

# Horticulture

September/October  
2007

# News

## Firespike

All summer long the firespike has been growing and putting on its large avocado like leaves. Soon, in early fall, it will adorn itself with 1-inch tubular, bright red flowers that almost smother 12-inch spikes. Humans are not the only ones to notice the showy blossoms. Butterflies and hummingbirds zoom in for their share of the nectar.

Firespike (*Odontonema strictum*) is native to Central America. An attractive, compact shrub, it will reach 4 feet in the garden and about 3 feet in containers. Even when not in bloom it adds a tropical feel to the garden.

Firespike is one of those low-maintenance perennials that gardeners always search out. All it needs is a little sprinkle of Osmocote (a slow-release fertilizer that is encapsulated in a polymer coating that allows nutrients to be released over a long period of time) around the base in early spring just as the new growth started emerging. If you do not use the Osmocote, fertilize it every month to six weeks during the growing season with a complete slow-release fer-

tilizer such as 10-10-10.

Plant in a well-mulched area of the landscape, so weeds are not a problem. According to researchers at the University of Florida, there are no pests of any consequence.

Although the foliage gets killed each winter, firespike is reliably root hardy throughout Florida and most of the deep South. When freezing weather arrives, firespike will turn black and its show will be over. At that time the blackened stems can be cut back to the ground. To protect the roots during the winter, scatter a bit of mulch over the crown.

Firespike prefers a site with moderate shade, but it can be grown in full sun as long as it gets adequate moisture. It prefers rich, moist, well-drained soil, but like many plants, it can do with less if it has to. Moderately fertile, sandy soil is adequate. It shows very little tolerance for salt near the coast.

Firespike spreads slowly, but eventually it forms a clump two or three feet wide. Propagation is easy from cuttings, seeds, or division of older clumps.

Use this adaptable peren-

nial in the landscape in several ways. Cluster several firespike plants 3 to 4 feet apart as a backdrop or border for gardens, patios and walkways. Remember that the tops will not be present after the first frost, so site them near some hardy shrubs to avoid gaping holes in the winter landscape.

Firespike can be planted at any time of the year in Florida. It is available in independent nurseries that specialize in plants for local conditions. When you find it, buy three, five, or seven, and plant them two feet apart to fill in an area quickly. Massed in this way, they make a bold statement in the landscape.



## Program Announcements

*For more information about these programs, call Rebecca Jordi, UF/IFAS Nassau County Extension Agent and Certified Arborist at 904-548-1116 or e-mail [rljordi@ifas.ufl.edu](mailto:rljordi@ifas.ufl.edu).*

### **Arborist Certification Education/Advanced Training on Trees**

6PM-9PM  
Monday September 10th  
Tuesday September 11th  
Monday September 17th  
Tuesday September 18th

Yulee County Bldg  
86026 Pages Dairy Rd.

Fee is \$35 for notebook and materials. Study book is available for \$66.

Registration deadline is Tuesday Sept 4th.

### **Crash Course in Florida Gardening**

9AM-12PM  
Monday October 22nd  
Tuesday October 23rd

Yulee County Bldg  
86026 Pages Dairy Rd.

Fee is \$35 for materials. Checks should be made out to Nassau County Extension.

Registration deadline is Friday September 12th.

### **Landscape Matters**

September 19th  
Wednesday  
10AM-11AM  
Bromeliads  
Bonnie Johnson

October 17th  
Wednesday  
10AM-11AM  
Pruning  
Bea Walker

Nassau County Govt.  
Complex  
North Corridor  
Conference Room A  
96135 Nassau Place

## Stinging Insects - Saddleback Caterpillar

*“If the victim has a history of hay fever, asthma, or allergy, or if allergic reactions develop, contact a physician immediately.”*

Caterpillars or larvae of certain moths possess stinging hairs. These sharp hairs or spines are either hollow, connected to poison glands (venom flows on contact), or similar to glass fibers (hairs break off in skin easily) sometimes causing pain like a needle prick. Depending on the individual, reaction to the sting ranges from mild, with local reddening, swelling, burning and itching to severe pain. Hypersensitive persons may experience severe swelling, nausea and generalized systemic reactions, occasionally requiring hospital treatment. Fortunately, stinging hair caterpillars are not a widespread problem (occurring in small numbers). Complaints

occur in late summer to early autumn. The saddleback caterpillar is a very unusual and striking insect. It is brown with a green back and flanks, on which there is a conspicuous brown oval central area that usually is bordered with white. The brown spot looks like a saddle, and the green area looks like a saddle blanket; hence, the common name. It may exceed an inch in length and is stout-bodied. The primary nettling hairs are borne on the back of paired fleshy protuberances toward the front and hind ends of the body. There is also a row of smaller stinging organs on each side. This

caterpillar feeds on many plants, including hibiscus and palms, but appears to show little host preference. First aid: Place Scotch tape over the affected area and strip off repeatedly to remove spines. Apply ice packs to reduce the stinging sensation, and follow with a paste of baking soda and water. If the victim has a history of hay fever, asthma or allergy, or if allergic reactions develop, contact a physician



## ***“To Do” List for September***

**Flowers:** For instant color plant marigolds and garden chrysanthemums. Bulbs to plant now include amaryllis, Aztec lily, calla, elephant ears, grape hyacinth, iris, leopard lily, narcissus, snowflake, watsonia, and zephyr lily.

**Herbs:** Plant anise, basil, borage, chervil, marjoram, parsley, sesame, and thyme.

**Lawns:** Fertilize with a 15-0-15 or 16-4-8 fertilizer. Most Florida soils are high in phosphorous, the middle number on the fertilizer label, so this nutrient is rarely needed. Increase mowing heights to promote a deeper root system.

**Trees:** Fertilize palms with slow release palm fertilizer. For fall color plant deciduous trees such as bald cypress, Chickasaw plum, crape myrtle, redbud, red maple, river birch, sugarberry, sweet gum and winged elm. Trees to plant include black olive, dogwood, golden raintree, hollies, loquat, southern juniper, sugarberry, and wax myrtle.

**Vegetables:** Snap beans, pole beans, beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, endive/escarole, lettuce, cucumber, bulbing onions, bunching onions radishes, summer squash, and turnips.



## ***“To Do” List for October***

**Flowers:** Buy spring flowering bulbs (narcissus, tulips, etc.) and store in the refrigerator for 60 days. Plant bulbs immediately upon removal. Keep them away from ripening fruit during storage. Plant cool season flowers like dianthus, pansy, petunia, shasta daisy, snapdragon, viola, million bells, status, thunbergia, flowering kale and cabbage. Bulbs to plant include agapanthus, gladiolus, kaffir lily, marica, moraea, society garlic, spider lily, anemone, hyacinth, pineapple lily and star-of- Bethlehem.

**Herbs:** Plant parsley, sage, thyme, and rosemary.

**Lawns:** Do not fertilize the lawn this late in the year. For a green winter lawn overseed with ryegrass. Watch for brown patch fungus disease, chinch bugs, sod webworms, army worms, and mole crickets.

**Trees:** You can remove diseased or dead limbs any time of year. If you plant a tree this month, remember that water is the most important part of early tree care. Be sure to dig the hole wider than deep. Do not fertilize now, wait until next spring. Let the tree put its effort into producing roots.

**Vegetables:** Plant strawberries in late October through November. Plant in rows 36” apart and 12” apart within the row. Elevate rows 6” above existing soil to insure good drainage. Use pine straw to reduce weed problems and slugs.



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If you would like to receive  
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Visit us online at  
<http://nassau.ifas.ufl.edu/>

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this information. Horticulture News is a  
joint project with contributions by county  
agents and Master Gardener Volunteers.  
Sincerely,**



**Rebecca L. Jordi,  
Environmental Horticulture Agent II**

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## **Herb of the Month - Parsley**

**P**arsley (*Petroselinum crispum*) grows well in Florida gardens. There are three common varieties of this popular, bright green biennial: flat leaf (Italian, with leaves like celery and cilantro), curly leaf, and parsley root (Hamburg). It is quite nutritious, containing vitamin A, vitamin C, several B vitamins, calcium, and iron.

Although a hardy biennial, parsley performs best as an annual. It overwinters in plant zones 2 through 7,

with plants flowering and setting seed in the second year. It is a cool season vegetable, best planted in late fall or winter in North Florida. It is fairly hard to transplant, so seeds should be sown where you want them to grow. Plant thickly  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch deep: then thin seedlings to 6 inches apart.

Parsley tolerates full sun, but would like some afternoon shade in hotter regions of the South. To harvest, cut leaves back to the crown, or cut the whole plant down to 2 inches

above ground. Use the leaves in cooking or as a garnish.

