

Spring 2020, Issue 13

In this Issue

Title	Page
Master Gardener Training.....	1
Florida Friendly Landscaping™..	2
Lawn Care Tips.....	3
Master Gardener Volunteers.....	4
Mulch.....	5-6
All American Selections®.....	7

Veggie Garden

April is the time to plant many of your warm season crops, including Swiss chard, beans, squash, and tomatoes. 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>



St. Johns County Master Gardener Volunteer Program Applications

The Florida Master Gardener Volunteer (MGV) program is a volunteer training program designed to help University of Florida Cooperative Extension faculty disseminate research-based information about horticulture to the public.

UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County is accepting applicants for the 2020 MGV Training Program. Our program provides participants with 50 hours of horticulture training and requires 75 hours of volunteer service within the first year and 35 hours each subsequent year to maintain MGV status.

The deadline to apply is Sunday, May 31, and classes will be offered on Wednesdays, from August 12 to October 7.

Interested St. Johns County residents should contact Terra Freeman at terraf@ufl.edu for an application. I need the interested persons e-mail address—not their phone number—in order to provide an application via e-mail. I look forward to hearing from you!



For more information contact: UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County
Terra Freeman ▪ terraf@ufl.edu ▪ (904)209-0430 ▪ FAX (904)209-0431

Florida-Friendly Pest Management

Terra Freeman, Urban and
Commercial Horticulture
Agent, UF/IFAS Extension
St. Johns County

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the term “pest management”? I imagine many of you conjure up images of spraying a product or sprinkling granules over an unhealthy plant or lawn.



For those of you familiar with term “integrated pest management” or IPM, hopefully you imagined yourself utilizing preventative measures such as proper plant selection and placement, appropriate irrigation and fertilization, regular scouting for pests, encouraging beneficial insects, using clean pruners, providing air circulation for plants, etc...

Integrated pest management is a comprehensive approach that utilizes cultural, physical, and chemical controls to prevent, minimize, and treat pests starting with the least toxic method. A healthy, thriving plant can fend off pests more easily than a sickly one.

In addition to proper cultural methods, plants will benefit from regular scouting, or monitoring, for pests. This enables you to catch pests early on before they have a chance to spread. Common pests in our Florida landscapes include scales, mealybugs, aphids, thrips, whiteflies, mites, caterpillars and chinch bugs. When scouting, observe for beneficial insects that prey on pests for natural pest control. Common beneficial insects include lacewings and their larvae, ladybugs and

larvae, spiders, assassin bugs, parasitic flies (syrphid and tachinid flies) and parasitic wasps.

When you discover a pest problem, the first course of action should be to remove the insect or affected part of the plant and put in the trash (not compost bin). If the issue

is large enough to warrant use of a pesticide, start with the least toxic products, such as horticultural oils, insecticidal soaps, or microbials. Spot treat the affected area rather than broadcasting to the entire landscape. Be sure to read and follow the instructions carefully and remember that the label is the law. Use only on plants the product is labeled for.

Overwatering, overfertilizing and overhead irrigation are your plants worst nightmare! Avoid overhead irrigation as much as possible (other than lawn).

For a more comprehensive exploration of natural pest management methods, refer to the publication *Natural Products for Managing Landscape and Garden Pests in Florida*: <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/IN/IN19700.pdf>.

References:

Integrated Pest Management: <https://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/care/pests-and-diseases/pests/management/integrated-pest-management.html>

Spring into Lawn Care

Carol O'Hagan,
Master Gardener,
UF/IFAS Extension SJC

Spring has sprung, the grass has riz.....

See how pretty the birdies iz.

Ok- I'm a terrible poet but you get the idea – after a few months of dormancy your lawn is beginning to wake back up. It's time to get prepared for the long turf growing season ahead.

First – Check your lawn mower blades – make sure they are sharp. Dull blades tear leaf tips making them more susceptible to disease and less drought tolerant.

Second – speaking of drought, now is the time to calibrate your sprinkler system to make sure you are applying the correct amount of water to your lawn. Make sure the sprinkler heads are pointed in the correct directions and not on driveways or sidewalks where the water is not needed. It is best to water on an as needed basis, which means 30 to 50 percent of your lawn shows at least one of the three wilt signs symptoms: folding leaf blades, blue-gray color, and footprints remaining visible in grass. Watering is best done between 4 and 8 a.m., applying ½ to ¾ inches of water per zone.

Third – perform a soil test before fertilizing to be sure of your lawn's nutritional needs. Generally, fertilizer should be applied in the spring. In Florida we generally need low phosphorus fertilizers. Slow release nitrogen fertilizers are ideal as they release nutrients to the plants' roots over an extended period of time. Also be sure to select a fertilizer for your type of turf.

Finally -Scout for weeds and evaluate areas of your lawn that may not be doing well. Generally, a good way to prevent weeds is to keep a healthy lawn through proper fertilization, mowing, pest management and watering. If there is an area of your lawn that seems problematic you might consider replacing turf in that area with other plants that might thrive in that location, whether the problem is too much shade, low-lying damp areas, or something else.

Links for additional information:

[Lawn mower care](#)

[Calibrating your sprinkler system](#)

[Watering your lawn](#)

[Fertilizer Recommendations for Florida Turf](#)

[Weed Management Guide](#)



Master Gardener Volunteers Celebrate Bartram Trail Library

Dianne Battle,
Master Gardener,
UF/IFAS Extension SJC

Florida Arbor Day occurs in the third week of January. Master Gardeners from UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County celebrate it annually by giving away free native tree seedlings. The Bartram Trail library has been the site of one of these giveaways for years, and this year our Master Gardeners celebrated their library by planting a redbud seedling (*Cercis canadensis*) and two Hearts-a-Bustin' Strawberry Bushes (*Euonymus americanus*) on the library grounds.

Redbuds are known for their showy lavender flowers in spring, and while the "strawberry" bushes do not yield strawberries, the colorful berries are relished by birds each fall. Although the seedlings are currently too immature to produce these blooms and berries, we hope that in a few years the plants will provide patrons with an interesting visual display and birds with food. Since both species are native to this area, they should need minimal care. The librarians were very pleased with the new plantings and are looking forward to seeing them mature. Since the plants are visible from the library's children's area, youngsters will be able to watch them grow.

It's an undisputed fact that attractive landscaping, including trees and shrubs, increases curb appeal for potential home buyers and provides a spot of tranquility for owners. It also can provide shade, reduce utility bills, and diminish pollution by absorbing carbon dioxide. Native plants do all these things and they provide support for wildlife; for every native plant there is a native bird or pollinator that relies on it. Furthermore, native plants do not need extra fertilizing and are tolerant of changes in weather if they are planted in an appropriate spot.

According to a recent Gallup poll, going to the library is the most popular away-from-home activity across all age groups and geographic areas, beating out going to a movie or a sporting event. Cicero's observation, "If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need," is still accurate today. See what's going on at the Bartram Trail library, www.sjcpls.org/branches/bartram-trail-branch, to check out a book and the newest horticultural additions.



Master Gardeners Lisa Hethington, Doris Dowling, Cathy Rodgers, Dianne Battle, Doris Durham, and Library Branch Manager, Dan Markus, hold native tree seedlings planted at the library.

Photo by John Battle

This article was originally published in The CreekLine community newspaper, March 2020 edition. It is reprinted with permission.

Benefits of Mulch... What Plants Really Want

Danny Lippi

UF/IFAS Extension SJC Horticulture
Advisory Committee Member

ISA Board Certified Master Arborist
ISA Qualified Tree Risk Assessor

Nature has a wonderful way of replenishing nutrients that are lost from soils due to rain, erosion, oxidation, or the most common method - human interference. The way nature replenishes its lost nutrients and rebuilds its damaged soil structure is by adding organic matter. The two most beneficial forms of **soil organic matter (SOM)** are mulch and roots. When leaves fall, when branches break, when bugs die, they all release their organic constituents back into the soil. All the nitrogen, sugars, starches, carbon, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, iron, boron, etc. are released and cycled back into the soil. If the SOM is recalcitrant (not readily available), then soil microorganisms such as bacteria and fungi begin to work their enzymatic magic and break down organic products into readily available components that are ready for uptake by plants. As roots from trees, grasses, or any other plant begin to wind their way through soils, a portion will die and that too will become a rich source of SOM.

Mulch is a wonderful addition to soil. It will create a home for microorganisms that will break down the mulch, create a rich top soil that will invite root growth, make all your plants

healthier, and more often than not, it's free! Lawn clippings, raked up leaves, ground up tree parts, compost, and many other forms of potential soil organic matter exist that are frequently thrown away.

Stay away from cedar and cypress mulch. These products do not prevent pests, or provide any other benefit often touted by companies selling these products at a premium. They will however cause the unnecessary loss of more and more cedar and cypress trees. Dyed wood chips are good for only one thing - adhering to HOA landscaping codes. They do not provide ecological benefits, but they sure look fancy.

Stay away from "deep root" injections, "deep soil" feeding, liquid injections, fertilizer stakes, or any other fancy method of adding product to the soil. If it sounds like snake oil, that's because it is. All of

these methods are very ineffective, expensive, and do not enhance your soil. **SOM (soil organic matter) IS MULCH, plain and simple.** Lay it on top of your soil, mix it in, and add water. It's that simple. It's the way Mother Nature has been doing it for a very, very long time.





Benefits of Pine Needle Mulch

Phil Stambaugh,
SJC Resident

Pine needles make great mulch. Whether it is at Augusta National Golf Club or both of the courses at the World Golf Village, pine straw is the overwhelming choice around trees and shrubs.

“It’s very soothing to the eye and doesn’t conflict for attention with beautiful flowers,” said Renee Stambaugh, certified Florida Master Gardener. “Pine needles give a landscape a more finished, natural look.”

Among the many types of mulch, pine needles are an excellent choice for yards in this area. In addition to appearance, there are many practical reasons for using pine straw or pine needle mulch. These include:

Water conservation: Pine needles form a thick, protective mat during heavy rains. This allows moisture to penetrate the pine needles but prevents erosion, trapping water where it’s needed near surface roots. They also reduce rainwater runoff and make excellent mulch for hillsides.

Weed prevention: Like most mulches, a thick layer of pine needles suppresses weeds. Many weed seeds need light to germinate. Pine needles prevent such seeds from sprouting. They also prevent wind borne seeds from sprouting because they form a barrier between soil and seed.

Improves the soil: Pine needles decompose and add organic material to the soil. They also aerate the soil

and improve drainage as they decompose. Pine straw mulch may also help regulate the soil temperature. Just keeping the soil a few degrees above freezing for a few days longer in the winter can actually extend the growing season. And unlike bark mulches, it does not add excessive minerals to the soil. Some hardwood mulches can add too much calcium and other minerals to the soil.

Ecologically sound: Pine trees shed their needles annually, forming a thick carpet on forest floors. To harvest and create pine straw mulch, the needles are simply raked or scooped up, processed, bagged and sold. Trees do not need to be cut down or put through a chipper as is done to make hardwood mulch, pine bark nuggets or other wood chips. Trees can continue to grow for many years to come. The trees may eventually be harvested, but foresters get more years of growth from them. Pine mulch also beats down slower than other mulches, so your investment lasts longer than typical hardwood or bark mulches.

“Pine straw is symbolic of a southern landscape to many and this Florida-friendly, renewable mulch offers more benefits than many other mulches,” said Terra Freeman, Urban and Commercial Horticulture Extension Agent for St. Johns County.

In our environment, it is clear that using pine straw is a wise decision and works perfectly for home gardens and professionally landscaped gardens alike.



Color in the Shade

**Shirley Barber,
Master Gardener,
UF/IFAS Extension
St. Johns County**

As we move into the warm Summer months our landscapes must tolerate heat, humidity, drought and the rainy season. We rely on flowering plants to cool our spirits and add cheerful highlights in the garden. So often it is a challenge to add color to shady areas in the garden. Typically, one thinks of begonias, caladiums and impatiens. Don't underestimate the value of foliage plants that will offer a diversity of form, texture and color to your garden.

No plant does it better than coleus with its stunning leaves in shades of pink, red, burgundy, copper, green and gold. These beautiful plants carry their non-stop color long past any flowering plant. Some coleus leaves display solid colors, while others have complex and fascinating patterns. Different shapes and textures of leaves, along with various growth habits offer so many design and plant combination possibilities.



Coleus can be grown in most types of soil and do quite well in containers with moist well-drained growing medium. Plant in shade or dappled sun. Some varieties were created for sun; however, afternoon shade will prevent wilting in the heat. Coleus are considered annuals as they don't tolerate frost. Most grow to 3 feet tall; however, there are dwarf and trailing varieties.

Pinch back growing tips to encourage branching and remove flowers as they appear. Be sure to take cuttings from your favorite coleus before cold weather arrives. This will ensure you will have plenty of coleus for future gardens and to share with friends.

All-American Selections® (AAS) named their first coleus as an AAS 2020 Winner with the introduction of Main Street Beale Street. This variety has beautiful deep red foliage on a bushy 30-inch plant and can be grown in sun without losing its rich color.

Visit the shade gardens planted along the walkway through mature Crape Myrtles in the Botanical Gardens at St. Johns County Extension Center. This Crape Allée will inspire you with its luscious mix of colors, textures and shapes, where there is no absence of color.

