Letter from the Editor

To our readers:

The theme for this issue of Roots & Shoots is soil. It is a basic element of any garden. Along with sunshine and rain, soil is needed for the growth of our plants. While progress is being made in hydroponic gardening, the vast majority of all agriculture depends on the earth. An ad in the December National Geographic states that not only is soil a living organism, it is host to both the flora and the fauna which live within it. Some of these are beneficial and some not so welcome.

While soil could be said to be a “living resource,” in general it is not renewable. Soil can be enriched and conserved but making more of it is not something that humans really can do. The part of the earth's surface which we think of as soil is really the thin upper layer of the earth's crust. When this topsoil is eroded by wind and water or suffers any type of damage, then there is less to be made use of. Especially in the United States, which is such a large country, we do not realize how dangerous wasting this resource is. We see erosion and hear stories of the Dust Bowl of the Thirties, but we do not see that this is a danger to our future wellbeing.

Conservation and pollution control are popular themes today. They need to be considered about the earth as a whole, including the soil which produces our food, flowers and forests.

To begin the discussion about what each of us can do about soil, this edition of the newsletter contains articles on soil testing and pH, composting, as well as the continuing series on Roses.

Two Master Gardeners give their take on composting to show you how the same goal can be approached from different directions. Interestingly, one writer is an experienced Master Gardener, the other just completed the training—but both have years of composting experience.

A new regular feature joins “From the Master Gardener Plant Clinic”—this one focused on gardening topics for children. Let us know what you think (of this or any other article) at oscmg@osceola.org.

Remember to keep us up to date with your current email address so that you do not miss an issue. If you are not a subscriber then please contact us by phone, mail, or email to put your name on the list. Subscription information can be found throughout the newsletter.

Barbara Shuman
Roots & Shoots Editor
In the previous issues we looked at some of the best types or classes of Old Garden Roses (OGR) for Florida. We discussed Species, China, Noisette and Bourbon roses. Now for our final classes we turn to Tea, Polyantha, and Found roses.

The **Tea** class (not to be confused with Hybrid Tea) is my favorite. They were originally known as Scented Tea because of their tea-like perfume. Eventually the “scented” was dropped and they are now called Tea roses. The similarity to a tea scent has been debated but the fact that they are very fragrant has not. They are large shrubs needing lots of room to spread out and they produce a cycle of blooms every six weeks. The blooms are quite large ranging from deep pink to white. They hate heavy pruning. I know since I killed my first one by doing just that. Some of the most popular ones in this group are:

- **Safrano 1839** Zone 6/ 4-6 ft. high/ 3-4 ft. wide/ fragrant/ apricot blend/ reliable repeat bloomer.
- **Sombreuil 1850** Zone 7/ climber 10 ft. or more/ very fragrant/ white/ reliable repeat.
- **Duchess de Brabant 1857** Zone 6/ 4-6 ft. high/ 3-4 ft. wide/ very fragrant/ light pink/ reliable repeat.
- **Marie van Houtte 1871** Zone 7/ 5-7 ft. high/ 4-5 ft. wide/ fragrant/ pink blend/ reliable repeat.
- **Mrs. B. R. Cant 1901** Zone 7/ 6-8 ft. high/ 4-5 ft. wide/ very fragrant/ medium pink/ reliable repeat.

The **Polyantha** class is a cross between the pink China roses and the wild R. multiflora roses that have large clusters of blooms. They have a compact growth form. Some of these are:

- **Cecile Brunner 1881** Zone 5/ 3-4 ft. high/ very fragrant/ light pink/ repeat.
- **Clotilda Soupert 1902** Zone 6/ climbing/ very fragrant/ white with pink centers/ repeat.
- **LaMarne 1915** Zone 5/ 4-6 ft. high/ fragrant/ pink/ repeat.

**Found or Mystery** roses are those that have unknown lineage. Many roses that have been discovered growing along byways and highways, cemeteries, and abandoned buildings have not been able to be identified but are worthy of rescuing and preserving.

- **Caldwell Pink unknown** Zone 6/ 4-6 ft. high/ pink/ repeat.
- **Puerto Rico unknown** Zone 7/ 4-6 ft. high/ white/ repeat.
- **Bermuda’s Kathleen unknown** Zone 7/ 3-5 ft. high/ pink to rose/ continuous.
- **Smith’s Parish, Zone 7/** 4-6 ft. high/ white to pink/ repeat.
From the Osceola Master Gardener Plant Clinic

By Sandi Switek, Master Gardener (2005)

Question: What can I do to get rid of that terrible grass with the runners? It is all over my lawn and has now crept into my flower beds.

Answer: You are probably dealing with common Bermuda grass. Unfortunately there is no herbicide which will selectively control this pesky grass. This means that you must either try to dig it up or use a non-selective herbicide which will kill everything it hits. If the infestation in the lawn is really bad, you may end up having to kill whole sections of your lawn and then re-sodding it. In the garden, it may be easier to dig up or spray without killing everything else.

Question: My azaleas have these caterpillars all over them. What can I do to get rid of them? I tried some horticultural oil, but it did not work.

Answer: The best products to use to kill caterpillars would be ones that contain either BT (Thuricide) or Carbaryl (Sevin). While these both work well, they are not systemic. You must be on the lookout for future infestations and reapply the chemical if more caterpillars appear later.

Question: Is there an alternative to St. Augustine and Bahia grass? I don't like either one of them.

Answer: There is finally a type of Zoysia grass which has been developed for use in Florida. This cultivar is called 'Empire' Zoysia and is supposed to be more drought tolerant than St. Augustine, while growing thicker than Bahia. It will tolerate most lawncare chemicals well, and has a nice fine blade. However, it will be slower to green up in the spring. Unlike Bahia and St. Augustine, it needs to be mowed low. It does have the ability to green up again after a drought, which St. Augustine can not do. However, it is recommended to water at the first sign of wilt.

Questions in this column are taken from inquiries to the Master Gardener Plant Clinic, particularly those which seem to be of general interest. If you have any gardening questions, submit them by phone at 321-697-3000 or by email at oscmg@osceola.org. Of course, you are also welcome to come into the Clinic at the Extension Office in Heritage Park, M-F from 8-5: Master Gardeners are on duty from 10-2.
pH is a measure of acidity or alkalinity. pH is expressed by a number on a scale from 0-14. A neutral reading is 7. Any reading below 7 represents an acidic condition and the smaller the number the more acidic the condition. Any number above 7 indicates an alkaline condition and alkalinity increases as the number on the scale increases.

Optimum soil pH will vary from plant to plant, but considering all factors, a pH between 5.5 and 7.0 is generally accepted as the best range.

The pH of the soil has a direct influence on what nutrients are available to plants. If the pH is above or below the recommended range for that plant, then nutrients may not be soluble (absorbable by plants) or they may be so soluble that they leach or become phytotoxic. Therefore, the plant can show signs of nutrient deficiencies or toxicity even when the correct amount of fertilizer is applied to that plant. pH also influences the activity of soil microorganisms. Compost piles depend on the decomposing activity of bacteria and fungi. Therefore, lime is usually added to compost piles to keep the pH in a range suitable for maximum bacterial action.

Lime is added to the soil when a soil test determines that the soil pH is too acid. It is the carbonate ion which neutralizes the acid. It results in carbon dioxide and water, if the reaction goes to completion.

Soil testing for major nutrients of phosphorus and potassium plus secondary nutrients like calcium and magnesium can be obtained through your local extension office. The office supplies test kits you use to send samples to the University of Florida soil-testing laboratory. The cost for the test is $7.00 and in return you get an analysis plus fertilizer recommendations.

Besides the nutrient analysis, you receive a soil acidity test, often referred to as a pH test, plus recommendations for adjustment if needed. The pH test may be the most important part of the soil analysis. Many local soils and those near homes and concrete walkway are much higher. If you wish, a pH test can be made using kits available through many garden centers, and they and local extension offices offer this test for free or a small fee.

Using a trowel, dig a V-shaped hole in the soil four to six inches deep. Remove a 'slice' from one side of the hole. Collect similar "slices" from several spots in the area you wish to plant. Mix all the individual "slices" together. One-half pint of this mixed sample is sufficient for testing purposes. The sample should be
free of all plant debris and rocks, but should include all the "dust" (fine particles).

A complete fertilizer is best for most plants. A complete fertilizer means that all three major elements - nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium - are available in that fertilizer in some proportion. It is also recommended that a fertilizer containing other elements such as iron, manganese, sulfur, etc. be applied once a year. These nutrients are listed on the label as secondary and/or minor plant nutrients. For a "long lasting" fertilization select a fertilizer containing some percent "Water Insoluble Nitrogen".

The term 100% organic causes a lot of confusion. It is used in fertilizer advertisements because many people incorrectly associate "organic" with "slow release" in the context of fertilizers. However, this is not necessarily the case.

Nitrogen which is WATER-SOLUBLE is readily available to plants but it is also readily able to leach. As such, it can be lost to plants and can contribute to environmental pollution. Nitrogen which is NOT water soluble requires time in the soil to become water soluble and is thus considered slow release and less likely to be lost to leaching.

WATER INSOLUBLE nitrogen can come from natural organic materials (e.g. seed meals, sludge, dried blood, etc.) as well as from certain forms of manufactured (synthetic) organic materials (e.g. urea-formaldehyde, isobutylidine diurea [IBDU], etc.). These are the SLOW RELEASE nitrogen fertilizers.

WATER SOLUBLE nitrogen can be either organic (e.g. urea) or inorganic (e.g. various nitrate and ammonium salts). It can be natural and manufactured.

Florida fertilizer law, in trying to protect the consumer, requires that the various forms of nitrogen be specified on the fertilizer tag. This gets pretty complicated because terms like "water soluble organic N and or urea N," "water insoluble N," and "synthetic organic N" are needed.

Alkaline soils are a result of natural soil characteristics or excessive applications of lime. Adding elemental sulfur can lower the pH of over-limed soils. Naturally alkaline or calcareous soils are common in coastal counties. It is difficult, if not impossible, to lower the pH of these soils. Nutrient deficiencies in plants growing on calcareous soils should be treated by nutrient foliar sprays. Plants that are tolerant of high pH should be used to avoid continuing problems.

Most plants prefer a slightly acid soil. If ever in doubt, you can usually be successful growing the common landscape plants in a soil with a pH between 5.5 and 6.5.

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Most plants prefer a slightly acid soil. If ever in doubt, you can usually be successful growing the common landscape plants in a soil with a pH between 5.5 and 6.5. A few that grow best in a more acid soil below pH 5.5 include azaleas and blueberries. Some that like the pH 7, a neutral soil, or slightly above include the herbs of borage, sage, tarragon and thyme.

Usually references do give a general guide to the soil acidity desired. They often mention a plant needs an acid or slightly acid soil, and you can assume this is in the 5.5 to 6.5 range. Only in a few instances is a more detailed discussion of a plant’s acidity requirement needed. Having the soil acidity at an exact pH is not that important for most plants.

source [http://osceola.ifas.ufl.edu/mg_faq_1.shtml](http://osceola.ifas.ufl.edu/mg_faq_1.shtml)
Tips on Composting in your backyard!
By Allan R Douglas, Sr., Master Gardener (2007)

Spend more time working with your soil and you may not have to work so hard trying to keep your plants alive. All gardeners will face problems with their plants sooner or later and most times the answer will more than likely be directed to the poor soil conditions where they are growing. Achieving and maintaining an ideal garden can be as simple as making the soil match the plant requirements. Therefore, improving any soil virtually guarantees a more beautiful, healthy, and productive garden.

Compost is the best kept secret beneath any beautiful garden. Composting is the natural breakdown of organic materials. It can create a favorable environment for microorganisms, earthworms and beneficial insects that are nature’s “soil builders.” Around the home, compost can be used as a mulch around trees and shrubs or it can be mixed with soil to improve soil quality. Think of your compost mixture as a worker resource center for your plants. This center contains millions of workers (micro organisms) that are ready and eager to begin working for you in your garden. The more workers the more your garden will be healthy and productive. Therefore, compost benefits gardens, plantings and lawns by:

- Loosening clay and compacted soils for better drainage.
- Attracting necessary earth worms, a “hidden hero.”
- Increasing moisture retention in sandy, porous soils.
- Controlling soil erosion.
- Suppressing weeds when used as mulch.
- Making nutrients more easily available to plants.
- Creating good soil texture to hold nutrients better.

Step 1. Getting Started.
- Decide what materials you will use in your compost recipe.

Keep in mind the volume and availability of the materials you want to generate. For example: Fruits, vegetables, coffee grounds, leaves, grass clippings, horse manure and most other garden surplus items are good sources of nitrogen for your composting project.

...compost can be used as a mulch around trees and shrubs or it can be mixed with soil to improve soil quality. Think of your compost mixture as a worker resource center for your plants.

Step 2. Decide if you want to use (a) The Compost Bin or (b) The Tumbler.

(a) The Compost Bin, will keep the material in a confined area to retain heat and moisture; deter pests; help to reduce the effects of wind and weather and most importantly prevent complaints from your neighbors. You can make your own bin or buy one of the many commercial bins available on the market. The bin consists of three separate compartments for incoming organic material, working compost and the finished product. It requires a pitch fork along with some physical work to mix the materials occasionally. Turning the materials hastens the composting process, reducing the potential for odor.

(b) The tumbler is incredibly amazing but pricey; it is designed to make

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aerating or turning the pile easier, is aesthetically appealing, and does not require all the physical labor that’s involved with maintaining a three compartment bin. If you are like me and you are looking to work smarter and not harder, then the tumbler is your answer.

Each of these systems allows you to continue adding fresh material as it is generated from your kitchen or yard. When adding fresh material, always turn to aerate the mixture and to incorporate the new material within the “hotter” sections of the pile, where decomposition activity is highest. Temperature should be high between 130 – 150 degrees for maximum compost activity. Specialized, long-stemmed thermometers can be used to monitor temperatures deep within the mixture. Keep the compost moist but not wet. Finished compost is a dark brown, crumbly, soil-like material with a sweet earthy smell. The time required to fully compost materials will vary from six weeks to a year depending on the type of system you have selected, the composition, the temperature within the mixture, and the outdoor temperature. Also, the moisture content and the amount of aeration you provide plays a major function in the overall process.

Think of your garden as both an art and a science. When you select your plants you are exercising your artistic skills; when your plants start to encounter problems that’s when you tap into the science, and you want to be ready to deal with the current challenges. If you prepared your soil properly you can move on with confidence and examine other factors that may be contributing to a particular problem.

Growing fruits and vegetables removes many valuable nutrients from the soil each year. If your plants are to continue producing fruits, vegetables, and flowers, the nutrients must be replaced with a natural soil amendment. Using compost on a regular basis ensures a strong, healthy, and productive garden.
Thoughts on Composting
By Brenda Becker, Master Gardener (2005)

I first discovered composting in Illinois one fall when I never got around to bringing my raked and bagged leaves out to the curb for pick-up. They got buried under an early fall snow and there they stayed until spring when I discovered that they were no longer leaves, but beautiful, rich humus. I was hooked and have composted on purpose ever since.

Kitchen and yard waste will compost with or without any assistance because everything decomposes eventually. The trick is to accelerate what nature already does. To get the most compost with the least amount of effort, the browns to greens ratio matters. If you are not familiar with the browns to greens ratio, it is really quite simple when you think about it. Essentially, browns are dead and greens are alive. Browns are, well, for the most part, brown. This includes any living thing that has been aged after being previously removed from its life source. (i.e. Weeded, pruned, mowed, ripped apart by a hurricane, etc.) This also includes newspaper. Greens are, well, (you guessed it) green. Or purple, red, yellow, etc. The greens group would include any living thing that has been recently removed from its life source and has not yet turned brown.

I have tried composting a number of ways since being an Osceola County resident. They all worked and they each have had their advantages and disadvantages. For ease of discussion, I’ve named them: The hole method, the soon to be a garden method, and the heap method.

The Hole Method
This was inspired by my dog as well as other wild life that would venture into the yard to dig through my kitchen and yard scraps. It is very simple and works well if you live in a community that does not allow compost heaps. You simply dig a hole about 18 inches deep, throw your kitchen and yard scraps into the hole and cover them with dirt. When that hole fills up, dig another one. Except for eggshells, everything added to these holes completely composted in one season.

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The Soon to be a Garden Method
Wherever my next garden was going to be in the yard, I would layer 2/3 browns to 1/3 greens with a sprinkling of wood ash and then dirt from the yard over it. Using this method, I had pockets of completed compost in less than three weeks!

The Heap Method
This is what most people think of when thinking of a compost pile. Heaps can be done both with and without support. Support can be as simple as a chicken wire cage or as elaborate as a pre-manufactured motorized turning chamber, with all kinds of possibilities in-between. Heaps without support are just a pile of kitchen and yard scraps. This heap will spread out at the bottom in a pyramid shape. By enclosing a heap in a structure (chicken wire, pallets, cement blocks, pre-fab plastic, etc.) the compost pile can be higher without taking up as much horizontal space. This would increase the heat in the pile which would speed up decomposition in winter, but overkill for the rest of the year. As long as the pile is kept slightly moist I have had these compost in about twelve weeks.

Turning.
I do not turn my compost piles. I keep the brown to green ratio at 2/3, and keeping the pile slightly moist, I have usable compost in six weeks. I keep at least three piles in my yard so pile number one is done by the time I am building pile number three.

If you (or your housing development) like something more aesthetically pleasing, plant a flower or vegetable that climbs or needs support around the caged compost pile. Or get one of the pre-constructed bins or turners.

Do Not Use:
Animal products. They will compost but do not include them since they will attract vermin long before they break down.
Animal waste. This will also compost but you don’t want to take the risk of doing it wrong.
Colored and/or glossy newsprint in your pile. You don’t want these chemicals in your garden.
Chemically-treated grass clippings. (See above.)

Smell
If your pile smells “earthy,” Congratulations! You are composting!
If your pile smells bad cover with an inch or two of “brows” or just stir some into the pile.
If your pile does not smell earthy, it is not moist enough. It helps to keep the pile covered to retain moisture when the weather is dry and it will help keep nutrients from leaching out of the pile during the rainy season.

Weed seeds.
To eliminate weed seeds the pile must reach a temperature of 140 degrees for two hours. I don’t check the temperature on my piles. I try to pull weeds before they seed. When that doesn’t happen, I send the seeds to the county, and put the rest of the plant in the compost heap. For awhile I did cook my compost but I got over that real quick. It was time consuming and when cooked, the beneficial organisms are destroyed as well. When the weed seeds ‘cook’ in a pile, the living organisms can move away from the killing heat, in an oven, they can’t.

This is what works for me. If you would like more information or are into turning the pile and taking temperatures check out Circular 958 in the Plant Clinic.

Sources for this article:
Kids’ Korner

Dried Flower Terrarium

Judie Mayland and Kathleen C. Ruppert

TIME REQUIRED: less than 30 minutes
DIFFICULTY LEVEL: [!] 2 3 4

This is a decorative and easy project for display or to give as a gift. Color of arrangements can be coordinated to seasons or holidays (e.g., spring, fall, red for Christmas, etc.). This project is best done in two steps. Paint the outside of the lid (two coats is best) and then assemble the next day. Due to the smallness of the plant materials used, this activity may not be suitable for arthritics.

WHAT YOU NEED

· empty baby food jar with lid (If you want to place the final product on a window sill, then be sure to choose a size of baby food jar that will fit in the space.)
· tempera paint
· colored clay material (Playdoh® and other brand names)
· assortment of very small dried flowers
· “Spanish moss” to cover clay base (optional)
· potpourri to cover base (optional)
· old newspaper or drop cloth

HERE’S HOW

1. Unscrew lid from jar. Place lid, right side up, on old newspaper or drop cloth. Paint jar lid with color of choice. Let dry. Paint again and let dry (overnight is best).
2. Press large, thumb-size ball of clay into inside of lid to form a base for securing dried flowers.
3. Place dried flowers into clay to form a small arrangement of various heights. Keep in mind that the height of the finished arrangement cannot be taller than the height of the jar. However, if this is what the individual wants, it is okay — just delete step 5 and have an open dried arrangement.
4. Clay base may be left as is or covered (optional) with a small amount of Spanish moss or potpourri.
5. Invert glass over flowers and screw into lid (Figure 10).

… If you decide to use Spanish moss, soak it in a 1:32 bleach solution (4 oz. bleach per gallon water) for 10 minutes, then rinse. Have the individual doing this process wear rubber gloves and safety glasses. Suspend wet moss across a string stretched out like a clothesline in a breezy area to dry. Alternatively, pre-treated moss may be purchased at a garden or craft store.

VARIATIONS

Small artificial flowers may be used alone or with dried flowers to form arrangements. Use colorful foliage. Use arrangements of small sticks.

University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences
CENTRAL FLORIDA
GARDENING CALENDAR
January—March PLANTING GUIDE

PLANTING GUIDE

Annuals:

• Set out seasonal annuals, which are cold hardy in January: Calendula, Carnation, Pansy, Petunia, Snapdragon, and Statice.
• Warmer weather in February allows planting of Ageratum, Alyssum, Aster, Baby’s Breath, Begonia, Browallia, Cosmos, Dusty Miller, Gazania, Geranium, Hollyhock, Lobelia Marguerite Daisy, Pansy, Periwinkle, Petunia, Snapdragon, and Verbena.
• Annuals for March planting include Ageratum, Alyssum, Amaranthus, Baby’s Breath, Balsam (Impatiens), Celosia, Calliopsis, Dusty Miller, Gaillardia, Gazania, Geranium, Hollyhock, Lobelia, Marguerite Daisy, Marigold, Nicotiana, Ornamental Pepper, Pentas, Periwinkle, Rudbeckia, Salvia, Streptocarpus, Sweet Williams, Thunbergia Alata, Torenia, Verbena and Zinnia.
• Fertilize annuals during soil preparation and then monthly.

Perennials and Bulbs

• February planting of perennial bulbs includes African iris, Blood lily, Caladium, Canna, Lilium, Shell ginger, and Tiger flower. Potted flowering perennials can be planted any time of the year.

Fruits

• Plant bare root Florida varieties of peach, pecan, persimmon and blueberries by late February. Do not fertilize at planting time.

Vegetables

• In January, plant beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, Chinese cabbage, collards, eggplant*, endive, escarole, lettuce, mustard, green onions, parsley, English peas, pepper* (sweet and hot), potatoes, radish, turnips, water melon*. (*-protect from frost)
• In February, plant beans, cantaloupes, celery, corn, cucumbers, kohlrabi, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, squash, Swiss chard, and tomatoes but protect from frost or late freeze.
• Wait until March to plant New Zealand spinach, okra, or southern peas. Safe to plant beans, beets, cantaloupes, carrots, collards, corn, cucumbers, eggplant, kohlrabi, lettuce, mustard, green onions, English peas, peppers, pumpkin, radish, squash. Swiss chard, tomatoes, turnips

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and watermelons.

- Start seeds of tender crops inside, and plant outside in **March** after all danger of frost is past.

**Cold Protection**

- Plants with young tender shoots need protection from frost or freezing weather.
- Move outdoor houseplants to warm locations when cold weather is predicted. Clean pots and leaves and control insects and diseases before moving plants inside or into greenhouse. Outdoor tropical plants (Schefflera, Croton, Dieffenbachia, Pothos, and Philodendron) should be protected from temperatures below 55 degrees F.
- Have boxes, blankets, hay, plastic, lights, etc. ready for freeze protection. Cover plants during cold spells, but be sure to remove any clear plastic covering once the sun is out. Heat buildup can cook plants. Be sure protective cover goes all the way to the ground.
- Protect citrus from temperatures below 28°F. If banking with soil, be sure to cover the bud union with soil that is free of sticks, leaves and other organic matter. Avoid damage to trunks of trees as this can lead to disease and insect damage.
- Applying a fungicide registered for citrus before banking or wrapping tree trunks will help reduce foot rot disease.
- Do not prune cold damaged plants until all danger of frost has past (early **March**) and plants have begun to show signs of new growth.
- Continue to water plants as needed during dry winter months.

**Pruning**

- If deciduous trees and shrubs need pruning, wait until after new growth begins to avoid cold damage to new growth, which will follow.
- Prune the tips of azaleas and camellias soon after flowering to promote fullness.
- Prune summer or fall flowering shrubs (hibiscus, thryallis, plumbago, powderpuff, etc) in late **February** or early **March** to promote flowering on new growth.
- Prune poinsettias and holiday mum plants before setting into the landscape.
- In **January**, transplant shrubs and trees, which were root pruned last year.
- In **February**, root prune shrubs and trees to be transplanted next year.
- Fertilize landscape plants and fruit trees in late **February** using a general-purpose fertilizer with slow release nitrogen. Use a rate of one pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet of lawn and landscape planting.
- Watch for scale insects, which seem to multiply at the same time new growth is maturing. Monitor at least weekly for pests and disease problems.
- Use soap or oil sprays when soft insects are detected (scales, white fly, spider mites, thrips, aphids, mealy bugs). Use 2 1/2 tablespoons each of liquid dish soap and vegetable oil in a gallon of water. Repeat spray in five days and then as needed.
- Apply crabgrass seed pre-emergence in mid-**February** to keep seedlings from invading weak lawns.
- Calibrate fertilizer spreader to properly apply fertilizer each time a new brand is purchased.

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THE WILD SIDE OF GARDENING

Sandi Switek Master Gardener (2005)

I can still remember what a shock it was to discover that a family of deer would have the nerve to gobble up my pansies. Apparently these beasts stood right out by the road under the streetlight, where my flower bed was.

Now that I live even farther from the city, a few more incidents have occurred. My hibiscus and citrus have been the deer dinner of choice, but these hungry animals would never turn down a schefflera or firespike meal either. When desiring more variety, they have even eaten young bald cypress trees, swamp tupelo trees, and pond apple.

Obviously I had to do something. There had to be a way to live in harmony with "our" deer. Coating the "deer favorites" with various forms of hot pepper was my first strategy. While this did help temporarily, the deer would watch and wait until the rain washed off all of the fiery stuff and then return.

Naturally, I was excited when I heard about another way to repel deer. I was told that if I put bars of heavily scented soap in the plants, the smell could deter them. I chose some Irish Spring and hung it in every citrus tree and hibiscus plant. For a few days, all went well.

I suppose it was inevitable that something would go wrong eventually. One morning when my husband went out to check the grapefruit tree near the pond, he found that in addition to another limb being gone, the soap had disappeared as well. We began to wonder if a deer in need of a bath had come by.

Since we had a whole package of soap, another bar was promptly hung in the same place. It did not take very long for history to repeat itself. However, this time we found a few clues. Staring at the ground, we noticed deer prints under the half-eaten tree canopy. Below the spot where the soap had been, were some deep hoof prints left by wild hogs. There was also a trail of soap bubbles between the tree and the pond. We couldn’t help wondering whether a soap-eating wild hog foams at the mouth before or after taking a drink in the pond.

By now, our worries are finally over and the damaged plants have recovered. What was the answer? Over a period of time, we were lucky enough to find some chicken wire, hog wire, and metal fence posts in trash piles by the side of the road. Now each "deer delicacy" is growing happily inside a round protective cage. Hopefully the trees will someday tower over the deer, but until then we will just learn to appreciate our strange yard decor.
Check and repair sprinkler system. Calibrate sprinklers to apply a ¾ inch of water each time you water when the grass blades begin to wilt and turn blue/grey.

Citrus

Check citrus for ripeness by taste testing, not color. Varieties for January harvest include Navel, Parson, Brown, and Pineapple oranges, Temple and Dancy tangerine, tangelos, and grapefruit. Fruit does not ripen after picking. Overripe fruit will become dry and tasteless. By March, Valencia should begin to sweeten.

Fertilize in February or March with a citrus type fertilizer. Contact the Extension Service for recommended rates.

To prevent citrus scab on fruit, spray with a copper fungicide when 2/3 of the petals have fallen.

NOTE: Use of websites named in this publication is solely for the purpose of providing information. UF/IFAS does not guarantee or warranty the products named, and references to them in this publication does not signify our approval to the exclusion of other websites with similar products. To simplify information, trade names of products may have been used. No endorsement of these products is intended nor implied criticism of similar products.

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The Complete Roots & Shoots

With full color illustrations and photographs

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