

Green Garden News

Bronson urges homeowners to protect their investment as termite season gets under way

Florida Agriculture and Consumer Services Commissioner, Charles H. Bronson, is urging Florida homeowners and home buyers to take steps to protect their homes as termite swarming season gets under way. Termites are responsible for more than \$700,000,000 in costs to consumers in Florida each year for damage and control.

"In Florida, it isn't a question of whether there are termites in an area, but how close they are to your home," Bronson said. "It's astounding that about half of the homeowners in this state have no termite protection. People need to take steps to protect what will likely be the biggest investment they will ever make -- their homes."

But Bronson also warns consumers that they must use licensed, reputable companies for pest control operations. The Department regulates and licenses the pest control industry and has more than doubled the number of inspections from 2,200 to 5,600 over the past four years. The Department's Division of Agricultural Environmental Services can provide consumers with the complaint history of a company and consumers should also check to ensure a company is properly licensed.

"The vast majority of pest control operators in this state are responsi-

ble, well trained and provide good service to their customers," Bronson said. "But our inspections show an ongoing problem with unlicensed pest control companies and of course there is no way to ensure the workers are properly trained to provide effective and safe pest control. It is also unfair to the businesses that follow the rules."

The two main types of termites that affect Florida consumers are subterranean termites, which live in soil and attack structures from the ground up, and drywood termites, which can live in isolated pieces of wood in a structure such as attic rafters, and can go undetected until they cause extensive damage. Licensed pest management professionals have the expertise to inspect and treat for infestations of these termites and provide protective measures for homeowners.

Swarming season occurs when termites begin to "swarm" or leave their colonies to search for new nesting sites. Many homeowners discover that they have a termite problem when they find termite swarms (winged, black insects about ¼ inch long) in their homes.

Consumers can take the following steps to protect their homes from this destructive pest:

(Continued on page 6)

Volume 4, Issue 3

March 2006

Inside this issue:

March Gardening Tips	2
After Bloom Azalea Care	3
Upcoming Events	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.

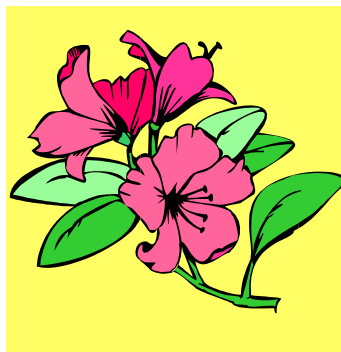
March Gardening Tips

Flowers

- Annual flowers that can be planted in March include: ageratum, alyssum, amaranthus, asters, baby's breath, begonia, calendula, celosia, cosmos, dahlia, dusty miller, gaillardia, geranium, hollyhock, impatiens, marigold, nicotiana, ornamental pepper, pentas, phlox, rudbeckia, salvia, sweet William, torenia, verbena, vinca and zinnia.
- Caladium bulbs are extremely sensitive to cold soil. There is no advantage to planting early. Purchase caladiums while there is a good selection, but wait until late March or April before planting them in shady beds.

Trees and Shrubs

- Finish pruning summer flowering shrubs such as althea, hibiscus, abelia, oakleaf hydrangea and oleander.
- Delay the pruning of azaleas, camellias, spiraeas, gardenias and other spring flowering shrubs until after flowering is complete.
- Prune any cold weather-damaged plants after new growth appears.
- If needed, fertilize shrubs and small trees with a slow release fertilizer. A good general-purpose landscape fertilizer is a 15-0-15.
- Mature palms should receive an application of granular fertilizer formulated for palms ("palm special") three to four times per growing season beginning in March and ending in September.
- Last opportunity to spray shrubs with dormant horticultural oil.
- Pick up all fallen camellia blossoms and remove them from your property. This practice helps to prevent petal blight next season.
- Prune ornamental grasses.
- If you are in the market for specific colors of azaleas, visit the local nurseries and garden centers this month. Though this is not the most ideal planting time, you are assured of the right flower color without having to wait until next blooming season.



Fruits and Nuts

- Time to finish planting bare-root fruit trees.

Vegetable Garden

- This is the month for establishing a spring vegetable garden. Early March plantings have about an even chance of avoiding a late frost.
- The warm season vegetables that can be planted this month are: bush beans, pole beans, lima beans, cantaloupes, sweet corn, cucumbers, eggplant, okra, southern peas, peppers, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, summer squash, winter squash, tomatoes and watermelon.
- The cool season vegetables that can be planted this month are: beets, carrots, celery, collards, endive, kohlrabi, leek, lettuce, mustard, bunching onions, parsley, English peas, Irish potatoes, radish and turnips.
- More conservative gardeners might wish to wait until the middle to latter part of the month to risk tender plants such as tomatoes and peppers.

Lawns

- Remove excessive accumulation of leaves from the lawn. This will increase the effectiveness of fertilizers and pesticides applied to the lawn.
- If a preemergence lawn herbicide is needed to control summer weeds, it should be applied in early March. Make certain to choose one that is safe on your kind of grass.
- Keep lawn herbicides away from the root zones of desirable flowers, shrubs and other plants.
- Fertilize the lawn only after the danger of frost has passed and when the grass has greened up. Fertilize using a fertilizer containing between 30 - 50% slow-release nitrogen.
- Service the lawn mower by sharpening the blade, changing the oil and adjusting the cutting height for your type of grass.
- Anyone considering establishment of centipede-grass from seed should hold off until the soil warms up and stabilizes above 70°F.

After-bloom azalea care

The northern Gulf Coast is famous for azaleas. Though we can't boast of outstanding fall leaf color, lilacs or tulips like more northern regions, few areas can consistently announce spring like we can.

Evergreen azaleas are a part of almost every landscape in the area. From the large growing Indica varieties to the dwarf kurume types, there is a color and size for use in many situations.

Azaleas will soon be in full bloom, enjoy them until the end of the flowering season and then get ready to provide some maintenance to ensure their health the remainder of the year. Although well adapted to our region, they are among a special group of plants that should be treated somewhat differently.

Understanding how the root systems of azaleas grow helps to explain why some of the maintenance requirements differ from typical garden and landscape plants.

They are members of the Ericaceae family, which also includes blueberries. The root systems of plants within this family are very shallow and fibrous. They prefer moist, but not overly wet soil, and one that is relatively acid.

Fertilizing

Fertilize in March or early April with an acid forming fertilizer such as an "Azalea, Camellia Special." Standard garden fertilizers should not be used for azaleas because many of them contain the nitrate form of nitrogen, which is poisonous to their roots. Organic fertilizers such as cottonseed and soybean meal can be substituted for commercial products, if desired.

Placement of the fertilizer is also important. Avoid concentrating fertilizer around the base of stems because severe burn could result. Feeder roots actually extend two to three times the branch spread of individual plants, so fertilizer should be applied beneath and at least an equal distance beyond the branch spread. When fertilizing azalea beds or mass plantings, consider the area as a unit, rather than fertilizing individual plants.

Apply fertilizer at the rate recommended on the label. Extremely heavy applications can result in damaged plants or excessive growth. Always fol-

low up fertilization with a thorough watering of the entire area.

Mulching

Maintain a mulch on the soil surface above the root zone of azaleas. Use a coarse material such as pine needles or bark and apply often enough to retain a depth of about 2½ inches. Keep the mulch from touching the base of stems by pulling it a couple of inches away after each mulching.

Pruning

Pruning is sometimes required to keep plants shapely and within bounds. Any heavy pruning should only be done between the end of the flowering season and before the end of June. This allows time for regrowth and bud set before winter. Avoid formal pruning or "shearing." Rather, let azaleas grow to their natural shape if possible. The removal of occasional unruly branches and sprouts can be done any time.

Watering

Irrigation is needed in the absence of at least one inch of rainfall per week. Only weekly irrigations is usually required on established plants. Well-designed microirrigation systems work well in azalea beds. They use less water than traditional overhead systems and deliver the water without wetting the foliage each time.

Pests

Azaleas, though well adapted, are not completely pest free. There are three common pests that are seen at times but can be controlled, especially if detected early.

- Watch for spider mites during hot, dry periods.
- Lace bugs are sometimes a problem in late spring and early summer.
- The leaf stripping azalea defoliator caterpillar often shows up in August and September.

—by Dan Mullins, Extension Faculty, Santa Rosa County Extension

Upcoming Events

Every Tuesday: *Plant Diagnostic Clinic.* This free clinic is open to the public from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm on Tuesdays at the South Santa Rosa Service Center at 5819 Gulf Breeze Pkwy.

March 4, 2006: *18th Annual Forestry Conclave & Lumberjack Festival.* Timber! It's time for the 18th Annual Forestry Conclave and Lumberjack Festival at the Pensacola Junior College Milton campus.

Join the lumberjack and forestry festivities Saturday, March 4. The day kicks off with a free flapjack breakfast from 6:30 to 8:30 a.m. Get free tree seedlings while they last, and then compete for ribbons and prizes by competing in the various lumberjack games from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

March 11, 2006: *Gulf Coast Gardening from the Ground UP: "Garden Design".* This free program is open to the public and will be presented at the Navarre Library, 8484 James M. Harvell Road, Navarre. Registration opens at 1:00 p.m. and the program will start at 1:30 p.m.

March 11, 2006: *Gulf Coast Garden & Landscape Expo.* The program will be held from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the UF/PJC Milton Campus and is specifically designed for homeowners. Topics include butterfly gardens, hurricane proofing your landscape and exciting new plants for the garden and landscape. You may register online at: <http://wfrec.ifas.ufl.edu/center/events.htm>. For more information call Robin Vickers at 850-983-5216 ext. 113. There is a \$10 registration fee.

March 11, 2006: *Mixed Container Garden Sale.* The University of Florida/IFAS Milton Campus is excited to announce an upcoming Student Club Mixed Container Garden Sale. This is an opportunity for area residents and businesses to help UF students raise funds by purchasing indoor/patio dish gardens and vibrant container gardens filled with early spring flowering plants.

There will be several different sizes of container gardens including window boxes, color bowls, mini patio planters, and large pots.

The Mixed Container Sale will take place on the UF/PJC Milton Campus (Avalon Blvd. and Highway 90, Milton) on Saturday, March 11 from 8:00 am to 3:00 pm. Container gardens for sale will be displayed on the west end of the PJC track.

Questions about the sale? Contact Leah McCue at (850) 983-5216 ext.111 or ladmccue@ufl.edu. Please check out the web site: <http://wfrec.ifas.ufl.edu/plantsale/container.htm>

March 18, 2006: *Gulf Coast Gardening from the Ground UP: "Garden Design".* This free program is open to the public and will be presented at the Milton Library at 5541 Alabama St. Milton. Registration opens at 1:00 p.m. and the program will start at 1:30 p.m.

March 25, 2006: *Gulf Coast Gardening from the Ground UP: "Roses & Amaryllis".* This free program is open to the public and will be presented at the Navarre Library, 8484 James M. Harvell Road, Navarre. Registration opens at 1:00 p.m. and the program will start at 1:30 p.m.

March 31 through April 2, 2006: *10th Annual Emerald Coast Flower and Garden Festival.* Open Friday 12 noon-4 p.m. and on Saturday & Sunday 10 a.m.- 4 p.m. UF/PJC Milton Campus, 5988 Highway 90, Milton FL, Free Admission, Open to the public.

April 1, 2006: *Gulf Coast Gardening from the Ground UP: "Roses & Amaryllis".* This free program is open to the public and will be presented at the Milton Library at 5541 Alabama St., Milton. Registration opens at 1:00 p.m. and the program will start at 1:30 p.m.

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

Questions and Answers

Q: When do I apply weed-n-feed containing a preemergence herbicide?

A: Applying a weed-n-feed containing a preemergence herbicide can be a bit tricky on warm season grasses. Keep in mind that a weed-n-feed contains both a fertilizer and a herbicide.

The first preemergence herbicide application should be applied approximately March 1 along the Gulf Coast, but we should wait until late March to early April to fertilize. I recommend you apply fertilizer and herbicide separately. If improperly used, weed-n-feed products can damage lawns.

If you use weed-n-feed, remember that you are applying a pesticide - a weed killer. Read the label and active ingredient statements carefully and make sure the herbicide will do what you want done.

Q: What is this leafy, scaly, gray-green thing growing on my tree's trunk and branches?

A: A lichen. Lichens are living organisms consisting of a fungus and an alga growing in a symbiotic relationship. The lichen may be flat, leafy, or hairy in appearance. Lichens grow on trees but are not parasitic. They do not harm the tree but are indicators of declining tree health. Lichens grow rapidly when exposed to full sunlight, which helps to explain why they grow well on less vigorous or dead branches.

Lichens are not responsible for the bad health of a tree so control is not necessary. Lichens will gradually disappear if plant health is restored. They will probably reappear if the true cause of the tree's decline is not corrected.

Q: I have misplaced a recent article that you wrote. Where can I find a copy?

A: The Santa Rosa County web site maintains archives of past gardening articles. Go to <http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/extension/horticulture.html> for past articles and newsletters.

Q: I plan to establish a centipedegrass lawn from seed this spring. When is the best time to do this?

A: Seeding is an acceptable method of starting a centipede lawn, but don't get in a hurry. This grass doesn't germinate well until the soil warms up. The recommended planting time is April through June. Follow soil preparation and seeding instructions carefully. Then be patient. Even under good conditions it takes about 3 weeks for seedlings to germinate.

Q: If I plant two different varieties of the same vegetable near each other in the garden will the resulting fruit be a mixture of these two varieties?

A: No, the resulting vegetable should have the characteristics of the original variety planted during the first generation from seed. The result of cross-pollination would only begin showing up if you saved seed and produced plants from them in the future. Since most currently used vegetable varieties are hybrids, saving seed is not recommended.

As usual, there are a few exceptions. Sweet corn, when fertilized with pollen from a different variety, can result in color and flavor differences. The result of crosspollinated peppers also shows up in the first generation. For example, if you plant sweet and hot peppers too near each other you might harvest sweet peppers that are also hot.

Q: When I apply fertilizer to my flower and shrub beds, is it necessary to pull back the mulch and work the fertilizer into the soil?

A: It is not necessary to pull back the mulch to fertilize. In fact, doing that might needlessly injure roots growing up into the mulch. Just scatter it over the mulch.

After doing this however, water the fertilizer in well—preferably by hand watering to make sure it gets below the surface.

(Continued from page 1)

- Remove wood piles and other cellulose sources from under and next to their homes.
- Have an annual inspection of their homes by a licensed professional pest control company.
- Renew their termite protection contract annually.
- Direct water sources, such as air conditioner drip lines and roof downspouts, away from the structure foundation.
- When purchasing a home, carefully check its termite protection history.

All Floridians are urged to review the steps they are taking to protect their homes from termites and to take advantage of information available from the Department about how to protect their homes and businesses against this destructive pest. Information is available from the Department's web site <http://www.FloridaTermiteHelp.org> or by calling 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352).



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.html>

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

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