

# Horticulture News

UF/IFAS Nassau County Extension

July/August, 2011

## LIGHTNING

**L**ightning never strikes twice. Don't bet on it! Contrary to common belief lightning can and often does strike the same place twice, especially tall buildings and mountain-tops.

What causes it? As water droplets collide in the atmosphere during a storm, electrons are knocked free, creating negative electrical field in the clouds. Objects on the ground, including the earth itself, become positively charged, creating an imbalance that nature needs to fix by passing current between the two charges. A step like series of negative charges (each about 150 feet long) work their way down from the clouds to earthbound streamers, or shreds of positive energy. When they meet, lightning explodes. The tallest object in a storm does not always get struck by lightning. Lightning can strike anywhere.

A bolt of lightning reaches 50,000° F, three times hotter than the surface of the sun. About 2,000 people are killed worldwide by lightning each year. Hundreds more survive strikes but suffer from a variety of lasting symptoms, including memory loss, dizziness, weakness, numbness, and other life-altering ailments.

The odds of becoming a lightning victim in the U.S. in any one year is 1 in 700,000. The odds of being struck in your lifetime is 1 in 3,000.

Contrary to popular belief, rubber tires do not protect your car from lightning because they do not conduct electricity. The reason you are safe in your vehicle is that the metal carries the charge into the ground.

Surge protectors cannot save your computer and other electronics from being fried by lightning. No

surge protector can survive a direct hit.

Safety should be your primary concern during a thunderstorm. The hair on your neck and arms will stand up when lightning prepare to strike nearby. Head immediately for the nearest shelter. Do not hide under a lone tree and do not lie on the ground. Always keep your feet on the ground with the rest of your body curled in a tight ball. If lightning does hit you it will continue on its way as long as your feet are hugging the earth.

Lightning is good! Plants need nitrogen to grow. The air is about 78% ni-

trogen, but plants cannot use it. Lightning changes nitrogen in the air into a form that your garden plants can use. This is called "fixation" of nitrogen. Lightning accounts for only about 5% of the natural fixation of nitrogen, with bacteria doing most of the work.



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## Program Announcements

These programs are free to the public, so please call us at 904-879-1019, 491-7340 or e-mail [rljordi@iufl.edu](mailto:rljordi@iufl.edu) if you plan to attend. If response is too small, the program will be canceled.

### Landscape Matters

#### Composting

10AM-11AM  
Wednesday July 13  
Master Gardener Joanne Roach

#### Vegetables

10AM-11AM  
Wednesday August 10  
Master Gardener Howard North  
Master Gardener Joseph Smith

#### Location

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

### Spotlight on Nassau Gardens

#### May Winner - Shirley & Paul Hargraves

These lovely pink azaleas grace the entire front yard belonging to Shirley and Paul Hargraves on Amelia Island. They are approximately 25 years old and have never been trimmed. They are beautiful.

#### June Winner - Jackie & Joe Stubits

Gardening lovers Jackie and Joe Stubits, Amelia Island, have lived in their home for 27 years and have thousands of beautiful amaryllis which they have planted from bulbs over the years. They also have hundreds of day lilies and Easter lilies over their property. What a delight to behold!!

### The Grass is Greener...Centipedegrass

Would you like a new lawn? Consider centipedegrass. This creeping perennial is well adapted to the sandy, acidic soils of Florida. It has a coarse texture with short upright stems that grow close to the ground and need less mowing. It survives mild cold temperatures as long as there aren't several hard freezes. With light freezes the grass will turn brown but will recover and turn green as soon as the temperature rises.

The first and most important thing to know before

planting any grass is the soil pH. Centipede grass likes an acid, infertile soil with pH around 5.0 to 5.5. Since it grows slowly, it has low fertility requirements.

It is naturally pale green in color. Over fertilizing in order to produce a dark green color reduces its cold tolerance, increases long-term maintenance problems, and is believed to contribute to "centipedegrass decline."

It has fair to good shade tolerance and good drought tolerance. It can be established from seed, sod, or

plugs and spreads by stolons. For more information about centipedegrass and other grasses for your Florida lawn check out the University of Florida website: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep288>



# LIVING GREEN - COMPOSTING

Composting is the biological decomposition of organic waste such as food or plant material by bacteria, fungi, worms and other organisms under controlled aerobic (occurring in the presence of oxygen) conditions. The end result of composting is an accumulation of partially decayed organic matter called humus. Composting with worms, also known as vermiculture, results in nutrient-loaded worm castings.

### WHY COMPOST?

- It's easy
- It creates a useful soil enricher
- It is an environmentally sound way of reducing yard waste

Yard waste is such materials as leaves, grass clippings, brush, and prunings. Some states, including Florida, have banned yard waste from landfills. Leaves and grass clippings can be used as mulch in your garden or landscape. Yard waste that will be picked up should be bundled or bagged.

### HOW DOES COMPOSTING WORK?

**Step 1:** Choose the right composting method for you.

There are two kinds of composting--bin/pile composting and worm composting (vermiculture). The type of composter used should be the one that best suits your needs and capabilities.

#### Bin/pile composting:

Simply throw in organic materials as they become available around your home and yard

[Learn about the right bin for you](#)

#### Worm composting:

Popular way to compost small amounts of food and paper wastes

[Read detailed instructions on how to build a worm bin](#)

**Step 2:** Choose the right location for your compost bin.

Consider how you will get the raw materials to the pile and how the finished compost will be moved to the area it will be used.

**Step 3:** Decide what to compost.

To build a compost pile, simply alternate layers of browns and greens.

#### Greens:

Vegetable and food scraps  
Fresh grass clippings and yard waste  
Coffee grounds  
Tea bags  
Egg shells

#### Browns:

Dried leaves, grass, mulch or hay  
Cardboard rolls  
Sawdust  
Lint  
Newspaper (shredded)  
Fireplace ashes  
Hair/fur  
Clean paper  
Wool/cotton rags

#### Avoid:

Egg yolks (attract vermin)  
Meat (attracts flies and rodents)  
Oils, grease (produce odor, attract vermin)  
Pesticides (can kill composting organisms)  
Pet waste (can carry disease, attract flies)



**Step 4:** The composting process.

The compost pile should be periodically mixed to incorporate oxygen. Regularly check the internal temperature and turn over the mixture when it reaches 140°F. The compost pile should be built in layers 3 - 4 inches deep. Composting still happens if the pile is not turned, but the materials break down slowly.

**Step 5:** Using compost around your home.

Once the composting process is complete, the result is a dark, nutrient-rich humus that has many uses:

**Soil Amendment**--work a 1 - 3 inch layer of compost into garden soil.

**Mulch**--apply a 2 - 3 inch layer on top of existing soil

**Potting mix**--blend with potting soil for container plants





## July Checklist

**Citrus:** Depending on citrus fertilizer label, apply fertilizer every six weeks or as directed. Check for citrus insects and disease. Weed as needed, keep mulch away from trunk. Water once a week unless it rains.

**Fruit:** Remove about 1/4 to 1/5 of the oldest blueberry canes (usually 1 to 3 of the oldest canes.) Apply 6-6-6 or 8-8-8 fertilizer to nectarine. Weed as needed.

**Flowers:** Annuals to plant include celosia, coleus, crossandras, exacum, impatiens, kalanchoe, nicotiana, ornamental peppers, portulaca, torneias, salvia, and periwinkle.

**Bulbs:** Separate bulbs and give away to friends. Bulbs planted too deeply need to be removed. Transplant bulbs if the area is receiving too much water.

**Herbs:** Bay laurel, culantro, ginger, horehound, lavender, Mexican tarragon, mint, parsley, oregano, rosemary, sesame, and thyme can be planted now.

**Roses:** Continue spray program. Water, water, water. June 15, apply liquid fertilizer. Cut and remove spent blooms. Check for spider mites.

**Lawns:** Add iron sulfate to green up lawn but avoid nitrogen fertilization this month. "Take-all-root-rot" will be in full force during the summer - be sure to avoid over watering and over fertilizing.

**Perennials:** Cut off old flower heads, prune off dead or insect infested areas, and pinch off tips of stems to encourage denser growth.

**Trees:** Remove crape myrtle seed heads to encourage blooming through September. Remove old flower and seed stalks. Prune now for trees that flower in the winter. Palms should have a "palm special" fertilizer applied over the root system under the spread of the fronds. The configuration should be 8-2-12-4 (N-P-K-Mg). Ideally this would also include manganese, boron, sulfur, etc. with appropriate formulations. Use a slow release fertilizer. Many palms are deficient in potassium, in spite of using palm fertilizers. Apply Muriate of Potash to correct this deficiency.

**Vegetables:** It's too hot to be planting anything now but lima beans, eggplant, okra, Southern peas, peppers, and watermelon. However, this is a good month to solarize your fall garden. Till your plot, moisten the soil, cover the ground with clear plastic. Place heavy objects around the edges to keep the plastic from blowing away. Let the sun bake your soil. It will help control fungi and nematodes. After 30 days till soil, replace the plastic and bake another few weeks. Plant your August or September garden.

*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*



Persian Violet (Exacum)

## August Checklist

**Citrus:** Depending on citrus fertilizer label, apply fertilizer every six weeks or as directed. Check for citrus insects and disease. Weed as needed, keep mulch away from trunk. Water once a week unless it rains.

**Fruit:** Apply azalea fertilizer to blueberry shrubs, at 1/2 pound per 3 feet of shrub. Weed as needed. Check irrigation to ensure it is working. Make repairs.

**Flowers:** Plant asters, balsam, begonias, black-eyed Susan, blue daze, cats whiskers, coleus, cosmos, cockscombs, dianthus, forget-me-not, gaillardia, golden globe impatiens, marigolds, melampodium, moon vine, pentas, periwinkles, petunias, phlox, porterweed, portulaca, purslane, salvia, scabiosa, strawflowers, sunflowers, tithonias, torenia, verbena, and zinnias.

**Roses:** Repeat July procedures. Water, water, water.

**Bulbs:** Plant African Iris, agapanthus, amaryllis, cannas, crinums, daylilies, gladioli, gloriosa lilies, society garlic, and rain lilies (Zephyranthes).

**Herbs:** Bay laurel, culantro, ginger, horehound, lavender, mexican tarragon, mint, parsley, oregano, rosemary, sesame, and thyme can be planted now.

**Lawns:** There is still time to install a seeded lawn but do not delay. Select good quality seed such as Argentine Bahia, common bermudagrass or centipede. Initially the seeds to need stay moistened but once they have germinated irrigation can be reduced. These grasses do well without heavy irrigation and high nitrogen fertilizers. They turn brown earlier than St. Augustinegrass in the winter.

**Perennials:** Start salvia, violets, ruellia, lion's ear, gerbera daisy, butterfly weed, and blanket flower from saved seeds. Let seeds dry on the plants. When pods open, dry seeds inside on screen or cheesecloth. Put into a plastic bag or a jar and label. Keep the seeds in the vegetable section of the refrigerator. Use within one year. Do not store in the freezer!

**Trees:** Cut back unwanted limbs to a branch angle or the trunk. Remove old fronds and seed stalks from palms. Do not apply paints or coverings to wounds. Remove old seed-heads from crape myrtle trees to encourage additional blooms.

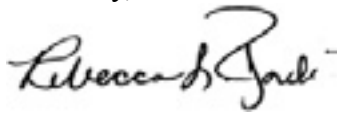
**Vegetables:** To produce fruit August plantings are especially important for corn, eggplant, pumpkins, peppers, tomatoes, and watermelons. Each of these crops takes about 90 days to come to fruition. Do not wait too late, or an early frost may reduce the yield. Other cold tolerant veggies to plant include snap beans, pole beans, lima beans, broccoli, cauliflower, collards, corn, cucumber, bunching onions, Southern peas, peppers, pumpkin, summer squash, tomatoes, turnips, and watermelons. One pest to be especially aware of is the cutworm.

*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*



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,



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## Growing Avocado in North Florida



**A**vocado, *Persea Americana*, is grown commercially in south Florida and many homeowners enjoy having a few avocado trees in their landscape as well. It is possible to grow avocado here but your selection of a specific cultivar will be essential for your success. Be sure to plant the trees in a protected area away from cold north winds and salty sea breezes.

The varieties that can

tolerate the coldest temperatures are from Mexico such as 'Brogdon', 'Ettinger', 'Gainesville', 'Mexicola', and 'Winter Mexican' which are able to survive infrequent temperatures in the low 20s. 'Tonnage', 'Taylor', 'Lula', 'Kampong', 'Meya', and 'Brookslate' may be planted in areas with temperature ranges of 24°F-28°F. Moderately cold-tolerant types (25°F-30°F) include 'Beta', 'Choquette', 'Loretta', 'Booth 8', 'Hall',

'Monroe', and 'Reed'.

It might work best if you plant two different tree varieties to assist with pollination (see the publication listed below for specific directions). Trees should be planted in full sun in well drained soil, these plants do not like wet feet. Fertilize using 6-6-6-4 once every 1-2 months. Young trees should be irrigated twice

a week if no rainfall occurs. It is important to irrigate on a consistent basis when trees are fruiting and certainly more water is needed on newly planted trees.

Check out the UF/IFAS publication on avocados for the homeowner for additional information: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/mg213>

