



Master Gardener Vision “to be the most trusted resource for horticultural education in Florida”

2266 N. Temple Ave., Starke, 904.966.6299 Email: lcompton@ufl.edu January, 2015

Florida Winters

Florida winters— you gotta’ love ’em! Running the air conditioner in the afternoon and the heater at night. Bundling up in the morning, shedding most of those clothes by the afternoon. If we are this confused by the weather, imagine what the plants are going through! Now is the time to really start planning your spring garden. Have you had a soil test done recently? If not, now is a good time! Check out our Gardening Calendars on pages 2, 3 and 4 for things you can do now to get ready for spring. We have a new crop of Master Gardeners and we have highlighted them on pages 5 and 8, along with some other Master Gardener news. Congratulations to Murley Blankenship, Kathi Fellows, Deborah Green and Tracy Meadows— our newest Master Gardeners! We have a two page spread on pages 6 and 7 about ecological engineers, Florida’s native pocket gopher being among one of the best. And if you are looking for an ornamental tree that blooms beautifully in the spring, try the Chickasaw plum (see below), a small, native tree that is unassuming during the year, but glorious when in bloom! So put on your shorts, flip flops and your down parka and enjoy the winter! It’s way better than the one they are having up north!

Laurie

Chickasaw Plum

Chickasaw plum is a native shrub or small tree that makes an attractive Florida Friendly™ addition to any yard. Each spring, Chickasaw plum trees are covered with clusters of tiny, fragrant, white flowers. The flowers bloom on the previous year’s wood and are especially dramatic since they appear before the trees puts out new leaves. Then the small fruits appear, turning from red to yellow as they ripen. The tart plums can be eaten fresh or turned into tasty jelly, and they’re also enjoyed by wildlife. Chickasaw plums form a rounded mass of slender, thorny branches around a short trunk. They can grow up to 25 feet tall, but are more often found in the 6- to 12-foot range. Chickasaw plum is native to Florida and a number of other states and is hardy to USDA Zones 5-9. It is known scientifically as *Prunus angustifolia*.



Laurie

What to Plant in January

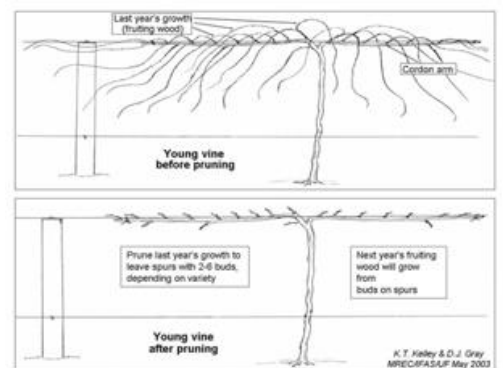
Although January can be warm, it's best to be safe and choose plants that are cold tolerant. Choices of plant material may be restricted in January, so it's a great time to plan for your spring garden! If you want to plant annuals in January, try carnations, pansy and petunia. Vegetables to plant now include broccoli, cabbage mustard, onions, radish and turnips. Lettuces are one of the first cool season vegetables to go to flower after a few days of really warm weather. Once the plant begins this process (bolting), harvest the leaves as soon as possible because they will become more bitter over time.



Red Mustard

What to Do in January

Prune grapes in January or February. For muscadines, prune all branches that are less than 3/16" in diameter, leaving 2 to 6 buds per spur. Remove most of the spurs located at the top of the trunk to prevent crowding and bushiness. Harvest citrus that are ripe before the freeze if temperatures are going to drop below 28°F for at least 4 hours. If fruit are not ripe, leave on the tree. Citrus will not ripen once picked! Prior to a severe freeze, protect graft unions of young citrus by banking clean sand around the trunk or wrapping the trunk with a blanket just above the graft union. Now is the time to purchase and plant bare root fruit trees like pears and plums. Be sure fruit trees are zoned for our area!



Pruning Muscadines

Source: http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/lawn_and_garden/calendar/

Wildlife Calendar January

- Nesting activity can be seen by ospreys, sandhill cranes, hawks, and owls.
- Look for red-tailed hawks perched in trees along highways.
- Gray foxes, bobcats, and raccoons begin breeding this month.
- Deer reach the peak of the rutting season in north Florida.
- Black bears in North Florida are inactive or in dens.

Source: http://www.wec.ufl.edu/extension/wildlife_info/happenings/



Pinecone with peanut butter and seeds

Did You Know? If you have a live Christmas tree, put it to good use after the holidays; place it in the yard and decorate it for the birds! Begin with the old pinecone trick: Wind a cotton string around the pinecone scales and loop the end so that it can hang from the tree. Then mix peanut butter (thinned with a bit of vegetable oil) with birdseed and spread the mixture on the cones. Roll in more birdseed and hang. You can also use this mixture on rice cakes which have been punched with a toothpick to make a hole and threaded on cotton string with a loop at the end for hanging on the tree.

Laurie

What to Plant in February

In February, the weather can be up and down, but we are almost guaranteed to get a few cold nights. If you would like to plant annuals, try baby's breath, calendula, marguerite daisy, and statice. For March flowers, plant delphinium, digitalis (foxglove), and larkspur in February. Both delphiniums and larkspur may require staking to support the flower stalk and both can be used as cut flowers. Keep in mind that all plant parts, including the seed, are poisonous. Vegetables to plant now include beets, carrots, cauliflower, celery, Chinese cabbage, collards, kale, kohlrabi, leek, onions, parsley, English peas, and potatoes.



Marguerite Daisy

What to Do in February

Hold on to poinsettias if you intend to plant them in the landscape after the cold weather is past. March is typically a safe planting month. Fertilize fruit trees in mid-February. For most fruit, use a citrus blend or peach/pecan special. Use a 6-6-6 or 8-8-8 at the rate of 1 to 2 pounds of fertilizer per inch of trunk diameter measured 4' above ground level. It's time to prune deciduous plants if needed. Don't prune spring flowering shrubs or trees until after bloom. Examples include: azalea, dogwood, red-bud, Japanese magnolia, and spirea. Prune roses and strip any remaining leaves from plants to reduce disease problems. Remove leaves that have dropped to the ground. Fertilize young ornamental plants in mid-February with a specialty or 16-0-16 type fertilizer.



Knockout Rose

Wildlife Calendar February

- Ospreys will begin nesting in north Florida near the end of the month.
- North Florida woodcocks begin courtship behavior.
- Pileated Woodpeckers begin their mating season and will start announcing territories by drumming on objects including houses and telephone poles.
- Swallow-tailed kites begin returning to Florida from South America.
- Pocket Gophers begin their spring breeding season.



Pocket Gopher

Did You Know? Pocket gophers are furry animals known by many old timers as "sandy mounds." It was given this name because of the sandy mounds of excavated earth that the gopher pushes out of its underground burrows. The name sandy mounder, over time, morphed into "salamander", but the pocket gopher is not a salamander. Salamanders are amphibians shaped like lizards. Salamanders are often known as "spring lizards" in Florida. To make this nomenclature even more confusing, in some areas of Florida gopher means a certain burrowing tortoise; the gopher tortoise. To simplify things keep in mind that in Florida "spring lizard" can mean "salamander" and "salamander" can mean "gopher" and "gopher" can mean "turtle." Clear as mud?

Laurie

What to Plant in March

Now is the time to put in our warm season plants. Annuals to consider include alyssum, asters, baby's breath, blue daze, calendula, celosia, cosmos and dusty miller, to name just a few. Bulbs to plant in March include allium, alstroemeria, blood lily, caladium, canna, crinum, dahlia, gladiolus, gloriosa lily, gloxinia, voodoo lily, watsonia and zephyr lily. In March, we transition from cool season vegetables to warm season vegetables. Some to try: beets, carrots, celery, endive, kohlrabi, leek, lettuce, bunching onions, parsley, English peas, potatoes, and radish.



Gloxinia

What to Do in March

March is always a busy time in the garden! Plant poinsettias left over from the holidays in the landscape or in large containers. Select a sunny area that is not exposed to artificial lights and add organic matter to enrich the soil. Cut back leaving 4" to 6" of height. Fertilize monthly from March to September. As plants grow, pinch the growing tip monthly to generate more blooms; discontinue September 10 because buds are forming. Pick off old camellia blooms and rake up any that may have fallen to decrease the risk of camellia blight in the following years flowers. Same thing for azaleas, after they quit blooming. Start fertilizing blueberries using an acid-forming fertilizer like an azalea/gardenia blend. Young plants benefit from frequent but light applications starting in February or March and continuing every other month with the last application in October. Prepare your vegetable garden area for planting as soon as temperatures are consistently warm.



Pink Poinsettia

Wildlife Calendar March

- Chickasaw plum and crabapples bloom in north Florida.
- Look for red foxes emerging from remote beaches.
- Newly-returned chuck-will's-widows call after sunset.
- Plant columbine, coral bean, and other wildflowers to attract hummingbirds.
- Wild turkey and quail begin breeding in central and north Florida.



Red Fox

Did You Know? The red fox can be found in many areas of Florida, although it was probably native only to the northern panhandle and has been introduced to other areas of the state, most often by hunting clubs. The red fox prefers upland habitats mixed with fields and pastures. Unlike the gray fox, the red fox does not like heavily wooded areas. The nocturnal red fox resembles a small dog with a bushy tail, weighing only 10 to 15 pounds. *Source: <http://www.sfrc.ufl.edu/extension/4h/wildlife/redfox.html>*

Bragging On Our Master Gardeners

Class of 2016 Bradford Master Gardeners (see back page for more on the graduation)



Murley Blankenship, Dr. Eric Simonne, Jim DeValerio & Wendy Wilber



Jim DeValerio & Kathi Fellows



Deborah Green & Dr. Simonne



Tracy Meadows, Dr. Simonne, Jim DeValerio & Wendy Wilber

More Master Gardener News:

Our Bradford County Master Gardeners were up for a lot of awards this year! Laurie Compton, a Master Gardener since 2006 received her ten year pin at the 2016 Regional Master Gardener Conference held in September in Duval County. At the annual Volunteer Recognition Dinner held in December, Beckie Burkett, Donna Solze and Georg Schaefer each received pin for 250 hours of volunteer service, and Pat Caren and Tom Sutton each got a pin for 500 hours of volunteer service. Congratulations to all!

On a sadder note, Emily and Georg Schaefer will be retiring from the Master Gardener program to pursue their many other interests. Thank you Georg and Emily for all your hard work, your expertise and your laughter (not to mention the cheesecake!) We will miss you!

Laurie

Ecological Engineers: Southeastern Pocket Gophers Are One of Nature's Architects

What is Ecological Engineering?

Ecological engineering is defined as the creation, modification, and maintenance of environments by plants and animals. All organisms affect their environment in some small way, but ecological engineers make significant changes such as regulating the availability of essential resources (like food, water, and shelter) or altering natural processes (such as water flow). By modifying their habitats, ecological engineers also influence the occurrence of plants and animals in natural communities. Scientists recognize two types of ecological engineers: autogenic and allogenic.

Autogenic engineers provide or modify habitat through their *presence* or physical *structure* (these are typically plants). An example of an autogenic engineer is a Live Oak tree (*Quercus virginiana*). Environmental conditions beneath the tree's limbs and leaves (its canopy) are different than conditions outside the tree's canopy. In summer, for example, light levels are typically lower and temperatures are cooler under the protective cover of the canopy than in areas beyond the canopy. Live Oaks also provide cavities, which serve as shelter or nesting sites for various animals.



Live oak

Cavities provide refuge to treefrogs, tree-dwelling lizards and snakes, birds, and mammals like opossums and squirrels. Certain plant species known as epiphytes (plants which grow on other plants), such as Spanish Moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*) and Resurrection Fern (*Polypodium polypodioides*), prefer the canopy of Live Oaks as their homes. Live Oaks produce acorns, a favored food of many game animals like deer and turkey. The presence and structure of live oaks provide numerous resources that other plants and animals rely on for their existence.



Beaver dam

Allogenic engineers alter the environment through their *activities*. The American Beaver (*Castor canadensis*) is the traditional example of an allogenic engineer. These industrious mammals use trees and other vegetation to construct dams. Beaver dams alter streams in several ways; decreasing water flow is the most noteworthy effect. Slow-moving water allows fine soil particles and organic matter to settle to the bottom, enriching the water of the beaver pond. Plant and animal communities in and around beaver impoundments change in response to water levels and flow as well as increased

nutrients. Numerous species of animals, such as snakes, turtles, muskrats, and raccoons use beaver dams and dens as feeding and resting sites. Many plants and animals found in association with beaver dams are unable to exist without them. For example, some salamanders and frogs are unable to reproduce in fast-flowing streams and rely on beaver ponds in which to breed.

An important allogenic ecological engineer in Florida is the Southeastern Pocket Gopher (*Geomys pinetis*), also known as the "sandy-mounder" or "salamander." This rodent is found in southern Alabama, southern Georgia, and all but southern-most Florida

Pocket Gophers live in dry, sandy uplands where they excavate extensive underground burrow systems. The most notable engineering activities of pocket gophers include soil tilling, tunnel construction (tunnels are a source of shelter for wildlife), and root herbivory. Probably the most important habitat-altering activity of pocket gophers is soil mixing. Typically, soil particles settle into distinct layers or “horizons.” When gophers tunnel and build mounds they disrupt soil layering, they aerate the soil, and they cycle nutrients. Studies have found that natural areas with gopher activity have enhanced plant productivity and greater diversity. Pocket gophers are known to excavate extensive tunnel systems,



Pocket Gopher



Sand Mounds of a Pocket Gopher

some greater than 500 ft. in length. Research suggests that gopher tunnels serve as an important shelter for a variety of animal species. Typical burrow inhabitants include many insects (some are exceptionally rare), salamanders, frogs, lizards, snakes, and small mammals. Some species of beetles and camel crickets are very rare and exist only in burrows made by gophers. These insects have evolved with gophers and are entirely dependent on them for their survival. The Florida Pine Snake (*Pituophis melanoleucus mugitus*) is a large, impressive snake that shares habitat with the Southeast-

ern pocket gopher. Pine snakes spend much of their time underground and prefer to use pocket gopher burrows as a place to hide and rest. By feeding on plant roots, pocket gophers can drastically affect the local plant community. Some plants can tolerate root herbivory and even flourish, but others are adversely affected. For example, grasses are known for responding favorably to root herbivory, which may be why gophers and grasses coexist together. Little is known about the effects of root herbivory on most plants, but it is likely that the root herbivory of gophers influences plant communities. The Southeastern Pocket Gopher is reportedly declining in all three states, with the most notable losses in Alabama and Georgia. This decline is mainly due to land development activities of humans. Widespread residential and commercial development, industrial-scale agriculture, and extensive roads and highway systems are all major obstacles to the continued existence of Southeastern Pocket Gophers.

The decline of gophers does not just concern the rodents themselves, but also those species that depend on them as habitat engineers. As gophers decline, populations of rare insects, like camel crickets or scarab beetles, are in danger of becoming extinct. Despite their apparent importance as ecological engineers, gophers have not been offered protection by any state nor by the federal government. Furthermore, many land owners consider pocket gophers a nuisance because of their habit of tunneling in yards and golf courses. Despite these concerns, pocket gophers should be tolerated, especially in their native upland habitats. To ensure survival of the Southeastern Pocket Gopher and the many species coexisting with it, tracts of upland pine habitat need to be protected and properly managed.

Laurie

Source: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic_gophers



(Pictured left to right): Murley Blankenship, George A. Grant (UF/IFAS Graduate student & National Poinsettia Trial Head Grower), Tracy Meadows, Jim DeValerio, Tom Meadows, Deborah Green, Kathi Fellows, Donna Solze and Richard Solze.

Congratulations 2016 Master Gardeners!

Bradford County Master Gardener Coordinator Jim DeValerio, family members and seasoned Master Gardeners welcome our new graduating Master Gardeners.

The Master Gardener students completed 50 hours of instruction over 10 weeks in the fall of 2016 and were recognized for their efforts during a graduation ceremony on December 8th at Fifield Hall on the University of Florida's main campus.

Graduation festivities included a ceremony where each new Master Gardener was presented a certificate and official name tag by Statewide Master Gardener Wendy Wilber and NE Florida Extension District Director, Dr. Eric Simonne.

The day was enhanced by the inclusion of several advanced learning opportunities for all who attended. Attendees learned how Master Gardeners impact the State of Florida from Wendy Wilber, enjoyed a rousing presentation on insects in the home by Dr. Phil Koehler and toured the Plant Disease Clinic led by Dr. Carrie Harmon.

Moving outside, attendees visited the Horticultural Science Greenhouses complex to learn about basil and coleus breeding from Ria Leonard and poinsettia breeding from George Grant. Many spectacularly colored coleus and poinsettias were enjoyed by all who attended. The last outdoor stop was a walking tour of Florida Friendly™ demonstration landscapes.

