Do you like peaches, apricots, and plums? Meet the loquat, a delectable but neglected fruit native to China and cultivated in Japan for over 1000 years. The loquat is comparable with its distant relative, the apple, with a high sugar, acid and pectin content. You may enjoy it as a fresh fruit or mix with other fruits in fruit salads. It can be used to make pies, jam, jelly or chutney and is delicious poached in light syrup. Fruit may also be canned, dried, or frozen.

This beautiful tree, *Eriobotrya japonica*, is best adapted to subtropical climates, making it a good candidate for the landscape in North Florida. The trees are very cold tolerant and may withstand temperatures down to 10°F. However, the flowers and fruit are killed by temperatures below 27°F. Temperatures above 95°F may negatively affect tree growth, which can reach heights up to 25 feet.

Loquat plums are about 2 inches in size, and for best results should remain on the tree to ripen. The fruit appears anywhere from February to April and should be thinned to improve fruit size. The trees can be propagated by seed but then produce inferior fruit; therefore cuttings provide the best specimens. Loquats grow in a wide variety of well-drained soils but are not truly salt tolerant. The loquat requires no pruning.

Loquats are susceptible to fireblight which is caused by bacterium (*Erwinia amylovora*). It can spread rapidly, killing trees when conditions are right. The first symptoms of fire blight occur in early spring, when temperatures are above 60°F and the weather is rainy or humid. Infected flowers turn black and die. The disease moves down the branch, resulting in death of young twigs, which blacken and curl over, giving the appearance of a “shepherd’s crook.” Leaves on affected branches wilt and remain attached to the plant, giving it a fire-scorched appearance. Slightly sunken areas, called cankers, appear on branches and the main stem. During wet weather you may notice a milky-like, sticky liquid oozing from infected plant parts. Insects and rain can spread the disease. Reduce the spread of fire blight by removing and destroying all infected plant parts. Pruning cuts should be made 12 inches below any sign of infected tissue. Disinfect all pruning tools between cuts using a solution of 1 part household bleach to 9 parts water. Succulent new growth is easily infected if injured. Avoid over fertilization which results in excess growth.

There are numerous loquat varieties with a wide range of peel and pulp colors in Florida and the U.S., but many cannot be found in the nursery trade. Ask your local nursery if they can obtain a desired cultivar. Then enjoy this wonderful and delicious source of vitamins and minerals, the loquat!
Program Announcements

Biannual Master Gardener Plant Sale

Friday April 23rd 9AM-2PM
Saturday April 24th 9AM-2PM

Our biannual plant sale has Master Gardener-propagated plants, select trees and shrubs and “goodies “ for your garden, including custom painted planters. Attend classes by horticulture experts including Rebecca Jordi - Horticulture Agent III and others. Melaleuca mulch will be on sale for $3.50 per bag. Don’t miss the best sale Nassau County has ever seen! All proceeds benefit the Nassau County Master Gardener program and the volunteer community projects they perform in Nassau County.

Location
Yulee Satellite Office
86026 Pages Dairy Road
Yulee, FL

Landscape Matters

Seed & Plant Propagation
Wednesday March 17th, 2010 10AM - 11AM
Master Gardener Shirley Fenton

Container Gardening
Wednesday April 21st, 2010 10AM - 11AM
Master Gardener Carol Ann Atwood

Location
Demonstration Garden
Nassau County Government Complex
96135 Nassau Place
Yulee, FL

Plant Clinics

Monday March 8, 2010 10AM-2PM
Monday March 22, 2010 10AM-2PM
Monday April 19, 2010 10AM-2PM

Location
Yulee Satellite Office
86026 Pages Dairy Road
Yulee, FL

Bring us your tired, diseased, insect infested plants yearning to be free of problems. When possible place your plant in a plastic bag to prevent chances of spreading issues to other plants. You will receive current research based information on proper plant care, disease management and insect control. These sessions are free to the public. No registration required. Come anytime between 10AM - 2PM for expert advice.

Stinging Insects - Velvet Ant

Velvet ants – actually wasps – get their name from the hairs that cover their body and because they resemble ants. The flightless females, which are often encountered while wandering on the ground, especially resemble ants. Males have wings but no stingers, while females have stingers but lack wings. When harassed, and during mating, velvet ants produce an audible squeak. Velvet ants are also known as cow killers or mule killers because of their extremely painful sting. Like all wasps, they can sting multiple times. Of course the velvet ant cannot kill a cow or a human and probably has seldom ever stung a cow. Because of their armor-like exoskeleton and painful sting, few if any animals consume this conspicuous wasp. Velvet ants are solitary creatures unlike their cousins the bees. Adults feed on nectar but the larvae’s main food is burrowing beetle and bee larvae. Velvet ants are not aggressive but the female will sting if she is provoked. Velvet ants do not cause plant or property damage and should be left alone. If a chemical control is needed you may try a contact insecticide normally used on wasps or yellow jackets.
March Checklist

Flowers: Water as needed. Over-watering causes root and stem rot. Opt for drought tolerant plants such as purslane or periwinkle. Group your plants together according to their watering and light requirements. Bulbs will be in full bloom. To conserve plant energy, cut off the old seedpods after flowering. Fertilize perennials this month if you missed last month. Plant poinsettias in landscape during late March. Cut back plants to within 12 to 18 inches of ground level. Pinch back new growth every four weeks until September 10. Fertilize monthly from May to September. Choices for planting include lantana, pentas, salvias, purple coneflowers, buddleia, verbenas, dianthus, petunias, and snapdragons.

Roses: Continue spray program (every 7-10 days). Water as needed. March 15, apply liquid fertilizer. Check your micro irrigation system (leaks, dirt in system, timers)

Lawns: Rake dead grass to allow new grass to grow. Complete fertilizer can be applied this month. Check your soil first. Phosphorus can accumulate in the soil.. Select a fertilizer with a such as a 15-0-15 or 16-0-8. Follow directions on the label.

Shrubs: Prune and fertilize azaleas with acid fertilizer as soon as they finish blooming. Azaleas may be transplanted now as well. Selectively prune overgrown shrubs to minimize height.

Trees: Make sure your younger trees maintain a straight trunk as new growth begins. Do selective pruning of any competing limbs with chosen central leader. Remember, you do not need to prune completely back to the trunk. Err on the side of too little rather than too much pruning. Once you cut it off, you cannot put it back!

Vegetables: Have your soil tested after you have added your amendments but prior to planting. You can pick up soil tests kits to mail to the University of Florida at either Extension office. It is important to have vegetable soil test once every 2-3 years. The pH and the nutrient content of the soil is an important factor in production of vegetables. This month’s choices for planting are cantaloupes, watermelon and beans.

April Checklist

Flowers: Annuals to plant now include celosia, coleus, coreopsis, dusty miller, geraniums, hollyhocks, impatiens, kalanchoe, lobelias, marigolds, portulacas, rudbeckias, salvias, verbenas, zinnias. Groom to reshape perennials. Prune hard to correct growth problems. Divide overcrowded fall flowering perennials and bulbs. Bulbs to be planted now include achimenes, agapanthus, amaryllis, Asiatic lilies, begonias, blood lily, caladiums, cannas, crinum, dahlia, gladiolus, gloriosa lily and zephyranthes.

Roses: Continue spray program (every 7-10 days). Water as needed. March 15, apply liquid fertilizer. Check your micro irrigation system (leaks, dirt in system, timers)

Lawns: Water during early morning when the leaves curl and turn gray-green. Stop feeding during very dry times. Keep mower height at the highest setting for your grass type. Apply 1 inch of sand to uneven areas for leveling. Allow grass clippings to fall on the lawn.

Trees: Most older trees and palms are fine and can exist with the seasonal rains. Look for aphid, borer, and scale infestations. Caterpillars may be extra heavy this month.

Vegetables: Herbs to plant are anise, basil, borage, chives, dill, marjoram, mint, oregano, rosemary, sage, savory, and thyme. Vegetables to plant are cantaloupe, collards, cucumbers, lima beans, okra, pumpkin, yams, peppers, squash and watermelon.
Weed Watch - Japanese Stilt Grass

Japanese stilt grass, *Microstegium vimineum*, is a warm season annual which prefers shaded areas. It goes by other common names such as: Japanese Grass, Annual Jewgrass, Nepalese Browntop and Nepalgrass. It is considered a noxious weed in Connecticut, Alabama and Massachusetts.

This weed is native to Asia and found in the United States from Ohio to Virginia southward. The plant was accidentally introduced into the state of Tennessee around 1919 and is assumed to have entered from packing material used to ship porcelain from China. Since that time it has become a highly aggressive invasive species and is present in most of the eastern states, more than half of which have reported it to be invasive.

It has no means of reproduction aside from seeds. This limitation makes it easier to control than perennial weeds. Use a hoe, rake or remove by hand before it produces seeds to reduce your chances of seeing this grass again next year. Summer is not the best time of year to apply weed killer to lawn grasses as the herbicide may weaken or even kill the grass you wish to keep. Use a pre-emergent herbicide in the spring to reduce the seed germination of this weed.