

# Green Garden News

## Pruning Trees

While it may seem that there is not much to be done in the yard this time of year, it is an excellent time to prune trees. Trees are generally better at dealing with pruning injuries this time of year and on deciduous trees it is easier to see the form of the tree without the leaves.

You may have pruned trees in the past, but as I drive around town I notice that non-professional pruning is often done with many errors that make it harder for a tree to recover. Also, even if you don't plan to prune the trees yourself it is good to know the basics to make sure the professional you hire is up to date on how to correctly prune a tree.

The first thing we should consider is... do we need to prune? Reasons to prune include removal of dead branches, removal of crowded or rubbing limbs, and/or to eliminate hazards. Trees also are pruned to increase light penetration to the ground so that lower level plants like grass will receive more sun and grow better. For grass this is only a temporary fix and it is recommended that shady areas be used as beds instead of grass lawn.

When pruning off branches it is good to remember that the foliage of a tree is there to capture energy from the sun. This energy is then used to make food for the tree. If you cut off

branches, the tree has fewer leaves to manufacture food for itself. Cut enough foliage off a tree and over time it will starve to death. This is why you should never prune more than ¼ of a tree's live branches at any one time.

If we find we have reasons to prune then it is best if we remember that pruning is an injury to the tree and that trees don't react to injuries the same way people do. While this may sound obvious, much of the logic used to prune trees in the past was done with that very assumption.

With this in mind, the big concept is that trees don't heal. Instead, injured trees compartmentalize or wall off the injured area and then grow around it. This walling off only occurs at three areas. Scientifically these are the growth rings, cells called rays and finally, the one most important to pruning, the branch collar. The injured area won't grow back, but if pruning is done correctly the tree will grow around the injured area. Thus a pruning cut's location is critical to a tree's response in growth and wound closure. To prune properly, pruning cuts should be made just outside the branch collar. The branch collar is the swollen part where the branch connects to a larger branch or the trunk of a tree. Leaving the branch

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## Promising New Evergreen Magnolia Species for the Gulf Coast

Since 2000, individual plants of over 120 members of the Magnolia Family have been planted in a demonstration site at the University of Florida/IFAS North Florida Research and Education Center in Quincy. These plants are being screened for growth, ornamental characteristics, pest susceptibility, maintenance needs and overall adaptability to North Florida and the Gulf Coast.

Several of the evergreen species in this planting are notable for flowering and form and deserve more widespread use (Table 1).

*Magnolia maudiae* has long been lauded for its early spring display of 5 – 6 inch white flowers contrasting with blue-green foliage on a small, upright tree. *Magnolia foveolata* is similar to *M. maudiae* in having gray-green foliage and 5-inch white flowers in early spring. *Magnolia martinii* has developed an attractive, compact, rounded crown of glossy, dark green leaves but has yet to flower. *Magnolia maudiae* var. *platypetala* is the most impressive plant of this group due to its 4 – 6 inch white flowers and 28 weeks

of flowering in 2003. In addition, this tree has dark green leaves, fast growth and a narrow, upright form. Of the three forms of Banana Shrub in the planting, *Magnolia figo* var. *skinneriana* has proven to be superior in form and flowering.

Unlike all the previous species, *Magnolia tamaulipana* is from northern Mexico rather than Asia. Its form resembles that of *Magnolia grandiflora* but *M. tamaulipana* foliage is a dull, medium green and flowers are slightly smaller. American native evergreens, *Magnolia grandiflora* 'Little Gem' and *Magnolia virginiana* var. *australis*, are planted for comparison to the nonnative species.

All evergreen magnolias appear equally susceptible to magnolia scale. No other pests or diseases have affected these plants.

—by Gary W. Knox, Professor, NFREC

Table 1. Characteristics of promising evergreen Magnolia species planted at UF/IFAS NFREC in Quincy			2003			
Current Name	Former Name	Year Planted	Height (ft)	Width (ft)	Number of Weeks Flowering	Primary Dates of Flowering
Magnolia x foggii	Michelia x foggii	2000	10.9	7.3	3	Mar. 17-Mar. 24
Magnolia figo	Michelia figo	2000	5.2	4.3	5	Mar. 17-Apr. 14
Magnolia figo var. crassipes	Michelia crassipes	2002	3.2	4.8	0	
Magnolia figo var. skinneriana	Michelia skinneriana	2000	8.9	7.9	13	Mar.17-Apr.28 Nov. 24-Dec. 29
Magnolia foveolata	Michelia foveolata	1997 and 2001	13.1	5.9	14	Jan.6-Mar.10
Magnolia grandiflora "Little Gem"		2000	10.2	7.4	18	May 5-June 9, June 23-Aug 4
Magnolia martinii	Michelia martinii	2001	8.3	5.2	0	
Magnolia maudiae	Michelia maudiae	2000	11.1	9.1	4	Feb. 3-Feb. 24
Magnolia maudiae var. platypetala	Michelia platypetala	2000	14.8	6.8	28	Jan.6-Feb. 24 June 30-Aug.18 Sept.29-Nov. 10
Magnolia tamaulipana		2000	15.5	9.4	11	Apr.21-Apr.28 May 12-May 26 June 23-July 21
Magnolia tamaulipana 'Bronze Sentinel'		2001	11.8	5.7	0	
Magnolia virginiana 'Jim Wilson' Moonglow®		1998 and 2001	8.9	4.4	4	May 5-May 19
Magnolia virginiana var. australis		2001	5.7	2.4	0	

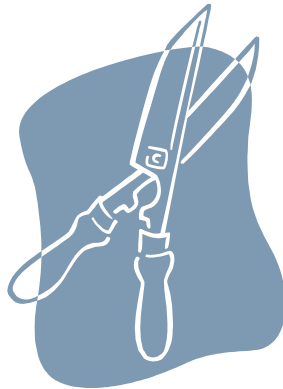
# February Tips

## Flowers

- Re-fertilize cool season flowerbeds, using a liquid or granular form of fertilizer. Be careful not to apply excessive amounts and keep granules away from the base of stems.
- Prepare flowerbeds for spring planting by adding and incorporating soil amendments like mushroom compost, manure or homemade compost. Till or spade the bed to incorporate the amendments with the existing soil to a depth of 6 to 8 inches. Allow the prepared bed to lie undisturbed for 3 to 4 weeks before planting. This provides time for some important biological activity to take place, and new plants are less likely to suffer from stem and root rots as a result. Have a soil test done. Sometimes lime is needed. However, a lime application should be made only if the need is revealed by the test.
- Replenish mulch in flowerbeds.
- Prune rose bushes.

## Trees and Shrubs

- February is possibly the best month for rejuvenation of old, overgrown shrubs. When pruned now, plants have an entire growing season to recover.
- Prune summer flowering deciduous shrubs such as Althea and Hibiscus. Since they flower on current season's growth, flowering can actually be enhanced by proper pruning.
- Do NOT prune the spring flowering shrubs yet. Azaleas, Spiraeas and Forsythia flower during early spring because buds were formed last summer and fall. Pruning in February would therefore remove most of the flower buds.
- Cold damaged trees and shrubs should NOT be pruned until new growth appears. You want to preserve as much healthy plant material as possible.
- Replenish mulch in shrub beds.
- Finish planting ornamental and fruit trees.

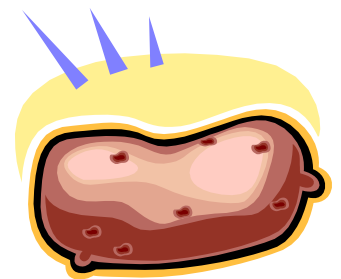


## Fruits and Nuts

- Fertilize *established* pecan trees. Use a "special pecan fertilizer" that contains zinc. Use 2 lbs. for every year of age of the tree up to a maximum of 55 lbs. Broadcast the fertilizer evenly beneath the tree.
- Fertilize *established* peach, plum, pear, persimmon, apple and fig. Apply about 1½ lbs of a 10-10-10 (or similar) fertilizer for each year of age of the tree until a maximum of 10 to 15 lbs. per tree is reached.
- Blueberries are very sensitive to nitrogen and can be killed easily. Fertilize only if your goal is to increase yield or berry size. An annual application of 2 ounces of a special "azalea/camellia" or "special blueberry" type fertilizer per plant in February is ample fertilizer on 2-year-old plants.
- Prune muscadine grapes between mid-February to mid-March. A standard method is to allow 2 to 4 node spurs spaced every 6 inches of cordon. You may notice that pruning cuts bleed, but there is no evidence that this is injurious to the vine.
- Grapes (bunch and muscadine) should be fertilized at the rate of 1½ lbs of 10-10-10 for each year of age with a maximum of 5 lbs per plant applied in late February.
- Last call for planting fruit trees! Most fruit trees such as pecans, plums, persimmons, figs, peaches and nectarines are shipped bare roots and should be planted during the dormant season.
- Apply a spray containing horticultural oil emulsion to dormant fruit trees and ornamental shrubs. Follow label directions carefully.

## Vegetable Garden

- Several winter vegetables can still be successfully grown by starting them this month. Plant beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, Chinese cabbage, collards, endive/escarole, kale, kohlrabi,



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## Upcoming Events

**February 8, 2005: Commercial Horticulture Winter Meeting: Ornamental Plant Pest ID, biology and Management Workshop.** University of Florida-Milton Campus. 5988 Hwy. 90, Building 4900, Milton, FL. This event is a one-day program for commercial horticulturists in the green industry. Please register online at <http://wfrec.ifas.ufl.edu> or by calling (850) 983-5216 ext. 113.

**February 17, 2005: Gulf Coast Gardening From the Ground UP: Tree Selection and Planting.** This free program is open to the public and will be presented at the Milton Library at 5541 Alabama Street, Milton, FL. Registration will open at 6:00 pm and the class will start at 6:30 pm. Theresa Friday, Santa Rosa County Residential Horticulture Agent, will discuss how to choose an appropriate tree for your landscape and how to correctly plant it for maximum success. The program will last approximately 2 hours followed by a question and answer period.

**February 19, 2005: Gulf Coast Gardening From the Ground UP: Tree Selection and Planting.** This free program is open to the public and will be presented at the Navarre Library at 8484 James M. Harvell Road, Navarre, FL. Registration will open at 9:00 am and the class will start at 10:00 am. Theresa Friday, Santa Rosa County Residential Horticulture Agent, will discuss how to choose an appropriate tree for you landscape and how to correctly plant it for maximum success. The program will last approximately 2 hours followed by a question and answer period.

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

## Pruning Trees

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collar allows the tree to wall off the injury. If you cut the branch collar off, then you get a rotten hole into the trunk that can weaken the tree. Finally, remember if the branch is larger than eight inches in diameter, the tree may have a hard time walling off that injury even if done properly. This is one reason why it is best to prune trees when they are young.

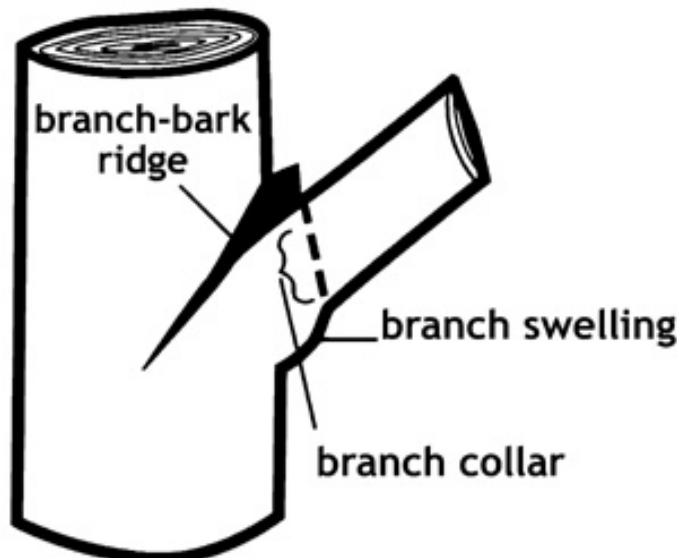
When removing a large limb, first reduce its weight to avoid tearing the bark by making an undercut about 12-18 inches from the limb's point of attachment. Then make a second cut from the top, just outside the branch collar. After you make the final cut there is no benefit to putting anything on the cut like pruning paints.

If you have a place for it, pruned branches piled up can make excellent homes for some of our smaller urban wildlife.

If done properly, pruning can do much to keep

our trees and landscapes healthy.

—by Stan Rosenthal, Extension Agent with the University of Florida  
IFAS Extension in Leon County



## Questions and Answers

**Q: My houseplants seem to be losing a lot of leaves and I have not done anything different. What's wrong?**

**A:** Homeowners often become concerned about their houseplants at this time of year because they look unthrifty and may even shed leaves. Most of this is the plant responding to low light levels. Not only is the day length shorter during the winter but the angle of the sun means sunlight must travel through more atmosphere before it reaches us in the northern latitudes. Each of these factors means less light energy reaches our houseplants. Houseplants respond to this stress by stopping growth and dropping leaves if necessary. So how can we tell if leaves are being dropped due to stress or due to other factors? Normally, stress is the culprit if leaves are dropped throughout the plant so a general thinning occurs.

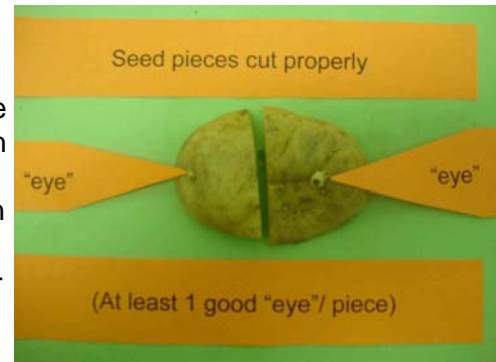
The next question, then, is what do we do about it? Well, you can add supplemental lighting or just wait until longer days and higher light levels allow the plants to recover. Unfortunately, people are often not patient enough and decide the plant needs more fertilizer or water to perk it up. Remember the problem is low light; not a lack of fertilizer or water. Adding extra fertilizer or water won't help and may actually harm the plant. Everything needs to be balanced in the plant. If there is plenty of sunlight, the plant can use plenty of water and plenty of fertilizer. Under low light levels, the plant is unable to use much fertilizer and the nutrients just stay in the soil where they can build up and may eventually burn roots. Also, excess water can actually drown roots. Therefore, it is important to do a good job of watering and fertilizing during the winter. Only water when the soil is dry ½ inch deep in the pot. Also, reduce or eliminate fertilizing during the winter months. If the plant still looks thin in the spring, cut it back so that it can put out new, thicker growth. Also, knock the plant out of the pot and make sure it isn't rootbound. If it is, move it up to a larger pot.

**Q: What type of potatoes do you recommend for this area? How small can I cut the seed potato?**

**A:** Most garden and farm supply stores stock the old standby varieties: 'White Kennebec' and 'Red Pontiac'. Commercial varieties recommended by the University of Florida include white-skinned ones like 'LaChipper', 'Sebago' and 'Yukon Gold'. Recommended red-skinned commercial varieties include 'Red LaSoda' and 'LaRouge'. These varieties are difficult to come by for the average home gardener. Homeowners may want to try a row or two of some of the blue, red, yellow and differently shaped tuber varieties available in seed catalogs as a trial in their garden and compare the yield to the old stands before planting entire gardens in the new varieties.

To answer on how small to cut seed pieces, many home gardeners tend to cut the pieces too small.

Cut seed pieces should be about the size of an egg with at least one good "eye" on it. Fifteen pounds of potatoes should plant about 100 linear



feet of garden row. Store the seed pieces in a cool dark room for two days to callus the cut area before planting to reduce the chance of the seed pieces rotting in the ground.

Planting depth and population can affect late frost survival and yield. Seed pieces should be planted 4 inches below the soil surface with the cut side facing down. On 36-inch distances between rows seed pieces should be planted 6 to 8 inches apart in the drill (in the row).

For more information on potatoes check out an excellent reference EDIS publication located on line at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/HS183>. (from *Vegetarian Newsletter*, Feb. 2004)

# February Tips

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leek, lettuce, mustard, parsley, English peas, radish and turnips.

- Plant Irish potatoes. Purchase certified seed potatoes rather than using the grocery store kinds. Use 2-ounce seed pieces with eyes and plant them 3 to 4 inches deep.
- Prepare spring vegetable and herb beds for planting by adding and incorporating soil amendments like mushroom compost, manure or homemade compost. Wait 3 to 4 weeks before planting.

## Lawns

- Hold off on fertilizing the lawn. It is still **too early** for an application of nitrogen containing product. Cold temperatures and lack of plant response would likely result in wasted fertilizer. However, your winter weeds would benefit greatly.



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