

Winter 2021, Issue 16

In this Issue

Title	Page
Gardening Tips.....	1
Health and Wellness.....	2
Winter Lawn Care.....	3
Monarchs.....	4
Cold Damage.....	5
All American Selections™.....	6



**Veggie Garden**

Bulbing onions, lettuce, arugula, spinach and more thrive this time of year. For a complete list, download the North FL Gardening Calendar: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/EP/EP45100.pdf> or The Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/vh021>

**Gardening Tips from UF/IFAS Extension  
St. Johns County Horticulture Department**

Celebrate Florida Arbor Day on January 15, by planting a new tree in your landscape. Not sure what to choose? This UF/IFAS site provides help selecting trees for urban and suburban landscapes: <https://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/woody/selection.shtml>

Due to the pandemic, our Master Gardener Volunteer program is postponing our annual Arbor Day tree giveaway until next year.

In addition to planting trees, these cooler months are an ideal time to plant cool season edibles such as broccoli, kale, carrots, and lettuce; and ornamental annuals such as pansies, violas, petunias and snapdragons. It's also a great time to plant fruit trees so their roots have time to develop before the warm, dry spring months.

Keep an eye on the weather this time of year for freezes and frosts. For more information read the article on page 5, or visit my blog at <http://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/stjohnsco/2018/01/31/freeze-factors/>

**Wishing you a Healthy and Happy 2021!**



# Take a Hike

Terra Freeman, Urban and  
Commercial Horticulture  
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St. Johns County

Incorporating nature or “greenspace” into your daily routine can improve your overall quality of life.

Greenspace is a catch-all term to describe natural or maintained environmental areas such as gardens, urban parks, nature preserves, or other wilderness environments. Experiencing nature can be as simple as hiking at a local park or forest, strolling through the gardens at our Extension center, or even just walking a tree-lined path in your neighborhood.

It should come as no surprise that our bodies react positively to natural settings. Over the course of evolution, our species has spent 99.9% of time living in the natural environment and less than 0.01% in modern surroundings. “The gap between natural settings, for which our physiological functions are adapted, and the highly urbanized and artificial settings that we inhabit is a contributing cause of the ‘stress state’ in modern people” (Song, Ikei, and Miyazaki).

The physiological and psychological effects of nature therapy is supported by growing scientific evidence. Studies have measured the healing effects of nature to include mood enhancement, reduced ADHD symptoms, healthier birth weight in babies, reduced stress and anxiety, improved mental health for seniors, and faster healing in hospitals, to name a few. There is plenty of evidence to support the positive relationship between mental health and well-being and levels of greenspace in neighborhoods. “Individuals have less mental distress, less anxiety and depression, greater well-being and healthier cortisol profiles when living in urban areas with more greenspace compared with less greenspace. Large differences in disease prevalence are reported when comparing residents of very green and less green settings, even after controlling for socioeconomic status” (Maas *et al*, 2009). Physical activity partially contributes to the positive correlation between mental health and well-being and neighborhood greenspace. “People who use the natural environment for physical activity at least once a week have about half the risk of poor mental health compared with those who do not do so; and

each extra weekly use of the natural environment for physical activity reduces the risk of poor mental health by a further 6%” (Mitchell, 2013). Blue spaces such as oceans, rivers, and lakes impart similar effects.

Research about the economic benefits of nature’s contribution to health and wellness is fairly new, although preliminary valuations can be found in this publication on the health and financial benefits of nearby nature: [https://www.naturewithin.info/New/2016.11.Economic Benefits of Nature in Cities.KWolf.pdf](https://www.naturewithin.info/New/2016.11.Economic%20Benefits%20of%20Nature%20in%20Cities.KWolf.pdf).

While time in nature doesn’t cure all ills, it can support opportunities for better physical and mental health while providing respite from life’s stressors. Anyone who regularly spends time in nature does not need scientific evidence to be convinced of the benefits, although it can inspire motivation to have one’s experience validated by science. If you haven’t been getting your regular dose of vitamin ‘N’ these days, I hope this article has inspired you to go outside and enjoy the gifts of health and wellness nature has to offer. Perhaps you can use some of the information presented to convince friends and family members to join you on your next outdoor excursion. Our gardens are open to the public to walk around, observe, relax and rejuvenate in daily from dawn to dusk. I hope to see you out there!

## References:

Chorong Song, Harumi Ikei, and Yoshifumi Miyazaki. Physiological Effects of Nature Therapy: A Review of the Research in Japan. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4997467/>

Jo Barton and Mike Rogerson. The importance of greenspace for mental health: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5663018/>

Kathleen Wolf, PH.D. Nature’s Riches: The Health and Financial Benefits of Nearby Nature: [https://www.naturewithin.info/New/2016.11.Economic Benefits of Nature in Cities.KWolf.pdf](https://www.naturewithin.info/New/2016.11.Economic%20Benefits%20of%20Nature%20in%20Cities.KWolf.pdf)

# Winter Lawn Care Tips

Carol O'Hagan,  
Master Gardener Volunteer  
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The beautiful lawn you work so hard on has turned brown. What have you done wrong? Probably nothing. Winter is a period of dormancy and slow growth for our warm season turfgrasses, and it is normal for lawns to stay green or turn brown during this time in North and Central Florida. So, what can you do to help your lawn during this time?

- First DO NOT fertilize your lawn from late September to mid-April. Fertilizing after a freeze will harm your lawn more than help it. It can cause new growth, which will be less cold tolerant and create more of a problem.
- Although mowing will be greatly reduced during this time, continue to keep mowing height high to enhance the stress tolerance of your turfgrass. Most St. Augustine and Bahia grasses should be mown between 3.5 and 4 inches; with centipede and zoysia from 2 to 2.5 inches.
- If freezing temperatures cause your lawn to turn brown, just wait for the days to become longer and temperatures to warm up in the spring, when your lawn should green back up.
- Do not apply weed and feed for preemergent weed control.
- Irrigation can be cut back to every other week in Central Florida or even every three to four weeks in North Florida.

- What if you just aren't sure if your lawn is dormant or dead? Here's something you can try. Cut some plugs from your lawn- including roots and shoots. Plant them in a pot of soil. Put the pot in a warm spot and see if the plugs begin to grow. If they grow, you know the lawn is just dormant.
- Finally, what to do if indeed your lawn did die in spots? Remove the dead vegetation, and replace those areas with sod or plugs. Try to do this before spring weeds begin to take hold as they will head to the weaker parts of the lawn first. Follow these tips to enjoy less labor-intensive winter lawn maintenance and you should be rewarded with a healthy lawn in the spring.

Resources: <https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/lawns/lawn-care/your-florida-lawn-in-winter.html>



Photo credit: <http://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/sumterco/2018/02/01/freeze-damage-in-my-lawn-is-it-dead/>

# *Protection Precluded for Imperiled Monarchs*

Dianne Battle,  
Master Gardener Volunteer  
UF/IFAS Extension SJC

On December 15, after a 6-year study on whether the monarch butterfly [warrants protection](#) under the [Endangered Species Act \(ESA\)](#), the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) issued its finding. It concluded that [the species deserves protection](#), but that it could not list it as an "endangered" or "threatened" species because it and the government organizations charged with providing such protections do not have the resources to do so. The USFWS already has identified 161 other species as being higher priorities for protection. Instead, the butterfly has been listed as "[warranted but precluded](#)". USFWS will review monarch data next year to determine its priority for protection.

The major threats to monarchs are climate change, pesticides, and loss of habitat. Human construction reduces habitat. Climate change increases extreme weather events such as California's historic wildfires, devastating droughts in Texas, and hurricanes, all of which degrade monarch habitat. Reducing the causes of global warming can benefit ourselves and imperiled animals and plants.

[Studies](#) have shown that pesticides use can have harmful effects on broad classes of insects not targeted by them. Last January the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) [released interim decisions](#) on insecticides containing neonicotinoids because of their harmful effects on honey bees. Studies to determine neonicotinoid effects on monarch populations are being conducted. The Florida Department of Agriculture and UF/IFAS have partnered with other stakeholders to ensure that [best agricultural management practices](#) do not harm beneficial pollinators. You can do your part to protect monarchs by using [natural](#)

[methods of insect control](#), such as physical and cultural control. If you do use pesticides, [read the label](#) and use them as directed to reduce killing beneficial insects.

Citizens have many important roles to play in protecting and advocating for this iconic butterfly while USFWS continues to study it. [Creating pollinator habitat](#), participating in citizen and community science projects such as butterfly counts, advocating for pollinators, and learning more about them all work for the monarch's benefit. Get involved with organizations such as [Monarch Joint Venture](#) to help advocate. Use the resources of your local [UF/IFAS extension service](#) to help your pollinator garden grow. Learn more about butterflies by taking a trip to the [Florida Museum of Natural History](#). By protecting today's monarchs, you'll ensure their future generations will be around to enchant our own generations.



Photo credit: Carolyn Warren

# Caring for Cold-Damaged Landscape Plants: From Frosted to Flourishing

Melissa Strohming,   
Master Gardener Volunteer,   
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I believe we've already had more cold this winter than we had in the last two winters combined. I am definitely seeing more cold damage to the local landscape than I have in the last few years. And we still have about 2 months left before the danger of frost has passed! As disheartening as this may be, do not despair.

Just like everything else in the garden, this frosty situation is temporary. With some patience and proper handling, your landscape can flourish again.

Until the risk of frost is over, try to prevent further damage. Cover your plants before a freeze, securing the cover all the way to the ground to trap the radiant heat. Trunks of grafted trees may be covered with pipe wrap and other plants can be covered with sheets or cardboard. Make sure to remove the covers after the freeze is over. Continue to water the soil around the plants as it helps them thaw. Do not apply fertilizer at this time. Do not prune your plants as the damaged parts can actually protect and insulate the undamaged parts. You may, however, remove dead leaves and flowers as they appear after the frost to prevent disease. Mostly, though, you should just watch and wait.

When the weather is safe from frost, watch for signs



of new growth to be sure of where to prune your damaged plants. Scratch the stem or bark to see if the tissue underneath is brown (dead) or green (alive). Don't prune much in the fall because the plant may not fully recover in time for the next

frosty season. Fertilize according to the IFAS recommendations for any given plant to help it "heal". Don't over fertilize or fertilize too late in the year.

After a while, it is most important to make note of which plants have been damaged severely or killed and which ones seem okay and bounced back. I had a hibiscus that would freeze to the ground every year, then get as tall as my house, bushy and blooming, when it grew back each time. Some plants can acclimate, some can't. Some need to be planted in different or more protected areas. Some do not belong in your garden at all. Whatever the case may be, use your frosty experience as a learning opportunity to enhance the flourishing, "Florida Friendly" aspect of your landscape.

For more information, see <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/mg025>



# Take Advantage of the Cooler Weather

Shirley Barber,  
Master Gardener,  
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St. Johns County

Cooler weather has arrived! During this time, you can rest on your laurels and take a break from the garden, or you can make use of what can be the most productive time in the garden.

Check out the new seed catalogs where you might find your next favorite flower. You have plenty of time to seed spring flowers and vegetables. Dreaming of a new vignette in your garden? Now is the time to get it started. Try your hand at other projects; such as, rebuilding tired garden beds in need of refurbishing; moving plants to more suitable locations; installing hardscaping; correcting drainage issues...the list goes on. So, don't miss the possibilities the cooler weather presents.

Consider adding some cool season color and edible plants to your landscape: snapdragon, petunia, dianthus, pansy, sweet alyssum, parsley, kale, fennel or Swiss chard...to name just a few.

Petunia 'Tidal Wave® Red Velour', the 2015 All-American Selections® (AAS) flower winner, played a starring role in the St. Johns County Extension Botanical Gardens for the last three years during the Spring months. This beauty quickly covered its allotted space and then romped over adjacent plants while strutting its gorgeous deep red velvety blooms. Living up to the Petunia Tidal Wave® series reputation, these vigorous trailing plants produce magnificent blooms slightly larger than 2 inches that recover quickly even after hard rains.

'Tidal Wave® Red Velour' is easy to grow from seed and deserves a place in your landscape. Plant in full to part sun in a well-drained area. Deadheading is not required as new blooms continuously pop up making this plant a carefree solution to cover an area quickly.



Petunia 'Tidal Wave® Red Velour', Photo by Shirley Barber