Enter Your Plants in the Fair!

How would you like to show off your plants, get bragging rights for the next year AND make a little money? Bring your plants to the Bradford/Union County Fair and you may be able to do just that! Registration for the Horticulture/Agriculture Booth at the fair will be on Wednesday, March 11th, from Noon to 6pm and again on Thursday, March 12th from 8am to Noon. Master Gardeners and volunteers will be on hand to help you register your plants.

Our plant show last year was the best ever, with over 200 plants on exhibit. Entries ranged from African Violets to Zamias in the ornamental section and from beets to tomatoes in the vegetable section.

We have three divisions this year, including Adult Amateur, Adult Professional, for nursery owners and professional growers and a Youth Division for those who are 18 and under (as of September 1, 2008).

Entries can include potted houseplants, hanging plants, patio plants, cut or potted edible or food producing plants, vegetables, fruits and nuts. We also have a Section for honey, cane syrup and eggs. You can pre-register your entries using the registration form included in this newsletter, or you can bring your plants to Building #2 of the fairgrounds on March 11th from Noon to 6pm or March 12th from 8am to Noon. See you at the Fair! By Master Gardener Laurie Compton

Featured Plant: Crape Myrtle

A long period of striking summer flower color, attractive fall foliage and drought tolerance all combine to make Crape Myrtle (Lagerstroemia indica) a favorite small tree for both formal and informal landscapes. Valued for its prolific summer flowers, heat and drought tolerance, and year-round landscape interest, crape myrtles begin flowering as early as May in some cultivars and continues into the fall. Each cluster of flowers (or panicle) develops on the tips of new growth and is composed of hundreds of 1-to 2-inch flowers. Colors range from shades of purple, lavender, white, pink and red, including “true” red, a relatively recent development. Well-established plants are extremely drought tolerant and have low fertility requirements, although they respond to fertilizer and water with lush growth. Crape myrtle generally requires little pruning. "Suckers" or water sprouts that develop along the lower portions of main stems or from roots should be removed when using crape myrtles as trees. Small twiggy growth on disease-susceptible shrub and tree forms should be thinned out from underneath and within the canopy. Crape Myrtle grows best in full sun with rich, moist soil. Insect pests are few, but they are susceptible to powdery mildew damage.
The Cutting Edge

March in the Garden: What to Plant

**Annuals:** Replace declining winter annuals with varieties that provide color now and through the summer, such as: ageratum, wax begonia, browalia, celosia, coleus, impatiens, pentas phlox and zinnia. Flower beds should be prepared before plants are purchased. Allowing plants to remain in their original containers for prolonged periods after purchase can have a negative effect on their performance after planting. Purchase plants when you're ready and plant them as soon as possible, preferably within twenty-four hours.

**Bulbs:** Plant spring and summer flowering bulbs now, in beds that have been amended with organic matter. Provide stakes as needed to support growth. Some bulbs to try: amazon and kaffir lilies, caladium and canna. General care includes fertilization once or twice during the growing season with a special bulb fertilizer or 1 or 1 1/2 lbs of 12-4-8 or an equivalent amount of other complete fertilizers per hundred square feet (10 m²) of bed.

**Seeds:** Bedding plants can be started from seed as soon as danger of frost has passed. Cosmos, morning glory, nasturtium and ornamental peppers are all very easy to start from seed.

**Vegetables:** This is the “busy “ season for vegetable gardening and the time to change from cool weather crops to warm weather crops. Warm season crops should be planted now for late spring harvest: Pole, bush and lima beans, cantaloupe, sweet corn, southern peas, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, summer and winter squash, & tomatoes.

Source: UF/IFAS Florida Gardening Calendar

March in the Garden: What to Do

- Pruning: If azaleas need hard pruning to shape or produce a fuller plant, do it just after plants finish blooming. To guard next seasons blooms on spring flowering trees and shrubs, begin pruning after the last flowers fade but before new buds set. The end of the dormant season is a good time to prune many trees and shrubs.
- Fertilize Lawns: Apply a complete fertilizer after all danger of frost has passed since fertilizing too early can damage the lawn.
- Fertilize: Palms, azaleas, camellias and ornamental shrubs. Choose a fertilizer based on each plants needs.
- Irrigation: Now that dry weather is here, check sprinkler systems for efficient use of water.

Wildlife Calendar for March

- Carolina wrens begin nesting—hang a gourd or open basket under your eaves.
- Swallow tailed kites return to Florida from South American wintering areas.
- Frogs and toads move to ponds, streams and ditches to breed following rains.
- Listen for newly returned chuck-wills—widows calling after sunset.
- Largemouth bass start to bed in North Florida.
- Great crested flycatchers return late March to early April.
- Wild turkey and quail begin breeding in Central and North Florida.
- Hummingbirds return.
- Black bears start moving after winters hibernation.
- Pine barrens frogs start calling.
- Chickasaw plum and crabapples bloom in N. Florida.
- Spring turkey hunters take to the field.

Source: UF/IFAS Florida Wildlife Extension
**April in the Garden: What to Plant**

**Annuals:** New varieties of coleus do well in sun or shade and provide vivid colors and patterns for months. Bedding plants purchased in compartmentalized plastic flats usually have pot-bound root systems. If planted intact, the root system will be slow to establish in the surrounding soil and plants will suffer moisture stress. A preferred method is to loosen and untangle the root system without breaking the soil ball. Plants will usually recover rapidly and become established quickly.

**Bulbs:** Louisiana iris thrives in most soil types and makes a beautiful cut flower. Many bulbous plants grow best if left in the ground year after year while others may become crowded and bloom poorly. Digging and replanting usually encourages more uniform flowering and larger flowers. It may be desirable to dig certain bulbs annually so that they can be replaced with other plants in the bed. Tropical bulbous plants, such as caladiums growing in north Florida, should be dug and stored to prevent injury by cold winter temperatures.

**Seeds:** This is the last month to plant annual flower seeds that need to germinate before hot weather returns.

**Vegetables:** Continue planting warm season crops. Mulch well to prevent weeds and provide irrigation if there is a lack of rainfall. Tomatoes benefit from staking and mulching. Tomato flowers self-pollinate and will drop if temperatures are too high or too low.

*Source: UF/IFAS Florida Gardening Calendar*

**April in the Garden: What to Do**

**Pests:** Monitor landscape plants weekly for aphids on tender new growth.

**Lawn Problems:** Many lawn problems mimic insect damage. Confirm the damage is being caused by insects before applying a pesticide.

**Divide perennials and bulbs:** Divide clumps of bulbs or herbaceous perennials to expand garden beds or pass along to friends.

**Shrubs:** Planting season is here and there are a wide variety of shrubs that can be added to the landscape now.

**Mulch:** Mulch conserves moisture during dry weather and minimizes weeds in the landscape.

**Wildlife Calendar for April**

- Bobwhite quail nest now through September.
- Watch for hummingbirds feeding on blooms of columbine, buckeye and others.
- Black bears begin moving after winters inactivity.
- Endangered gray bats return to Florida caves to raise young.
- Most Florida snakes begin mating rituals.
- Alligators begin moving about, seeking new territories and mates.
- The cobia migration is in full swing in the Panhandle.
- Plant extra parsley for black swallowtail butterfly larvae.
- Long tailed weasels, minks and river otters will be born April through May.
- Beginning of Sea Turtle nesting season on Florida beaches.
- Largemouth bass move into the shallow waters of Lake Talquin.
- Manatees move up the Wakulla and St. Marks rivers.

*Source: UF/IFAS Florida Wildlife Extension*
The pecan is one of the most important tree crops grown in the south and makes a beautiful dooryard tree. It is in the same family as hickories and walnuts (Juglandaceae), but is in a separate genus (Carya). Perhaps the most vexing problem with pecans is their tendency to bear heavy crops some years and very light or no crops during others. There is also a tendency for many nuts to be poorly filled. Several factors enter into these two problems. The pecan requires large amounts of food, which is produced by the leaves, for kernel formation or “filling” in the late summer and early fall just prior to leaf drop. When crops are heavy, there is not enough food to fill the nuts. Heavy crops also deplete the food reserve left to form flower buds in the following spring, so a light crop may occur the following year. Thus, it is highly important that leaf surfaces remain undamaged during the growing season and into the fall to produce the maximum amount of food for the maturing nuts and the following years flowers.

Mature trees require about 2 pounds of 10-10-10 fertilizer for each inch of trunk diameter (measure 1 foot above the soil) during the winter and summer. If tree growth is less than 2 feet per year, the quantity of fertilization should be toward the higher end of this rate. You may want to do a leaf analysis particularly if deficiency or toxicity symptoms occur in leaves or if limb growth is insufficient. Deficiency or toxicity can be diagnosed by a discoloration of the leaves or a malformation of the leaves. There should be 8 or more inches of terminal growth for older trees (10 years and older). For bearing trees, 2 to 4 pounds of fertilizer should be applied per inch of trunk diameter in February and again in June. Some growers prefer to bury fertilizer at 10 or more sites below the tree canopy to reduce runoff and increase fertilizer use efficiency compared to a broadcast application. Large trees (30 inches or more in diameter) may require 60 to 120 pounds of fertilizer in February and again in June. Conversions to per acre rates can be performed by multiplying the number of trees per acre by the above rates.

There is a lot to learn about pecan production. Visit the Bradford County Extension Service for information on cultivar selection, pest management, pruning, orchard establishment or care of young trees. Or read up on pecans at the following web pages: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/HS229

Going Electronic in 2009!

The Cutting Edge, Bradford County’s Master Gardener Newsletter is Going Electronic!

The Cutting Edge will be going to an electronic newsletter by November, 2009. If you would like to receive The Cutting Edge by email, please contact the Extension Office and let us know. If you don’t currently have email, we will continue to send you The Cutting Edge by snail mail!