Want to plant a treemendous tree? Look no further than the river birch. Although seedling river birch is common in the market place, there are at least two superb cultivars available that are noteworthy. These are ‘Heritage’ and ‘Dura Heat’.

The Society of Municipal Arborists selected ‘Heritage’ as the 2002 Urban Tree of the Year. It outgrows seedlings rapidly, yet the wood is not brittle. Its leaves are three to four inches long and are less prone to leaf spot than the species even during hot humid weather. ‘Dura Heat’ has a denser canopy of foliage than species River Birch along with leaf spot resistance. Both have good wind resistance, a benefit during hurricane season, and would be excellent trees for North Florida gardens.

In the fall, the butter yellow leaves provide bright color. The bark peels in lovely flakes of cinnamon, beige, and creamy white adding colorful winter interest, and making it a favorite tree for ornamental use.

Native to the eastern United States the river birch is commonly found in flood plains and/or swamps. Native Americans used the boiled sap as a sweetener similar to maple syrup, and the inner bark as a survival food. It is usually too contorted and knotty to be of value as a timber tree.

‘Heritage’ river birch can grow 50 to 80 feet tall but is often seen somewhat smaller. It will grow about 30 inches or more each year in USDA hardiness zone 7, and faster in the south. It can be trained with one central leader or as a multi-stemmed tree. The branches droop when they are wet, so be careful when locating them close to areas where clearance is needed for vehicular traffic.

The river birch is very well-suited for planting along steam banks and in other areas which are inundated with water for weeks at a time. It does tend to be short-lived (30 to 40 years) in many urban settings including street tree plantings. This might be due to inadequate water supply in dry soil or root rots in continually wet soil. But it will look great for about two decades or more, much better than many other trees commonly planted in urban areas.

Better adapted to heat than other birches, the tree tolerates heat well in the south and can survive modest droughts.

Propagation of river birch is by softwood cuttings. It transplants easily at any age.

No pests or diseases are of major concern.
Program Announcements

Troubleshooting & Neighborhood Stormwater/Landscape Program
Solve landscape problems and 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. Fifteen participants are required.

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

Landscape Matters
There will be no programs in November or December.

Spotlight on Nassau Gardens

October Winner - Yvonne Sawyer
The October selection for Spotlight on Nassau Gardens is Yvonne Sawyer’s lovely pagoda plant (Clerodenrum peniculatum). Yvonne lives in Callahan and has a lovely garden full of red hibiscus, pagoda plants, roses and blue Mexican petunias.

Plant a Palm - Pindo Palm (Butia capitata)

This cold-hardy, single-trunked palm is easily recognized by its rounded canopy of blue-grey, strongly recurved, graceful fronds which curve in toward the trunk. The heavy, stocky trunks are covered with persistent leaf bases.

Large, showy clusters of orange-yellow, juicy, edible fruits, the size of large dates, are produced and often used to make jams or jellies. The fruit, ripening in summer, can be messy on sidewalks or patios, so you may want to plant 10 feet away from the walk or patio.

This slow growing palm eventually will reach 20 feet tall and is attractive as a freestanding specimen or grouped with other palms. Most are seen smaller than this since growth rate is very slow.

Plant 10 feet apart as a street tree even beneath power lines due to slow growth and small size. Growing in full sun or part shade on a wide variety of soils, including alkaline, pindo palm is moderately salt-tolerant.

Pindo palm can survive hot, windy conditions, asphalt and concrete areas but looks better in good soil with adequate moisture. Some people do not consider this a pretty palm but it certainly will grow anywhere. Propagation is by seed which take many months for germination.

Palm leaf skeletonizer, scale, and micronutrient deficiencies (especially Mn and Fe) are occasional problems for pindo palm. Micronutrient deficiencies only show up on soil with a high pH. No diseases are of major concern. The roots and lower trunk can rot if soil is kept too moist.
November Checklist

**Flowers:** Sow seeds of larkspur, bachelor’s buttons, sweet peas, and California poppies in full sun for a colorful spring show. Set out hardy plants such as sweet alyssum, petunia, dianthus, and snapdragon.

**Lawns:** Avoid the temptation to apply winter fertilizers in NE Florida. Check your mower. Resharpen blades, change the oil, and clean mower of debris.

**Perennials:** Plant now for fall color. Mexican bush sage has spikes of purple-and-white flowers that will wave in the wind. Pineapple sage has brilliant red blooms and leaves each with the hint of pineapple aroma. Firespike with its red bloom spikes is great for partial shade. Philippine violet brightens fall days with its lavender flowers. The brilliant yellow of swamp sunflower will stop traffic a block away. Cigar flower has an abundant display of small orange-and-yellow, tubular blooms.

**Trees:** If you are planting a new tree, staking may not be necessary. New trees become stronger if some movement is allowed. Planting too deeply causes future problems. Plant trees so the top root is just at or slightly above soil level.

**Vegetables:** Keep crops picked to encourage new production. Irrigate during morning hours (6-10am) with drip irrigation to discourage disease.

December Checklist

**Annuals:** Plant carnations, digitalis, pansies, petunias, shasta daisies, and snapdragons this month.

**Bulbs:** Check for declining plant portions and pests. Examine bulbs in storage and remove adhering soil or damaged portions.

**Herbs:** Anise, basil, bay laurel, borage, caraway, cardamom, chervil, chives, coriander, dill, fennel, ginger, horehound, lemon balm, lavender, lovage, marjoram, Mexican tarragon, mint, nasturtium, oregano, rosemary, sage, savory, thyme and watercress can be planted now.

**Lawns:** Do not apply fertilizer or any nitrogen this time of year, wait until March or April. Keep mowing height the same year round. Water ¼ to ½ inch every 10-14 days if we receive no rain.

**Trees and Shrubs:** Late December is the ideal time to begin transplanting plants if the weather has turned cool. It is best to transplant trees and shrubs after they have gone into dormancy. Prune roots two to three months before digging by severing roots with a spade just inside the intended root ball to generate new root hairs and reduce transplant shock. Be sure to keep plants out of the ground as little time as possible. Do not put anything in the transplant hole, simply keep the plant irrigated well for 3-4 months.

**Vegetables:** Choices for this month include beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, Chinese cabbage, English peas, onions, and radishes.

Selected from Florida Vegetable Guide by JM Stephens, RA Dunn, G Kidder, D Short, & GW Simone, University of Florida and Month-by-Month Gardening in Florida by Tom MacCubbin
The Fall Master Gardener Plant sale was held Friday October 2 and Saturday October 3 from 9AM-2PM. It included Master Gardener propagated plants, select trees and shrubs and, new this year, FNG-LA Florida Plants of the Year.

Guest speakers were Doug Gates teaching Florida Friendly Garden Plants, Horticulture Agent III, Becky Jordi, Proper Planting Techniques, Shirley Fenton, Plant Propagation, and Paul Gosnell, How to Make a Rain Barrel. There was a drawing for a custom made rain barrel.

The sale was held at Nassau County Extension satellite office in Yulee, 86026 Pages Dairy Road. All proceeds benefit the Nassau County Master Gardener program and its volunteer community projects.
Shirley Fenton celebrates!

Ginny Grupe & Jane Brown in Plant Propogation Center

Bea Walker & Paul Gosnell
How to Make a Rain Barrell

Guest with Shirley Lohman

Shirley Fenton celebrates!
Don’t let winter pass you by without looking for the beautiful black skimmer (*Rynchops niger*) on the beach. This extraordinary bird, especially when in flight, can hardly fail to impress even the most casual observer.

The world’s three skimmer species are the only birds whose lower mandibles are longer than the upper. Of these, only *Rynchops niger* occurs in the Americas.

Black skimmers feed in large flocks, flying low over the water surface with the lower mandible skimming the water for small fish or crustaceans, caught by touch by day or especially at night. They also wade in shallow water, jabbing at the fish scattering before them.

They spend much time resting gregariously on sandbars in the rivers, coasts and lagoons they frequent.

Their breeding range extends from Massachusetts and Long Island south through the coast of Florida. In winter months, this species can be found as far north as the Carolinas.

Breeding and foraging occurs in estuaries, with nests typically constructed on open spaces in beaches, salt marshes and dredge spoil islands. Nests are not elaborate; usually just a simple surface scrape. The typical clutch size is 4 eggs; maximum is 5.