettle (*Lamium amplexicaule* L.) This winter annual will soon form small reddish flowers to develop seeds for next year's crop.

Right: Oxalis (*Oxalis stricta* L.). This perennial has small yellow flowers.



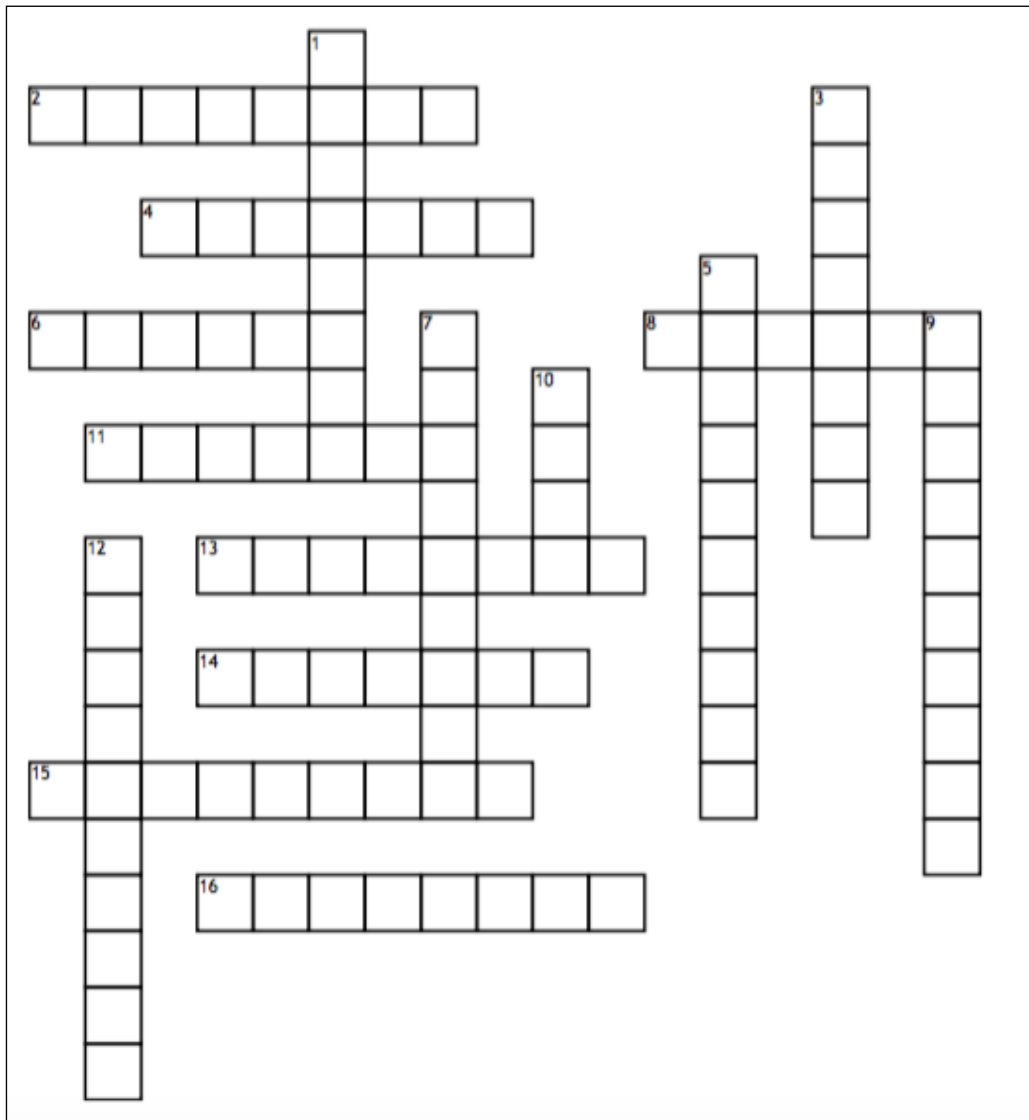
Left: Wild Geranium (*Geranium carolinianum* L.) A winter annual that will soon be forming pink to purplish flowers.

Right: Shiny Cudweed (*Gnaphalium americanum* Mill.) A winter or summer annual that seems to appear throughout the year.

All Photos : Mike Burba



February Crossword Puzzle



Across

2. Citrus _____ Disease
4. The technique of pruning and training a shrub into a formal shape
6. A tree or landscape in miniature
8. Not the botanical name
11. _____ matter is any material originating from something that had life at one time.
13. Moisture in the air
14. A thick central root that may penetrate deeply into the soil.
15. A plant's resistance to cold temperatures
16. Spring flowering bulb

Down

1. A plant propagation method
3. Medium used to hold water
5. Any shrub planted near house walls is a plant
7. Tree that loses all its leaves
9. To set out plants or shrubs randomly
10. To produce seeds or flowers prematurely.
12. Opposite of woody

Where can I find more information?

The UF/IFAS Extension Solutions for Your Life website and Gardening Solutions website offer online material, including pre-recorded webinars and videos, that can be accessed at your convenience.

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/lawn-and-garden/>

<https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/>

In addition, we have our Master Gardener webinar page and our Gardening in the Panhandle web archives full of educational content.

<https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/mastergardener/volunteers/education/webinars.html>

<http://nwdistrict.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/>

For a listing of local offices visit

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/find-your-local-office/>

Follow us on Facebook for updates

<https://www.facebook.com/SRCExtension/> Santa Rosa County Extension FB page:

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

The Santa Rosa County residential horticulture agent, Josh Criss can be reached at 850-623-3868.



Glacier National Park

Photo : Lois Scott, SRCMGV