



“Solutions for Your Life”

12520 Ulmerton Road
Largo, FL 33774-3602
(727) 582-2100

www.pinellascountyextension.org



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Things To Do in the Landscape

March 2009



Spring is here! Time to prune.

You can now prune those woody plants that were damaged by our several nights of freezing or near freezing temperatures. Watch for new leaves sprouting along the branches and prune back to this point taking care to maintain the natural shape of the plant. You may find that some of your more cold sensitive plants will need to be pruned back to the ground. It will take them a bit longer to recover, but be patient.

Once azaleas, poinsettias, and camellias finish flowering they should be pruned. Pruning encourages new growth and produces a more compact, bushier plant. There is still time to prune out dead growth and crossing limbs on crape myrtles, but try not to remove the new sprouts since the flowers will be forming on this year's new growth. Pruning is not necessary for crape myrtles to flower. Prune lightly to maintain a natural form.

Heavy pruning of **Hibiscus** is best done now. New growth should produce flowers in five to six weeks. Light maintenance pruning may be done any time of year to keep plants at desired heights.

If you planted some fall **Chrysanthemums**, they will be putting out new growth soon. They can get very leggy if not properly pruned. Small flowered varieties should have the ends of new growth pinched back once they reach six to eight inches high. Unless these growing tips are pinched, plants may develop tall, weak stems that produce only a few flowers. After you pinch, new branches will develop along the stem. Pinch all shoots every two weeks until June 10th for early varieties, and July 1st for later varieties. The fall flowers will not form if you continue to pinch later than this.

Consult the University of Florida/IFAS Extension publication, *Pruning Landscape Trees and Shrubs* on the Internet at: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG087> for additional detailed pruning information

Flowering Trees

One of the most common flowering trees in our area is the **weeping bottlebrush** (*Callistemon viminalis*). It produces bright red flowers that look like brushes used to clean bottles. The tree has a distinctly weeping

habit and the leaves are narrow and willow-like. Its relatively small mature height of only 25 feet has been partly responsible for its wide popularity in landscapes.

For the gardener who misses some of the spring-flowering trees and shrubs of northern areas, the **Chickasaw plum** (*Prunus angustifolia*), is worth considering. It produces a great profusion of tiny white flowers in late winter to early spring. It's small growing, often no more than 15 feet tall so it can be used in small yards. It does tend to sucker vigorously, forming shrubby colonies. It bears small, acidic plums which can be used to make jelly. **Flatwoods plum** (*Prunus umbellata*), is quite similar but does not have the same suckering tendency.

Another small flowering native tree is the **Sweet Acacia**, *Acacia farnesiana*, which has fern-like foliage and small yellow puff-ball blooms that are very fragrant. It is about 25 feet tall at maturity and is very drought tolerant.

Other small flowering trees for our area include; Trumpet tree (*Tabebuia* spp.), Frangipani (*Plumaria* spp.), and of course Crape Myrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*).

Any discussion of spring flowering trees for our area must include the **jacaranda** (*Jacaranda mimosifolia*). This is the tree that the non-gardener may simply describe as "that purple tree". This south American native is not a small tree and can grow to 45 feet tall. Its fernlike leaves drop for a period of time during the winter and usually the trees are leafless for the bloom period which occurs in April in most years. Flowers are sometimes also produced in the summer but usually not in the profusion of the spring bloom. One drawback is that jacaranda trees tend to be very brittle and can break in hurricane winds.

Although it often does not come to mind when considering flowering trees, the **red maple** (*Acerr ubrum*) is nonetheless one of our more colorful native trees. It does produce flowers but much of the color actually comes from the pink to reddish winged seeds or samaras. These seeds are as colorful as any flower. The downside of this display is that the seeds soon drop to the ground where they usually sprout in large numbers almost like weeds. Red maple does best where the soil remains moist most of the time and it is well suited to areas that may temporarily flood. Its deciduous leaves usually change to shades of red, yellow or orange before dropping in late fall or early winter.

Bulbs

Many different **bulbs** can be grown successfully in Florida. Amaryllis, canna, crinum, daylily, and spider lily are very common in our area. Some are true bulbs, others are rhizomes, tubers, and corms. We usually clump them all together as bulb plants. You may wish to try some different ones this year. **Amazon lily** (*Eucharis grandiflora*) can be planted from February through May and will bloom in late winter to early spring. They need partial shade and should be planted with the tip of bulb on the surface of the soil. Amazon lilies will grow in the ground, but in Florida they do best if grown in pots.

Select your **caladium tubers** as soon as they are available at the garden centers. Plant them in shade or partial sun. Some newer varieties with strap like leaves can handle full sun locations. Space tubers twelve to eighteen inches apart in a bed prepared with plenty of organic material. Cover the tops with about two inches of soil. Firm the soil around tubers to prevent the formation of air between the tuber and the soil. Caladiums grow best in a moist, well-drained soil. Fertilize with one tablespoon of a fertilizer such as 12-4-8, around each plant. Fertilize monthly during the growing season. Caladiums may also be grown in

containers indoors. Some cultivars which tolerate indoor conditions are Lord Derby, Fire Chief, Red Flash, Whorton, Porcile Anglais, Sea Gull, Beauty, and Aaron.

Flowers

Christmas poinsettias can be removed from their container and planted outdoors now. Choose a sunny location that is not exposed to ambient light at night and dig the planting hole twelve inches wider than the root ball. Place the plant in the hole at the same depth as in the container and fill around the ball with soil. Water every other day the first week then once or twice a week thereafter or as needed to keep the soil moist but not soggy. Poinsettias have a tendency to get root rot when too wet or when growing in poorly drained soils.

After the flowering period, **Christmas cactus** will produce new growth. Next year's flowers are formed on this new growth. To produce healthy flower-bearing tissue, add a balanced slow release fertilizer every other month and begin regular watering when the soil is completely dry.

Continue spraying **roses** weekly for black spot. If the leaves take on a dusty appearance or show signs of yellowing without black or brown spotting, check for spider mites. Mites are a common problem on roses in the dry spring months. Several products, including insecticidal soaps and oils can be used to control mites.

Have you tried **bromeliads**? They are a great drought tolerant addition to the shady landscape with some protection from frost or freeze. The nearly two thousand species of bromeliads provide plant lovers with an unbelievable selection of form, color, size, and blooming characteristics.

Pineapples are a familiar plant in the bromeliad family, a family native to the American tropics. Did you know that another common member of this family is Spanish moss.

Fertilize

Things to **fertilize** this month are annuals, bahiagrass (if not fertilized in February), bananas, bromeliads, bulbs, cacti, crape myrtles, figs, hibiscus, hollies, ligustrum, papayas, and vegetables. If you are using a weed and feed lawn fertilizer, use care since herbicides can damage the lawn if the temperatures are above 85 degrees. Also, be sure the type of your grass is listed on the label and keep the product away from the roots of shrubs and trees when it is applied.

Edibles in the Landscape

Vegetable gardening should be in full swing this month. Remember to keep a watch for insects and diseases and be prepared to treat at first sign of invasion. Vegetables are annual plants that require a lot of fertilizer while growing. Keep side-dressing every five to six weeks. There is still time to plant pole beans, lima bean, cantaloupes, collards, okra, sweet potatoes, and summer squash.

Heavy infestations of **whitefly** can suddenly appear on **citrus leaves**. Check the underside of leaves for the pupae that look like small clear ovals. Spray with a paraffin-based horticultural oil or Malathion, being sure to get under the leaves. **DO NOT** spray if trees are in bloom.

ALWAYS remove **suckers** below the bud or graft union on citrus, avocados, mangos, or any other grafted plant. These shoots will grow fast and rob needed strength from the upper portion of the plant and will not produce the desired flowers or fruit.

For additional landscape and garden information, visit our website at <http://pinellascountyextension.org>.

For events information / registration

www.pinellascounty.org/events or call (727) 582-2100

Pinellas County Extension is part of a nationwide network of land grant universities providing unbiased, research-based information to America's citizens. In our state, Extension's land grant link is the University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS). Pinellas County Extension serves as a bridge between the research labs of the university and the local community by providing educational opportunities for adults and youth.