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Fall Mulching

By Laurie McCarter, Master Gardener

Yes, it is that time again. Once the cool weather finally arrives and those weeds take a rest, it’s time to clean out our landscape beds and apply a fall layer of mulch.

What kind of mulch to use? Any organic mulch is acceptable for landscapes in the public spaces of your yard. Pine bark, cypress shreds, or pine straw are the most common types of mulch. You will notice that pine straw is the mulch of choice in many public areas and parks. Melaleuca mulch is also available locally. It has the added benefit of being the least desirable to tennis.

Remember to use caution with the "red" mulch. It is made from shredded wood products and the red dye can wash onto concrete sidewalks and driveways nearby. That type of mulch is better suited to commercial applications, like parking lot landscaping. If you do decide to use this red mulch, make sure you get one that is guaranteed not to contain recycled pressure treated lumber. Pressure treated lumber is often used for these red mulch products and can contain toxic amounts of arsenic, as reported on WESH News Channel 2. This arsenic can wash away in the rain and end up in our lakes and groundwater.

If you are interested in using pine straw mulch, you will find that it is not available at the local home improvement center garden departments. Other retail sources for pine straw are commercial mulch companies and some local nurseries.

The Cactus and Succulent Society of America

By Julie Fox, Master Gardener.

Society Information: www.cssainc.org
bimonthly - The Cactus and Succulent Journal
bimonthly - To the Point and Hazeltonia
basic annual membership $35, online signup capability

Organized in California in 1920, the CSSA has since expanded to 100 affiliates throughout the US. Services available to members and affiliates include a seed depot, lecture and field trip coordinator, slide library and article archive, books for shows and judging, as well as the above publications. There are a few sample articles under "publications" at the website. They are quite in-depth and offer clear pictures and photos.
Non-members may also order from the seed bank, although you will need to know the Latin nomenclature of what you want. There are currently 377 varieties available online at the seed bank.

Perhaps you'd like to see cacti in the wilds of Africa, Madagascar, India or South America? Become a member and apply for a $2000 travel award!

The Sarasota Club is 55 years old and boasts 54 members. Information can be found through wqmeier@aol.com. There is another club in Miami as well with 125 members. Information is at www.sfloridacactus.org. The Central Florida Cactus and Succulent Society in Tampa can be reached by calling (813) 974-2329.

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**Christmas Cactus**

*By Jean Helms, Master Gardener*

The Christmas cactus, a succulent, is relatively easy to grow and will reward you with prolific blooms year after year. Native to the tropics, this epiphytic plant is nicknamed for the holiday during which it blooms. With its various shades of red, pink, salmon and white, the Christmas cactus is a perfect holiday gift.

Water the cactus only when the top half of the soil is dry (about once a week or every ten days) and never allow it to remain in standing water. Watering requirements will vary with light, air temperature, and humidity.

After the holidays when my Christmas cactus is beginning to look a little shabby, I prune it to encourage branching and place it on the patio in a lightly shaded location. Direct sunlight can burn the stems (leaves). It is brought inside only when the temperature drops below 40°F. A frost or freeze can damage or kill the Christmas cactus.

If you keep your Christmas cactus in the house year-round, keep it in a sunny location out of direct sunlight. Although it will adapt to lowlight areas, more abundant blooms are produced on Plants that have been exposed to high light intensity. If housed inside, you will need to force flower buds for the holiday season by providing an adequate dark period. In early October, place your Christmas cactus in a room that doesn't receive any light during the evening hours.
I leave my Christmas cactus on the covered patio year round, and it blooms beautifully during the holiday season. Beginning early October, the cactus is placed in the area of the patio that receives no direct light from the moon or lamps during the evening hours. The cooler evening temperatures appear to promote flowering, too.

The Christmas cactus prefers well-drained soil. Repot it in a slightly larger pot in the early spring if it has become root bound. Use a commercial succulent mix or blend your own by using one part vermiculite or sand with two parts potting mix. During the spring and summer, apply a liquid fertilizer monthly (diluted to approximately ¼ to ½ strength).

The Christmas cactus is a hardy plant, requires little maintenance and is seldom bothered by pests or disease. Enjoy a Christmas cactus this holiday season.

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**Something for Everyone: The 2005 International Master Gardener Conference**

*By Peter Matt, Master Gardener*

One benefit of being a Master Gardener is that we get the chance to go to conferences that are all about gardening. Recently, I attended one of these conferences. The 2005 International Master Gardener Conference (IMGC) was held in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada from the 24 - 27 July. Until 2005 the event, which is held biannually, has been exclusively a North American affair.

This past summer we really went international with the arrival of a Master Gardener from London, England. Though I feel the delegation from Pearl City, in Aiea, Hawaii deserves mention for their efforts in getting to Saskatoon.

The final count for the conference was 459 delegates representing five Canadian provinces, 38 American states, and the United Kingdom.

The IMGC was a veritable smorgasbord of activities celebrating all things to do with Master Gardening. I say Master Gardening intentionally because there is a lot more to being a Master Gardener than just gardening. Beginning with pre-conference day tours and culminating with a slide show highlighting the faces and places of the conference, there was truly something for everyone.

The two full days of the conference offered tours, classes, and workshops. At any given time, there were four to six tours taking place and 12 - 16 classes or workshops.
And as if your plate wasn't full enough, there was a catered opening reception and an equally impressive end of conference buffet banquet.

Before I take you through the conference as I participated in it, you need to know a little about the organization, logistics and the driving force behind it all.

The two main lodging accommodations were the host hotel in downtown Saskatoon and the dormitories on campus at the University of Saskatchewan. A brisk 30-40 minute walk separates the two; however, if you were not inclined to walk, there was always a shuttle available.

I stayed on campus. Principally out of economic concerns but hoping the collegiate environment would induce an exchange of ideas and allow me, a first year Master Gardener, to glean pearls of wisdom from more experienced and longer serving Master Gardeners. It did.

So imagine if you will, keynote speakers in the main ballroom of a downtown hotel, classes and workshops on campus, tours departing both locations, as well as luncheons held in the commons area at the university, and a 30 meter tent housing vendors. All of this, plus the two previously mentioned social events, were the responsibility of the conference organizer, Patricia Hanbidge. Patricia orchestrated a great event plus she was everywhere. Always with a smile on her face, ready to resolve any last minute snafus, and at all times maintaining a positive mental attitude.

So that's the background. Let's get to the conference.

I arrived in Saskatoon on Saturday the 23rd and, after clearing customs, was greeted by a Canadian Master Gardener volunteer sporting a bright orange tee shirt. Not only was I quickly made welcome, but she ushered me curbside in time for me to share a ride to campus with a Master Gardener from Virginia. After registering at the housing office and stashing my bags I headed into town for a couple of well-deserved Canadian beers.

DAY #1

Sunday afternoon was spent on an optional guided tour of four of Saskatoon's most beautiful gardens. What made the spectacular displays even more impressive was that they were the creations of private homeowners whose entire growing season consists of only 120 days. Of all the sights and scents, the most beautiful were the linden trees.

Sunday evening was the Opening Reception held at the Western Development Museum. In addition to a University of Saskatchewan instructor regaling us with reminiscences of life in a turn of the century boontown, there were hors d'oeuvres and, those keen enough to figure out the exchange rate, beer and wine was available.
DAY #2

Monday marked the first full day. David Tarrant, a highly respected Canadian horticultural expert and University of British Colombia Botanical Garden's Public Relations and Program Coordinator, was the lead-off keynote speaker. His presentation, A Global Look at Gardens, took us around the world visiting public as well as private gardening activities. His message was how gardening links humankind worldwide and that gardeners understand that they are part of something bigger than themselves.

Monday afternoon was spent in the classroom. Caroline T. Kiang, extension educator from Suffolk County New York, delivered a very thought provoking presentation on a highly successful program. Her philosophy is that she is not training gardeners she is training educators.

My second activity for the afternoon was a workshop, How To Write For Gardening Publications-team-taught by the editor of Prairie Garden magazine and a university instructor. We were tasked with writing a short article and everyone did. It was just another indicator of the level of enthusiasm shared by all.

DAY #3

Tuesday morning found me boarding a bus for the Scientific Tour and a visit to the Canadian Light Source Synchrotron facility and the College of Agriculture's greenhouses. A synchrotron produces light, millions of times brighter than sunlight. It was pretty heady stuff, but what I found interesting was through manipulating light, it is becoming possible to unravel the mysteries of plant proteins. The end result of this will be the creation of plants more resistant to environmental stress.

On the walk between the facilities a comment was made to Professor Bob Bors, an assistant professor in plant science, that the trees were not mulched. Professor Bors explained that this is intentional, as it induces dormancy and reduces the tree's susceptibility to cold injury. Landowners in the know actually stop cutting their grass in August. This in turn forces the tree to compete with the grass for water and nutrients. As the grass sucks up the water and nutrients, the tree responds by slowing its metabolism and it saves itself.

My afternoon tour was billed as a Horticultural Therapy Tour with a visit to Sherbrooke Community Centre, a long-term facility that practices the ten principles of the Eden Alternative Care Model. Though I found the technical aspects of horticultural therapy lacking, what I did discover was a local Master Gardener who had combined his Master Gardener training and his concern for the welfare of others and created a gardening program for 297 patients.

Tuesday night's banquet A Taste of Saskatchewan featured a wide array of local dishes and the highlight of the evening was when 30 Saskatchewanians received their Master Gardener certification.
DAY #4

David Cavagnaro was the closing ceremony's key note speaker. His slide show, *Gardener's Legacy: A Heritage of Plants*, was a colorful portrayal of the richness and diversity of the world's corns, tomatoes, and beans; His slide show was spectacular, but it was trumped by the slide show created by Patricia's staff highlighting the previous three days. It was a high quality professional show that reinforced exactly how special those 72 hours had been.

The next International Master Gardener Conference is scheduled for the 2 - 5 May 2007 in Little Rock, Arkansas. I know I'll be there, there's bound to be something for everyone.

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Re-Blooming Advice for Amaryllis

By Julie Fox, Master Gardener

Ever wondered what to do with those amaryllis you received around the holidays? After the blooms fade you can plant them in your flowerbed and have them bloom again.

I have had about 18 amaryllis bulbs planted in my front flowerbed for 3-4 years now and have found a surefire way to force them to bloom year after year. For most of the year in my flowerbed, the long strappy amaryllis leaves hover over and protect a few dozen caladiums from sunburn. When winter comes, the caladiums will shrivel and the amaryllis leaves will have produced enough food for the bulbs to survive my upcoming forcing technique.

At the beginning of February, I completely cut back the leaves to about six inches above the ground. I add a slow-release fertilizer, fresh mulch and throw the old leaves in the composter. By the end of the month, I have lovely amaryllis flowers, about 4-5 per 3-foot stalk, racing each other to bloom first. All the bulbs produce flowers after this treatment partly because the bulbs have grown strong from the previous summer and fall growth.

The bed is planted on the west side of the house but only gets a half-day of direct afternoon sun. The soil is well amended, moist but with fair drainage. These were not particularly special bulbs, hybrids or mail-order either. They were simply the end-of-season sale or after Christmas bulbs from the home improvement stores. And if they are already sprouting in the stores, usually they are even cheaper. Simply plop them in the ground with the top just at the surface, water and wait! Here in Zone 9 there will never be a need to dig them up for cold weather or refrigeration.
December in Your Florida Garden

By Laurie McCarter, Master Gardener

Here are a few suggestions for adding a festive touch of color to the garden for the holiday season. Try using red petunias in flowerbeds or in container plantings. Red and white combinations are attractive using petunias, alyssum, or dianthus. Dusty miller can also be used as a backdrop for any red flowers. Remember that in our climate, plants in containers require frequent watering and fertilizer every two weeks.

For maintenance of trees and shrubs, the University of Florida/IFAS has these suggestions for December:

- Continue pruning trees and shrubs. Inspect fruit trees for diseased or damaged wood and remove branches.
- There is no need to apply a sealant or wound paint to a pruning cut. A plant will form callus tissue over a correct pruning cut.
- Check citrus, gardenia, camellias, and other plants for signs of white fly and scale. Spray the undersides of the leaves with horticultural oil if necessary.
- Plant or transplant deciduous trees and shrubs such as river birch, redbud, and crape myrtle. Make sure your landscape has room for its growth.
- Mulch around trees should be a layer only 2 or 3 inches deep and keep the mulch material at least a few inches away from the trunk of the tree.

Poinsettias in the Home

In caring for your poinsettias, the University of Florida/IFAS recommends the following:

- Location - Keep plants in a warm location tree of drafts and chilling. Bright light is always best, but avoid placing plants in extremely sunny, hot, and dry situations.
- Watering - Water your poinsettia when the surface of the soil is dry to the touch. Remove any excess water from the saucer beneath the plant, as poinsettias do not like to have
soggy soil. **Most people kill their poinsettias with too much water.** This plant came from the tropical desert (Mexico) and is more tolerant of dry conditions than of wet.

- **Humidity** - Poinsettias like a little bit higher humidity than the average household but will do fine in most situations without additional humidity. Misting plants or placing them on gravel trays will prolong the color and life of the poinsettia.

- **Fertilization** - It is not necessary to fertilize your poinsettia during the holiday season. In fact, high levels of fertilizer will reduce the quality of the plant.

For more information on the care and planting of poinsettias read "Poinsettias for Florida, Indoors and Outdoors" by Robert J. Black and Rick K. Schoellhorn at [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG352](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG352)

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**Plant Clinic**

If you have a gardening question or concern, assistance is as near as your telephone. Master Gardeners are available to answer your questions between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. Monday thru Friday at (321) 697-3000. You may also stop by the Extension Services Building in Osceola Heritage Park located at Highway 192 and Bill Beck Blvd.

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**Are Bugs Bugging You?**

**Practice Integrated Pest Management (IPM)**

IPM is the combined use of cultural, biological, and chemical methods for effective, economic pest control with little effect on non-target organisms and the environment. To practice IPM, you must know which organisms are helpful, harmful, or harmless.

Helpful organisms include predators, parasites and diseases. Predators kill and eat their prey. Parasites live in or on their prey, eventually killing it. Beneficial diseases consist of viruses, fungi, and bacteria that naturally infect and kill insects. Many harmful organisms have the potential to jeopardize the beauty or health of plants, but they often can be harmless in low numbers. Other organisms may be mistaken as damaging pests, but are actually harmless and don't require control.

- Identify organisms and know which life stage of a pest is damaging or is easiest to control.
• Know which plants commonly have pest problems and monitor them frequently.
• Use the "right plant in the right place". Improper site conditions predispose plants to pest problems and other stresses.
• Follow recommended cultural practices. Improper use of water, fertilizer, or pesticides will aggravate pest problems.
• Handpick or prune off pests when possible.
• Spot treat. Treat only affected plants using the least harmful pesticide.

Integrated pest management pays off in many ways:
• Protects natural enemies and other nontarget organisms.
• Reduces the potential for environmental pollution.
• Reduces pest resistance.
• Keeps useful pesticides on the market.
• Less pesticide is used, resulting in less pesticide exposure.

Helpful, Beneficial Organisms:
Lady beetles, lady beetle larvae, ground beetle, green lacewing, green lacewing larvae, brown lacewing, praying mantis, assassin bug, damsel bug, minute pirate bug, stink bugs, big-eyed bug, syrphid fly, tachinid fly, earwig, dragonfly and damselfly, paper wasp, parasitic wasps, spiders, beneficial diseases and some fungi.

Harmful, Destructive Organisms:
Aphids, armored scales, tea scale, soft scales, sooty mold, mealybugs, whiteflies, lace bugs, thrips, spider mite, cyclamen mite, leafminers, oleander caterpillar, azalea caterpillar, palm leaf skeletonizer, bagworms, giant palm weevil, lubber grasshopper, turf caterpillars, chinch bug, mole crickets, white grubs, snails, and slugs.
Harmless Organisms:
Centipedes, millipedes, psocids and leafcutter bees, jadera bug.

For more information visit the University of Florida, IFAS website:
EDIS and
Featured Creatures

Gardening Calendar for October to December

Plant Sale, November 4th 2005

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