

Horticulture News

UF/IFAS Nassau County Extension

July/August, 2012

Florida's Venomous Snakes

by Steve A. Johnson and Martin B. Mai

Florida is home to 45 species of native snakes, six of which are venomous (snakes are not poisonous -- "poisonous" refers to something that is toxic when ingested). The venomous species include five pit vipers (Eastern Diamond-backed Rattlesnake, Timber Rattlesnake, Pygmy Rattlesnake, Copperhead, and Cottonmouth) and the Coral Snake.

Copperheads and Timber Rattlesnakes have a limited range in Florida. Copperheads are not found in North Florida, occurring only in a small area of Florida's Panhandle just west of Tallahassee, while Tim-

ber Rattlesnakes are only found in northern Florida as far south as Gainesville and in limited portions of the Panhandle. The other four venomous species are found throughout the state. Florida's venomous snakes occur in a variety of natural habitats, ranging from swamps to dry woods.

The five species of pit vipers all share several characteristics. The pupils of their eyes are vertical (cat-like) and they have a deep facial pit between each eye and nostril. These characteristics can be difficult to see unless a snake is examined closely, so do not rely on them to dif-



Cottonmouth/Water Moccasin

ferentiate venomous from non-venomous species. Florida's pit vipers have blocky, triangular-shaped heads that are distinctly broader than their necks. Relative to their length, these species are heavy-bodied snakes.

Cottonmouth

The Cottonmouth is the most aquatic of Florida's venomous snakes and occurs throughout the state. Although they may exceed five feet in length, most adult Cottonmouths observed in Florida are about three feet long. This species prefers the margins of lakes, rivers, and wetlands. As a defensive re-

sponse when threatened, Cottonmouths often will open their mouths wide, revealing the cotton-white interior.

Eastern Diamond-backed Rattlesnake

This is a very dangerous snake and should not be approached. The Eastern Diamond-backed Rattlesnake is Florida's largest venomous snake and may exceed six feet in length. It occurs throughout Florida in a variety of dry habitats, such as pinelands, scrub, and golf courses.

Eastern Diamond-backed Rattlesnakes have bold ...continued on page 3



Program Announcements

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

Landscape Matters 10AM-11AM

Composting

Wednesday July 11

Master Gardener Joanne Roach

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

Vegetables

Wednesday August 1

Master Gardener Joseph Smith

Plant Clinics 10AM-2PM

Monday July 9

Monday July 23

Monday August 6

Monday August 20

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 researched 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.

Trouble-shooting Landscapes: Efficient Irrigation



County Extension Director/Horticulture Agent, Rebecca Jordi and Master Gardener volunteers Paul Gosnell and Nelson Peterson will assist homeowners in reducing insect and disease issues on lawns and landscapes. These problems often result from too much water, shallow irrigation, or uneven coverage. They will demonstrate how to properly measure irrigation at one zone and then provide solutions for correcting discrepancies. Other cultural practices such as fertilization, proper mulching, planting depth of trees and shrubs, etc. will also be provided. In addition, Jordi and the Master Gardeners will diagnosis disease or insect issues on ornamentals at the site. The goal is to reduce frustrations and the cost of managing North Florida landscapes. Jordi requires at least 6 homeowners and will come to your subdivision for these free sessions. To schedule a "Trouble-shooting Landscapes" session for you and your neighbors, please call the Extension office at 904-879-1019, or email Ms. Jordi at rljordi@ufl.edu.

Spotlight on Nassau Gardens

May Winner - Judy & John Layton



Judy and John Layton have lived in Yulee for 15 years and their lovely garden has been a continuous evolving process that is still moving forward because of their combined interest and enthusiasm. Each garden area is unique. Not only do they grow lovely annual and perennial flowers, but also a vegetable garden, a collection of citrus trees, many different beautiful orchid varieties, a delightful fish pond and a spectacular location on Lofton Creek. Their greenhouse is a safe place in cold weather to protect many potted plants. What a virtual paradise!

View more photos online at <http://nassau.ifas.ufl.edu/horticulture/spotlight/spotlight.html>. To be considered for Spotlight on Nassau Gardens, send a digital photo, with a description of your garden, along with your name, address and phone number to ncmg@nassaucountyfl.com For more information contact Rebecca Jordi at 491-7340. or 879-1019.

...continued from page 1



Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake

markings down their backs that include a row of large, dark diamonds with brown centers and cream-colored borders. The tail ends in a rattle that is used to make a loud buzzing sound when the snake feels threatened. Some individuals may not rattle, even when they are poised to strike.

The large, thick head has a light-bordered, dark facial band running diagonally through the eye to the rear of the jaw. The scales of this species are strongly keeled (i.e., there is a ridge along the center of each scale), giving these snakes a rough appearance. The young are similar to adults in color pattern.



Pygmy Rattlesnake

Pygmy Rattlesnake

Pygmy Rattlesnakes are the smallest of Florida's venomous snake species. Adults rarely exceed 20 inches in length. Pygmy Rattlesnakes range throughout the state

and occur in many different habitats that include pine flatwoods, oak scrub, open pinelands, and palm hammocks.

This is one of the most commonly encountered venomous snakes that occasionally is found in residential neighborhoods. Pygmy Rattlesnakes have a dark facial band that runs from each eye to the rear of the jaw. Their bodies are covered with numerous dark blotches with a row of darker blotches running down the middle of the snake's back. Usually a series of reddish-brown marks can be seen between the blotches on the back.

The rattle on the tip of the tail of this species is so small that it cannot be heard even when shaken vigorously by the snake. Pygmy Rattlesnakes are bold and will often hold their ground if approached. They will bob their head and strike into the air if they feel threatened.



Coral Snake

Coral Snake

Coral Snakes occur in many types of habitats throughout the state but are seldom encountered because they are quite secretive and spend much of their lives underground.

They are rarely longer than 30 inches and are usually no bigger around than a quarter. Coral Snakes are identified by the alternating bands

of black, yellow, and red that give this species its bold appearance.

Two non-venomous species look very similar to Coral Snakes because they also have bands of red, black, and yellow (or orange or white). However, the arrangement of the bands differs between



**Scarlet Kingsnake
Not Venomous**

the non-venomous species (Scarlet Kingsnake and Scarlet Snake) and the Coral Snake. In the two non-venomous species the red bands touch only black bands, but in Coral Snakes the red bands only touch yellow bands.

Remember the stoplight phrase "yellow, red, STOP!" If the red and yellow bands are next to each other, like the colors of a stoplight, it is a Coral Snake. Another feature of the Coral Snake is its blunt, black snout, which is followed by a band of yellow on the head. Neither the Scarlet Kingsnake nor the Scarlet Snake have black snouts.



**Scarlet Snake
Not Venomous**

HARVEST GOLD

Fresh from the Garden

by Joseph Smith, Master Gardener

GOLD



Field Peas

Hello Everybody! Welcome back to Harvest Gold. Here we are getting ready to enter the hottest days of summer. I would imagine that except for a few heat loving crops, such as field peas, butter beans, eggplant, okra, sweet potatoes, and peppers, most of our spring vegetables have just about had it. It is now time to plow these old, unproductive plants under and let our gardens rest for a month or so in preparation for our fall gardens. If we do not plow our gardens up, it would be a good idea to remove and compost or otherwise dispose of old vegetable plants. Even though

we might not be getting anything to eat off of these plants, garden pests are having a feast. By leaving these non-productive plants in the garden, we are providing these pests with free room and board. They will get fat and happy, raise their families in this old vegetation, and come back to haunt us next year in greater numbers. Removing these plants now will greatly reduce pest and disease problems in the future.

Traditionally, these hottest days of summer are called Dog Days. When I was a boy and my grandfather would mention Dog Days, I would conjure up images of dogs running around wild, chasing cars and bicycles, barking, playing, and generally having a mischievously good old time. As my grandfather related it, during Dog Days, snakes shed their skins, went blind, and became more aggressive, dogs were more apt to come down with rabies, and mockingbirds stopped singing and would not start again until the Dog Days were over. For a child, this was a strange and somewhat scary

time indeed.

So just what are Dog Days, and where does this idea come from? The notion of Dog Days goes all the way back to ancient times. The ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans noted that just before the hottest days of summer began, the brightest star in the heavens, Sirius (also called the Dog Star, so named because it is the most prominent star in the constellation Canis Major, or the “Big Dog”), rose at about the same time as the Sun, and for about a month, occupied the same position in the sky as the Sun. They reasoned that the Dog Star conspired with the Sun to somehow make the days on Earth even hotter, and named these hot, sultry days “Dog Days”, after Sirius, the Dog Star. We now know (obviously) that this is not the case, and that the extreme



Kaya stays cool on a dog day afternoon.



heat we experience is due to the tilt of the Earth on its axis. Nevertheless, according to John Henry Brady in his work *Clavis Calendaria*, published in 1815, throughout history these Dog Days were believed to be an evil time when “the Sea boiled, the Wine turned sour, Dogs grew mad, and all other creatures became languid; causing to man, among other diseases, burning fevers, hysterics, and phrensies.” Certainly, because of the heat, this time of year is not the most comfortable, but it is not quite as bad as Mr. Brady would lead us to believe, especially now since we have the benefit of modern day air conditioning!

Through the years, some disagreement has arisen as to the correct dates for Dog Days. According

to Grier’s Almanac, Northern states generally accept the period between July 3rd and August 11th for Dog Days, whereas here in the South, the period between July 28th and September 5th is normally used. Which are the correct dates? I don’t know. I just listen for the mockingbirds.

Before I go, I would like to include a few recipes (see following pages) for a couple of our heat loving crops:

Miss Alice’s Healthy Field Peas

Aunt Henrietta’s Eggplant Parmesan

Southern Fried Eggplant

Frau Simpson’s Baba Ghanoush

Well, my friends, I guess that just about does it for today. I

will leave you with a proverb I garnered from the Old Farmer’s Almanac:

“Dog Days bright and clear indicate a happy year. But when accompanied by rain, for better times our hopes are vain.”

Hope your days are bright and clear. Try to stay cool on these hot Dog Day afternoons, and until next time, God Bless and Happy Harvesting!

Peace and Goodness,
Joseph

Miss Alice's Healthy Field Peas

Ingredients

- 1 Quart Fresh Field Peas (Zipper, White Acre, Crowder, etc.)
- 1/2 Bell Pepper (Chopped)
- 1 Medium Onion (Chopped)
- 2 Cloves Garlic (Minced)
- 1 Cup Tomatoes (Diced)
- Salt and Pepper
- Olive Oil (About 4 Tablespoons)
- Water



Directions

Put olive oil in a large pot and heat oil. Add peas, and sauté until slightly brown, stirring while you are sautéing. Once peas have browned slightly, add bell pepper, onion, garlic, tomatoes, and salt and pepper to taste. Cover peas with about 2 inches of water, and cook on high until peas come to a boil. Turn heat down low, and simmer for about 2 hours, stirring occasionally. Be sure to check peas while cooking, and add more water if necessary. Serve over rice.

Notes: When preparing this recipe, only one type of peas may be used, or two or more types can be mixed. A mixture of Zipper peas and Black Crowders is a delicious combination. As with all field pea recipes, the peas are always better on the second or third day, after the seasoning has had a chance to go through them. Also, using olive oil instead of meat to season this recipe makes it quite a healthy dish. The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has found evidence suggesting reduced risk of coronary heart disease when people include olive oil in their daily diets. According to the FDA, "Eating about 2 tablespoons (23 grams) of olive oil daily may reduce the risk of coronary heart disease due to the monounsaturated fat in olive oil. To achieve this possible benefit, olive oil is to replace a similar amount of saturated fat and not increase the total number of calories you eat in a day."

Recipe courtesy of Alice Marie Smith

Aunt Henrietta's Eggplant Parmesan

Ingredients

- 3 Eggplants
- 2 Eggs (Beaten)
- 4 Cups Italian Seasoned Bread Crumbs
- 6 Cups Spaghetti Sauce (Divided)
- 1 (16 Ounce) Package Shredded Mozzarella Cheese (Divided)
- 1/2 Cup Grated Parmesan Cheese (Divided)
- 1 1/2 Teaspoons Fresh Basil (Chopped)

Directions

Preheat oven to 350 Degrees F. Wash, peel, and thinly slice eggplant. Dip eggplant slices in egg, then in bread crumbs, and place in a single layer on a baking sheet. Bake in preheated oven for 5 minutes on each side. Take a 9x13 inch baking dish, and spread spaghetti sauce to cover the bottom. Place a layer of eggplant slices in the sauce. Sprinkle with mozzarella and Parmesan cheeses. Repeat with remaining ingredients (sauce, eggplant, and cheeses), ending with the cheeses on top. Sprinkle with basil. Bake in preheated oven for 35 minutes, or until golden brown. Serve.

Recipe courtesy of Mrs. Henrietta Witherspoons



Southern Fried Eggplant

Ingredients

- 1 Eggplant
- Salted Water
- Black Pepper (To Taste)
- All Purpose Flour
- Oil



Directions

Wash, peel, and slice eggplant about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick. Put eggplant in a large bowl, and cover with salted water. (Salt the water is by dissolving about 1 Tablespoon of salt per quart of water.) Soak eggplant in salted water for at least 30 minutes. Mix black pepper with flour. Take eggplant directly from salted water, do not dry, and dip eggplant in flour/pepper mixture. (Another method is to put the flour/pepper mixture in a bag and shake eggplant in the mixture.) Remove eggplant from flour, and gently shake off excess flour. Fry in about 1 inch of hot oil for 2 to 3 minutes on each side, or until golden brown. Remove from oil, and transfer to paper towels to drain.

Notes: Since eggplant can sometimes be bitter, soaking it in salted water helps to remove this bitterness. Also, although many recipes recommend peeling eggplant before use, this is really not necessary if the eggplant is young and tender. If the eggplant is older, or has been stored for a while, peeling might be a good idea.

Recipe courtesy of Alice Marie Smith

Frau Simpson's Baba Ghanoush

Ingredients

- 1 Large Eggplant
- $\frac{1}{4}$ Cup Tahini
- $\frac{1}{4}$ Cup Fresh Lemon Juice
- 1 Large Garlic Clove (Minced)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ Cup Onion (Minced)
- Salt and Pepper (To Taste)
- 1 Tablespoon Olive Oil
- 2 Tablespoons Fresh Parsley (Chopped)

Directions

Puncture an eggplant with a fork several times, place on a cookie sheet, and broil in the oven, turning several times, until eggplant collapses and the inside is soft. Remove from oven, and let cool. Cut eggplant in half, and scoop out the insides, discarding the skin. Transfer eggplant to a food processor, and add tahini, lemon juice, garlic, onion, and salt and pepper to taste. Process until smooth. Taste and adjust seasoning as needed. Refrigerate. Just before serving, drizzle with olive oil, and sprinkle with parsley. Serve as a dip with pita bread cut into wedges, or pita chips.

Note: Baba Ghanoush is a Middle Eastern dip similar to Hummus.

Recipe courtesy of Pam Simpson



July Checklist

Citrus: Depending on citrus fertilizer label, apply fertilizer every six weeks or as directed. Check for citrus insects and disease. If adding horticulture oil or insecticidal soap be sure to use it only before 10am or after 6pm. Also be sure to use ultra-fine horticulture oil rather than dormant oil. 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. Cut and remove spent blooms. Check for spider mites and aphids.

Lawns: Add iron sulfate to green up lawn but avoid high nitrogen fertilization or high amounts 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 flowering 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

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 and grass out beneath the canopy. 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. Contact your local Extension service regarding a test for your soil pH. Common bermudagrass has a wide range of pH numbers; bahia and centipede prefer acid soils so be sure to have soil tested before investing in a new lawn.

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 seedheads 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.



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,



County Extension Director
Horticulture Agent III



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Landscaping for Energy Efficiency

Introduction

Landscaping is a good way to keep energy costs down. Landscapes that keep the sun away from the east and west walls reduces the amount of heat flow into a house. When heat is transferred into the home, your AC has to operate longer and harder, thus using more energy. Plants and trees that cast shadows over the east and west walls can reduce indoor temperatures by as much as 20°F in the summer!

Starting the Planning Process

A good way to start the landscape planning process is to make a bird's eye drawing of your home. Mark east and west directions on your plan and include all and

any existing trees and/or shrubs. This will help you decide where to plant the appropriate vegetation.

Planning Tips

Here are a few tips to keep in mind during the planning process:

Plant trees and shrubs so they can direct breezes. Remove low branches to allow for maximum air movement. Plants and trees release large amounts of water from the pores in their leaves, and this evaporative cooling process can create a zone around the plant as much as 9°F cooler than the surrounding air temperature.

Plant shade-casting plants around the air conditioning compres-

sor so it doesn't have to work so hard. Be sure that leaves and branches do not block the airflow and periodically check for fallen leaves.

Set trellises away from the house to allow air to circulate and keep vines from possibly damaging the exterior surfaces.

Consider using bark or woodchips for walkways. This helps to keep the yard cooler and provides drainage for water.

Plant natives! Use native plant species that are adapted to the soils and local environment.

