

Green Garden News

Preparing Your Plants for Cold Weather

In North Florida, weather is hard to predict. However, on average, the first killing frost for our area is usually during late November to early December.

So, it's not too early to begin preparing our landscapes for the effects of cold weather when and if the freezes come our way. It's better to prepare and be safe versus sorry.

Many of the plants we have in our landscapes in Northwest Florida can be damaged by cold weather. Some of this damage can be reduced or possibly prevented when the plants are maintained correctly. There are some things you can do now to prevent some winter injury in your landscape.

First, you should strive to keep your landscape plants healthy. This includes trees, shrubs and turf. Avoid letting the plants become stressed from lack of water, poor fertility, etc. When plants are weakened, they may be more susceptible to disease and insect attack. This weakened condition may make them less likely to survive the winter months.

For most trees, shrubs and warm-season turf grasses, it's best to avoid fertilizing with a high-nitrogen fertilizer too late in the year. Generally it is best to avoid using a high-nitrogen fertilizer any later than September. Nitrogen can force the plant to begin growing too late in the year.

That new tender growth is very susceptible to cold injury. Because pruning will also cause plants to produce new

growth, it is best to avoid pruning most trees and shrubs during the fall. Usually a few weeks after pruning, a plant will begin producing new growth. This new growth is subject to cold injury.

Two to three inches of mulch, such as fall leaves or pine straw, over the plant's roots will also help. This may not help in extreme hard freezes, but it may delay the freezing of the soil, allowing the plants to continue to draw up the water they need.

In addition, a moist soil traps more of the sun's energy and releases this energy at night, providing some warmth for the plants. Use a garden hose to direct the water to the base of the plant and try not to wet the foliage.

Plants that are exposed to high winds may be protected from cold injury with some kind of windbreak. The purpose of a windbreak is to prevent the cold winds, which have a drying effect on plants, from hitting the plants.

Here again it is questionable whether or not windbreaks are beneficial in hard freezes. There is strong evidence, though, that plants in protected areas survive extreme hard freezes.

During mild freezes, covering tender plants with a sheet or blanket may spare them from injury.

(Continued on page 6)

Volume 4, Issue 11

November 2006

Inside this issue:

November Garden Tips	2
Africanized honey bees-what's the buzz	3
Upcoming Events	4
Plant of the Month: Coreopsis	4
Questions & Answers	5

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Employment Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function without regard to race, color, age, handicap or national origin.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA, IFAS, FLORIDA A.&M. UNIVERSITY COOPERATIVE EXTENSION PROGRAM, AND BOARDS OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COOPERATING

The use of trade names is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product names.



November Garden Tips

Flowers

- Cool season flowers which can be planted now include: carnation, foxglove, pansy, petunia, snapdragon, Shasta daisy, ornamental kale and ornamental cabbage.
- Prepare to move potted tropical and subtropical plants inside. Cold sensitive patio plants like schefflera and philodendrons should not be exposed to 40°F nights. Temperatures in the 40's and even 50's, though they might not result in frost-like damage, can cause long-term problems.
- Buy spring bulbs such as tulips and refrigerate them for 8 weeks.
- When mums have finished blooming, prune back to 3 inches above the ground.

Trees and Shrubs

- Now is a great time to plant ornamental trees and shrubs.
- Locate and order fruit trees so that they can be planted in December.
- Apply horticultural oil if scales, mites, and other plant sucking insects have been a problem on woody ornamentals.
- Plant camellias later in the month.
- Looking for fall color in the landscape? This is the time of year to identify local plants that yield the best fall leaf color. Take a look around and see what's showing up well this fall. Some to consider for planting include: black gum, hickory, dogwood, crape myrtle, sweetgum, oakleaf hydrangea and red maple.
- Avoid heavy pruning jobs this late in the year.
- This is one of the most ideal times for transplanting trees and shrubs.
- Magnolia and dogwood seeds can be harvested and planted as soon as they are ripe. Remove the outer pulp and plant them immediately, before they dry out.

Fruits and Nuts

- Plant strawberries before November 15. Recommended varieties for North Florida include: Florida 90, Chandler, Dover, Florida Belle, Oso Grande, Sweet Charlie and Selva.

Vegetable Garden

- Start winter vegetables by planting beets, broccoli, brussel sprouts, cabbage, carrots, Chinese cabbage, collards, kale, kohlrabi, leeks, lettuce, mustards, onions, parsley, radish and spinach.
- Harvest gourds, butternut squash, pumpkins and other curcurbits as the vines begin to die. Clip, don't break about 2 inches of stem with each fruit.

Lawns

- In dry weather, water the lawn to keep it healthy during the winter.
- If desired, sow annual rye grass at the beginning of the month for a green lawn through the winter.
- Fertilize annual rye grass with a complete fertilizer after it has been mowed a few times. Apply at the rate of ½ lb of nitrogen per 1000 sqft.
- Allow the permanent lawn (centipede and St. Augustine, in particular) to gradually go dormant by withholding fertilizer.

Prepare your equipment for winter storage

Some simple and easy winter storage preparation will ensure that lawn equipment will perform when needed next spring.

- A thorough cleaning of equipment to remove dirt, grass clippings, etc. will prevent rust and corrosion and will reveal any damaged or worn parts that may need replacing.
- Changing the oil, cleaning the air filter, and even replacing the spark plug on gasoline engines before storage will have them ready to go when needed.
- If these engines will not be run for at least two months it is recommended that the fuel tank be drained and the engine run until all fuel is out of the carburetor. A couple of alternative options is to add a gasoline stabilizer (Sta-Bil) to the tank to prevent the gas from separating and leaving gum and varnish deposits to clog the fuel system, or simply put a small amount of fresh fuel in the tank and run the engines for about ten minutes each month.

Africanized honey bees—what's the buzz

Africanized honey bees (AHB) have made their way into the state of Florida. AHBs breed and compete with the European strains of honey bees that normally inhabit our state. Because Florida's AHB population is increasing, it is important to become familiar with AHBs and their behavior.

Although they are often referred to as *killer bees*, the correct term is *Africanized honey bees*. Another common mistake is describing them as *aggressive*. Their behavior is actually *defensive*—they react to human invasion of their environment and defend themselves when necessary. Attacks occur when people are too close to a nesting colony of AHBs. The AHBs do not sit around and plot attacks on humans.

Most people probably first hear about Africanized honey bees via B-grade movies such as "Killer Bees" (1974) and "The Swarm" (1978). Labeling AHBs as aggressive killers can provoke unjustified fear and hysteria.

Fortunately, you do not have to learn about Africanized honey bees from bad horror movies or rumors on the Internet. These tips from the Florida IPM Office can help you educate and protect yourself and your family.

Avoiding AHBs & Protecting Yourself

'Bee' aware of common AHB nesting sites! These sites include: abandoned vehicles, empty containers, places with holes, fences, lumber piles, manholes, water meters, utility infrastructures, old tires, trees, garages, outbuildings, sheds, walls, chimneys and crawl spaces under houses or buildings

How can I prevent AHBs from building nests in my yard or house?

- In order to 'bee-proof' a building, remove all potential nesting sites.
- From March - July (swarming season), inspect your property weekly for unusual bee activity.
- Seal all gaps larger than 1/8-inch in walls and around chimneys and plumbing.
- Install screens made of 1/8-inch hardware cloth over other openings, such as rain spouts, vents, cavities of trees and fence posts, water meters, utility boxes, etc.

(Note: Exclusion of entry points is a principle of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and will also keep out other unwanted pests.)

What should I do if I get stung by AHBs?

If you are stung by any type of bee, do not stay in one place and swat the bees. Remember, AHBs are trying to defend their nest. When a stinging event happens, you are too close to the nest, and you need to leave the area immediately. If you stand still, the bees may become more agitated. Cover your nose and mouth with your shirt as you run. This restricts bee access to your airways.

Furthermore, do not hide in thick underbrush or water. It may take the bees thirty minutes or longer to leave an area! Finally, seek shelter in a building or vehicle. Some bees will probably enter the shelter with you, but not as many as will remain outside.

If you witness an attack, do not go to the victim and try to help. It is better to stand at a safe distance and yell to the person to leave the area as quickly as possible.

(Note: Africanized honey bees will attack dark colors, going for eyes, nose, and mouth. Some estimates say that it will take about five stings per pound to kill a person; other estimates are higher.)

Don't Worry, 'Bee' Happy

Africanized honey bees can be frightening. You should respect them, but remember that their "killer bee" image comes from rumors and sci-fi movies, not from facts.

Although the AHB populations are generally more defensive, European bees also display defensive behavior, though at a much reduced level. The European honey bees (EHBs) that beekeepers work with have been bred for docility over hundreds of years.

In South America, where AHB populations have taken over, pollination and honey production experienced a slight dip during the transition period between EHB/AHB hybridization. However, countries in South and Central America are now exporting honey again, and AHBs are being selectively bred to produce more docile bees.

—www.solutionsforyourlife.com

Upcoming Events

Every Tuesday (except November 21): *Plant Diagnostic Clinic.* This free clinic is open to the public from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Tuesdays at the South Santa Rosa Service Center at 5819 Gulf Breeze Pkwy.

November 9, 2006: *Limited Commercial Landscape Maintenance Pesticide License training.* A six-hour review course will be offered followed by the State Exam. Pesticide Applicator CEU's are also available. For more information, contact the Santa Rosa County Extension Office at 850-623-3868.

November 10, 2006: Extension Office closed

November 23 and 24, 2006: Extension Office closed

Other Local Gardening Events

November 2: Bonsai Club meeting, Gulf Breeze Library 7pm (meets first Thursday of the month except July)

November 11: African Violet Society, 9:30 am, First Presbyterian Church on Gregory St. in the activity center.

November 14: Rose Society meeting, Garden Center, 7pm (meets second Tuesday of the month)

November 16-18: Pensacola Federation of Garden Clubs Festival Of Trees and Holiday Bazaar, Garden Center, Pensacola.

November 20: Pensacola Organic Gardener's Club, Catholic High School cafeteria, 7pm (meets third Monday of the month).

November 21: Camellia Club meeting, Garden Center, 1850 N. 9th avenue, 7 pm (meets third

For persons with disabilities requiring special accommodations, please contact the SRC Extension Office at least 5 working days prior to the program so that proper consideration may be given to the request.
(850) 623-3868

Plant of the month: *Coreopsis*

The genus *Coreopsis* is Florida's State wildflower. The *Coreopsis* species are commonly referred to as tickseeds because the flat small fruit is ovalish to round and has two short spines that give it a buglike appearance. Tickseed flowers generally have eight showy ray flowers ("petals") that are usually toothed at their ends. All tickseeds in Florida, except Swamp Tickseed, have yellow ray flowers.

Coreopsis lanceolata, lanceleaf coreopsis, is an evergreen to semi-evergreen perennial that is one of 13 native coreopsis species found in Florida. It primarily occurs in north Florida, but has been observed as far south as Volusia County. Seed from commercial sources has been planted along roadways, although native populations are also found on roadsides.



Lanceleaf coreopsis grows best in full sun in slightly moist, well-drained soil. Established plants will tolerate some short-term dry periods. It is not very tolerant of excessive water. If you wish to fertilize, use a low rate of a controlled-release fertilizer.

Tolerance to occasional freezes and frosts as low as the mid-20s has been observed for both the common garden variety and the Florida ecotype.

Direct seeding into a garden or meadow can be done from October through January. Seed should be planted no deeper than 1/8 inch in a firm seedbed. During abnormally dry winters, seedbeds should be irrigated occasionally.

For more information on the lanceleaf coreopsis, visit <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/EP058>.

Questions and Answers

Q: I'm seeing lots of colorful berries around. How do I know if they are toxic?

A: With the change of the season, comes the ripening of colorful berries on many landscape and wild plants. Some of these berries are poisonous.

Always caution children about the danger of eating unfamiliar berries. Unless you absolutely know the berry is edible—do not eat an unfamiliar berry.

Even some of the more familiar plants have berries that are toxic to some degree. Following are a few that might surprise you:

- Lantana - This is a very popular summer flowering perennial plant. All parts, including the green berries are extremely toxic. Poisonings have been reported in Florida. Some of the new cultivated varieties appear to bear very few, if any berries.
- Elderberry - Raw fruit, if eaten in moderate quantities has caused nausea.
- Pokeweed - Can cause severe poisoning in humans. All parts of the plant contain saponins, oxalates, and phytolacine (an alkaloid). However, the roots and seeds contain the highest concentrations of these toxins.

Remember that many plants can have a negative effect on our pets. For a list of toxic plants, visit http://www.aspc.org/site/PageServer?pagename=pro_apcc_toxicplants

Q: My citrus tree leaves are all distorted and silvery looking. What's causing it.

A: Probably the most common problem with citrus right now are distorted leaves. Some recognize there are tunnels in the leaves too. This is the citrus leaf miner.

The pest came into the country about 10 years ago and spread quickly



throughout the state. The adult insect is a moth whose larva stage tunnels within the leaves causing all the damage and concern. At first entomologists thought this might ruin citrus production, but the trees proved tough and resilient to the attacks.

Though you might not like the curled and crinkled looks, the citrus leaf miner can probably be ignored. It does not seem to cause that much harm. If you do need a control, natural oil sprays found at garden centers can help if applied when the growth just begins.

Q: My tree has lots of gray, crusty stuff on it. What is it?

A: Gardeners see lots of lichens on their plants, and they can look pretty scary. Actually, if you don't have some lichens in the landscape, your yard is probably not normal.

Some think lichens are a fungus, and they are sort of right. Others think they are some terrible disease, and this is totally wrong. Lichens, which take many forms in Florida landscapes, are composed of a fungus and algae living together, but they cause no harm to the plants.

Lichens can be gray, reddish, yellow or a blend of colors. Some lie relatively flat against the stems and trunks, and others take on a leafy appearance. Lichens can build up quite heavy on plants, and this is when you may suspect some problems. But lichens take nothing from plants.

Lichens are common growths on the limbs and trunks of many trees and shrubs. Some lichen growth is normal. But when the buildup becomes excessive, you may need to check the health and vigor of the plants. Lichens use the plants only as a place to grow. They take water and nutrients from the air.

When lichens are growing too well and the plants are declining, it's likely some other problem. Check for adequate water, nutrients and other cultural or pest problems that could affect the plant vigor. Believe me, lichens are not the problem, and don't need control.

Preparing for cold weather

(Continued from page 1)

For these coverings to be effective, they must cover the plants completely, making certain that the covering goes all the way to the ground and that the sides are held down with soil, brick or stone. The covering will trap heat from the soil and hold it during the night.

One word of caution: The covering should be removed when the temperatures rise above freezing the next day. The reason for this is to prevent the plant's dormancy from being broken, making it more susceptible to cold damage.

Plastic coverings, on the other hand, aren't recommended because they offer very little protection from freezing temperatures and because they allow a rapid temperature buildup under the cover when the sun rises. The high temperature may cause the frozen plants to thaw out too quickly, causing severe injury to the trunk and stems.

—by *Larry Williams, Extension horticulture agent, Okaloosa County*



Santa Rosa County Extension Service

6263 Dogwood Drive
Milton, FL. 32570-3500

Newsletter compiled by:

Theresa Friday
Extension Agent I
Environmental Horticulture
Phone: 850-623-3868
E-mail: theresaf@co.santa-rosa.fl.us
Website: <http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/extension/horticulture.html>

**SANTA ROSA COUNTY EXTENSION SERVICE
6263 DOGWOOD DRIVE
MILTON, FL 32570-3500**

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION
US POSTAGE PAID
MILTON, FL
PERMIT NO. 68