

Horticulture News

UF UNIVERSITY of
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Nassau County Extension

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Mulch for the Landscape

By Dale W. Armstrong, Coordinator Florida Yards and Neighborhoods

Mulch can be classified as either organic or inorganic. Chipped or shredded wood and leaves are examples of organic mulches. Crushed shell and recycled tires are examples of inorganic mulches. This article will focus on organic mulches.

Benefits of using organic mulch in plant beds are:

- Adds small quantities of nutrients to the soil as it decomposes
- Improves texture of the soil and helps retain water as a result of organic matter created during decomposition
- Helps to moderate soil temperatures by insulating from cold temperatures and direct sun
- Reduces evaporation of water from the soil by the sun and wind
- Insulates plants from radiated (summer) heat from soil (and hardscapes such as sidewalks and driveways).
- Suppresses weed growth – seeds are “kept in the dark” under layer of mulch or kept from contact with soil if above the mulch
- Helps reduce erosion of soil from impact of heavy raindrops

Commercially processed mulch is made from many types of wood. In addition, many communities offer mulch made from recycled yard waste at no charge. Homeowners can also collect leaves from oaks, pines, and other trees to use as mulch or be added to commercially processed mulch. Eucalyptus, pine bark, cypress, and recycled wood are some of the more commonly available commercial mulches. Some of these are being dyed in a variety of colors to add additional interest in the landscape. Pine needles, melaleuca, and recycled yard waste mulch are also available.

Consider this information when making choices:

- Cypress mulch – due to its popularity, this important native wetland tree has been drastically reduced in number due to harvesting for mulch production. Therefore, we suggest you consider using other mulches as an alternative.
- Melaleuca, sold as “Flora-mulch”, is produced from an invasive exotic tree that has overgrown many natural areas of Florida. As mulch, it has the desirable

attributes of durability and resistance to termites.

- The free mulch made from recycled yard waste breaks-down (decomposes) the fastest of the mulches evaluated. As a result, it releases nutrients more quickly and may need to be replenished more frequently than other mulches. But, the price is right!

Regardless of which mulch you choose, the important thing is to use it. Apply mulch 2 to 3 inches thick and replenished as needed to maintain that thickness. Keep mulch away from the trunks of all trees and shrubs to avoid stem rot.

Free mulch is sometimes available at Nassau County Solid Waste, located between Callahan and Hilliard. Be sure to call in advance at 904 321-5770.

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TREES ARE COOL

According to the USDA, the cooling effect of a healthy tree is equal to 10 room-size air-conditioners operating 20 hours a day.

PROGRAM ANNOUNCEMENTS

In 1945 the Florida Legislature designated the third Friday in January as State Arbor Day. This year it will be celebrated January 20th by schools and civic organizations with tree plantings and other activities. Check your local paper for announcements.

Neighborhood Stormwater/Landscape Program

Provide your neighborhood with information about proper landscape and pond maintenance practices that will protect Florida's natural waterways. St. John's River Water Management/WAVE Representative Paula Staples and Rebecca L. Jordi, University of Florida/IFAS Horticulture Extension Agent will come for a free consultation.

Minimum of ten (10) participants required.

Troubleshooting Florida Landscapes

Do you and your neighbors need a personal consultation on how to solve landscape problems? Are you concerned about your trees, shrubs, or lawngrass thriving? Rebecca L. Jordi, University of Florida/IFAS Horticulture Extension Agent and Nassau County Master Gardener Volunteers will come for a free group consultation.

Minimum of ten (10) participants required.

Landscape Matters

January 17th, 2007
Wednesday
10 - 11AM
Citrus
Rebecca Jordi
Horticulture Agent II
Yulee County
Building
86026 Pages
Dairy Rd.

February 14th, 2007
Wednesday
10 - 11AM
Roses
Master Gardener
Paul Gosnell
96135 Nassau Place Rd.
Conference Room A

These programs are free to the public, so please call us at 904-548-1116 or e-mail rljordi@ifas.ufl.edu if you plan to attend. If response is too small, the program will be canceled.

Crash Course in Florida Gardening

Monday/Tuesday January 29th/30th, 2007 9AM-12PM
Checks should be made out to Nassau County Extension.
Registration deadline is Friday, January 19th. Cost is \$25 for notebook.
Phone 904 548-1116 or e-mail rljordi@ifas.ufl.edu to enroll.

LUSCIOUS LEAVES - PERSIAN SHIELD



Want to create some spice of life in your garden? Love the color purple? Look no further than this beautiful Myanmar (formerly called Burma) native, Persian Shield, *Strobilanthes dyeranus*.

This plant has soft stems (not woody) and variegated purple and dark green leaves with an iridescent silver overlay as fabulous as any flowers. Lavender flowers appear

in the summer, but they are far less showy than the leaves.

Persian Shield thrives outdoors in hot, humid climates. It loves to be watered, and enjoys rich, well-drained soil. It does very well in partial shade, preferring bright sun in the morning and shade in the afternoon. Typically, Persian Shield will grow five feet tall and three feet wide. In North Florida it will die

back to the ground after a frost, but will resprout in the spring. In cooler areas it can be grown as an annual, or it can be over wintered indoors. The plant can get leggy very quickly, so prune to retain a compact appearance and to promote more color from additional leaves.

To propagate take stem cuttings in spring or summer.

CHECKLIST FOR JANUARY

Flowers: Annuals to plant are carnations, pansies, petunias, snapdragons, delphiniums, larkspur, dianthus, and foxgloves. Be ready to move less hardy bulbs inside. Most others, like ginger and amaryllis may have their foliage damaged during severe cold, but can be left in the ground and be expected to survive. Tulips, hyacinths, and daffodils can be planted now if you refrigerated them for 8 weeks to meet their chilling requirements.

Herbs: Plant anise, borage, chives, chervil, coriander, fennel, garlic, lavender, marjoram, mint, parsley, rosemary, sage, sesame, sweet marjoram, and thyme

Lawns: This is fertilize free month. Check the soil to determine water needs. When the grass blades start to fold it's time to water. Water once every 10-14 days in the winter. If mowing, keep your mower height at the highest level.

Perennials: Water when surface soil is dry to the touch, make sure you have 2-3 inches of mulch around the roots, and water during the morning hours only. Outdoor plants require less water in the winter months. Roses should be pruned once each year during December or January in North Florida.

Trees: Remove dead limbs, trim off suckers, lanky growth, and crisscrossing limbs; remove old seedpods. Don't perform major pruning on any tree this month, especially flowering trees that produce their blooms during the spring months.

Vegetables: English peas, beets, broccoli, potatoes, cabbage, celery, carrots, bunching onions, radishes, turnips, and cauliflower can be planted now.

This is fertilize free month for lawns.

CHECKLIST FOR FEBRUARY

Flowers: Remove all dead plant portions of annuals. Baby's' breath, calendulas, carnations, dianthus, dusty miller, Marguerite daisies, pansies, petunias, and snapdragons can be planted this month. Prune out declining foliage of bulbs as needed. Use insecticidal soap for aphids.

Lawns: Cut St. Augustine lawns as needed; keep the mowing height highest level for your grass variety. Cutting grass too short encourages insects damage and disease. No fertilizer this month.

Perennials: Do not rush to prune out the dead or declining portions, as some cold may linger until March. Leaving dead portions on may provide some protection in case another freeze occurs. Prune ornamental grasses. Remove all brown cut stems to 6-12 inches above ground and feed!

Trees: Existing well-established trees and palms do not normally need special watering - the nearby irrigation of lawns, shrubs, and flower beds normally supply adequate moisture. Some exceptions may be dogwoods or red maples.

Vegetables: This month plant collards, lettuce, endive, potatoes, and turnips.



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*To receive this newsletter
in color via email, contact
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address above.*

Visit us online at
<http://nassau.ifas.ufl.edu/>

Nassau County is proud to provide you with this information. Horticulture News is a joint project with contributions by county agents and Master Gardener Volunteers.

Sincerely,



Rebecca L. Jordi,
Horticulture Agent II



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HERB OF THE MONTH - OREGANO/MARJORAM

Its name derived from the ancient Greek word meaning, “joy of the mountains” (or “oreganum vulgare” in Latin), oregano once grew on the hills and mountainsides of Greece and other Mediterranean countries. Since Greek and Roman times it has been used with meats, fish, vegetables, and as a flavoring for wine. Before World War II, oregano was almost unknown in the United States. However, its popularity skyrocketed with the popularity of pizza.

The three varieties commonly used as herbs are wild marjoram (common oregano), pot marjoram and sweet or knotted marjoram. All marjoram

varieties are oreganos, (the genus name for both is now ‘origanum’), and ‘wild marjoram’ is in fact common oregano (*Origanum vulgare*). All are members of the mint family.

To grow, start either from seed in spring (when the temperature is above 45°), from cuttings in the summer or root divisions in the fall. Oregano loves bright light. It is very tolerant of most conditions and requires very little care. Ensure that it does not dry out too much in the first few months, but after that it will tolerate drought very well.

The leaves should be harvested just before it begins to flower in July time - if

harvested when the flowers have set seed, the taste becomes more bitter. An alternative is to trim off the flower heads when they form - in this way, the leaves can be harvested in small amounts through to November. If you have an excess of fresh oregano, you can dry it by tying the stems together and hanging it in a warm, dry, well-ventilated place.

The leaves of oregano will die down soon after frost occurs, but the roots will survive and provide new plants the next spring. Oregano is not tolerant of very severe frosts, so any protection over the dormant roots will help it to survive.

