October-December 2008

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Heritage Park
Approx. 1 mi. W of Tpk. Exit 244 on 192
Letter from the Editor

To our readers:

It has been a busy season for the Master Gardeners as the weather has passed from hot and humid to hot and dry with occasional moments of temperateness! News reports of snowstorms up north are a sweet reminder of why we live in the great state of Florida! Our Fall Plant Sale has come and gone, but we are happy to report that there are now four retailers in the area who are keeping melaleuca mulch in stock year ‘round. They are listed to the right, and on page 6 you can find full contact information.

This issue is an exciting mixture of new and old. To begin, Carolyn Lamond (Class of 1998), who discussed Old Garden Roses for the frustrated local growers of these fragrant blooms, expands on her earlier thoughts about ponds and water gardening. In this issue she discusses some of the options for construction materials, and in coming issues she will add in the water and the plants.

Sandy Switek (Class of 2005), the Master Gardener Plant Clinic Coordinator, gives some answers to questions that have come up in the plant clinic. And on page 12 she begins a saga about her struggles with some of the native animal life!

Two Master Gardeners from the Class of 2007 contribute this month, and we welcome their input. It is always nice when new Gardeners share their ideas and knowledge with the rest of us! Joe Rymsz gives us the lowdown on growing pineapples in pots where space is an issue, as it is in many of the local developments. His ideas can help you grow a steady supply of sweet fruit, an always welcome alternative during these economic times. Just, as he reminds us, be patient!

The second member of the Class of 2007, Jeff Richards, introduces a two-part article on harvesting rain water to ease the strain on our water resource supplies. With the dry season approaching, it is time to begin planning and building to catch each and every drop that we can. He is looking forward to having some Rain Barrel workshops at the Extension Office early in 2009, so this is a good start!

Of course, our readers’ favorite seasonal Planting Guide can be found on pages 10 and 11. Even now there is much to be done!

The January issue will see the arrival of a new editor, J. R. Denman from the most recent Master Gardener Class of 2008. As much as I have enjoyed shepherding this publication over the past couple of issues, I have not really been able to give it the proper attention, so it is with mixed feelings that I hand the reins over to this newest of Master Gardeners! I am sure he will enjoy the challenge as much as I have.

Donn Barclay
Roots & Shoots Acting Editor
WATER GARDENING IN FLORIDA  
Part 2  
By Carolyn Lamond, Master Gardener (1998)

Water gardening can be as simple or as elaborate as you want. The choice of designs is endless. I strongly recommend starting small and then gradually going bigger. There is regular maintenance involved so you need to consider just how much time you want to spend taking care of the pond, plants and fish. You do not want to bite off more than you can chew. As the years creep up on me I am starting to wish my pond could shrink a little. Let’s take a look at the possibilities in pond construction.

CONTAINERS can be large ceramic pots or halved whiskey barrels. These can accommodate a lovely water lily on a deck or patio.

LINER ponds are dug in the ground and lined with very heavy black plastic. These can be as however large or whatever shape you want.

PREFORMED ponds come in different sizes and shapes and are sunk into the ground making certain the depression is level.

CONCRETE ponds are constructed of reinforced concrete and can be whatever your imagine comes up with.

RAISED ponds are made of timber or concrete blocks above ground. These are lined with heavy plastic and are kind to you back.

These different types of ponds can be found in many books or on the internet. There are also professional contractors in the area. If you have muscle, brawn, enthusiasm, and plenty of energy you may want to take on the project yourself. Materials can be found at local stores. Now may be the time to get started since the heat of summer is fading and to be ready for the spring plants.

In the next issue we will take a look at the various aquatic plants including water lilies for your pond. Happy dreaming and enjoy your project. On the next page are some sources of information used for this article that will help you get started:

(Continued on page 4)
From the Plant Clinic: Lichens, Spanish Moss, Mistletoe

By Sandi Switek, Plant Clinic Coordinator, Master Gardener (2005)

I have some shrubs which are being ruined by this pale, dry stuff which covers the branches and then damages them. I need to know what this pest is and what to do to kill it.

**ANSWER:** The good news is that this is not really a pest, but lichen, which is harmless to your shrubs. For this reason, there are no recommended controls for it. Lichens merely move into branches where the leaf canopy is already thin, where they can find adequate sunlight. The presence of lichen in the interior of a plant can mean that the plant is declining due to other causes, such as stress, nematodes, or root disease.

My oak trees are covered with Spanish Moss, and lately I noticed that one of them is not quite as thick as it used to be. Is this moss taking the nutrients out of the trees?

**ANSWER:** No, it is fortunate that Spanish Moss takes nothing out of the trees. It can often live just as well on a telephone wire, getting what it needs from the sunlight, the rain, and the air. If the moss has become extremely thick in the leafy tips of the one tree, it may be reducing the amount of light which reaches the foliage. This is easily corrected by removing some of the excess moss. However, there is probably some other reason why the tree is thinning out, such as stress, caterpillars eating the leaves, or root damage. Ball Moss, a related epiphytic plant with silvery spiked stems, is also harmless to trees.

When we first moved here, I was so excited to find that one of our trees had some mistletoe growing in it. However, my neighbor recently told me that this is bad and that I should do something about it. Now I have noticed that the mistletoe is spreading to other branches and to another tree. What should I do?

**ANSWER:** If you love your trees, you may want to take out the mistletoe, because a heavy infestation can weaken or sometimes kill a tree. Mistletoe is a semi-parasitic plant or shrub which puts down roots inside a tree branch and takes water and minerals from the tree. The only way to take this invader out is to cut off the infested tree branches at least 2 feet from the mistletoe plant.

I have a hibiscus which has this terrible vine growing out of its stems. It does no good to cut the vine off, because it just comes back. The vine looks like gold string and is now getting into nearby shrubs too. I even tried pruning off part of the hibiscus, but the vine still re-sprouted from another spot on the stem. What on earth can I do?

**ANSWER:** This is a problem which is more likely to occur in South Florida, but unfortunately it seems to be appearing here now, with an absence of freezing weather. It is called a Love Vine and is even a native (but pesky) plant. Although leafless, the stems intertwine to form a thick mass on herbaceous and woody plants. This is a parasitic plant which does take nutrients and water from its host. Pruning is the only way to demolish it, and if your host shrubs are small, pruning off 2 feet below the vine may seem drastic. The love vine will return from its roots if your hibiscus is not pruned enough.
Growing pineapple in a container is easy, fun, and rewarding—it is hard to duplicate the sweetness and flavor of a pineapple allowed to ripen on the stalk. Although it takes an average of twenty four months to accomplish, a minimal commitment of effort and lot of patience are the gardener’s only prerequisites. The gardener should focus on growing the largest bromeliad plant to produce the largest pineapple fruit.

To get started, one only needs a pot, some good potting soil, and the top from a pineapple (you can eat the bottom part!) Later on you will need to move the growing plant to a larger pot than you started with, but you have plenty of time since it takes a couple years to produce a fruit.

Start with about a three gallon pot, or one with a diameter of 8 to 10 inches. This can be just about any pot you don’t mind looking at, plastic or ceramic. Put some stones or some leaves in the bottom to allow drainage yet keep the soil from draining out, and fill the pot to about 2” from the top with potting soil.

Then, simply twist the crown of leaves off a pineapple when you’re ready to eat the fruit, as one would remove a lid from a jar. Because of the protective spines, you may want to wear gloves any time you are handling the leaves. This crown can be put directly into the moistened potting soil. Tamp the soil down around it and be sure to keep the soil moist, but not wet. About once a month add a bit of well-balanced fertilizer--6-6-6, 8-8-8, or 10-10-10, preferably with traces of magnesium.

Although somewhat drought tolerant, pineapples need to be watered every three days or so, especially when they are being grown in pots.

(Continued on page 6)
which tend to dry out quickly. One way to tell if watering is needed is to push your finger into the soil up to the second knuckle to feel if the soil is moist. Since pineapples are in the bromeliad family, apply water into the center [core] of the plant and the plant will draw water as it needs it.

Place the plant in full sun and watch it grow—this is where the patience comes in. During the first twelve to eighteen months the bromeliad will grow handsomely. Once the plant appears root bound or too large for its container, transplant into a larger, five to seven gallon, container. During this growth period, some lower leaves will yellow or brown and can be easily removed. Removing suckers will hasten development of fruit and increase its size. Monitor plants for mealybugs, scales, nematodes, and grubs.

Pollination usually occurs during cooler temperatures, December to February in Florida. Once the plant produces 70 + leaves over a period of time it is ready to flower. To facilitate flowering, introduce apple skins, an apple core, or banana skins into the plant core. As these fruit pieces rot, they omit an ethylene gas which will serve as a catalyst.

Optimum temperature for pineapple growth is 68 to 86 degrees F. Pineapples are sensitive to freezing temperatures below 28 degrees F.

Once pollination occurs, a red heart surrounded by a hairy bract will emerge and become visible. The fruit will manifest itself within six months. At the early stages of growth, the container must be moved to an enclosed area to prevent animal pests from devouring the fruit before ripening. Relocate fruit inside a screen enclosure if possible. Another technique is to make a cage around the fruit out of chicken wire. As the fruit grows, staking may be required to keep it from falling over.

Individual pineapple plants may produce up to two fruits. Transplanting the crown creates the first. The ratoon crop, produced from a sucker that grows below the fruit, is the second. Gardeners must allow this sucker to grow for a period of time before transplanting. Otherwise its growing cycle will be substantially longer than two years.

For optimum sweetness, harvest pineapple fruit when it has turned yellow.
It’s really not about the barrels…..it’s about water harvesting. At least, that’s what the bureaucrats call it. A rain barrel in bureaucratese is a “harvested water storage device.” With the dry season approaching—if not already in effect—it is time to begin thinking about how to catch and hang on to as much of this precious resource as possible in the coming months. Many people find one rain barrel (excuse me, “harvested water storage device”) is not enough, so think about how many you might want and where you want to put them.

Water harvesting can be accomplished in many different ways. A 5 gallon bucket placed under the drip of an air conditioning condensation pipe is a water harvesting method. Hillsborough County incorporated a 15,000 gallon cistern in the construction of the courthouse. They called it Hydria, the Greek word for water jar. The façade of the building has hollow Greek columns that can store 15,000 gallons of rainwater. Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas, when constructed in the 1800’s used a water harvesting cistern system to catch all of the fresh water used at the fort, some of which is still in use today.

Systems and tools used to harvest water can vary widely in level of sophistication. A rain barrel is a simple system that can be installed by the homeowner to harvest water. It’s a one time project that will last many years.

A basic rain barrel system consists of storage tank (the barrel), some method of getting the water into the barrel (gutter, drip, chain, open top) and some method of getting the water out of the barrel (hose bib, soaker hose, open top, pump).

The construction of a rain barrel system can be as simple as setting a barrel on a couple of cement blocks with an open top to access the water. Keep in mind that a 55 gal-
lon drum full of water weighs almost 500 pounds. Anything you decide to use to elevate the barrel needs to be of sturdy construction.

Also consider how you are going to use your harvested water. The drain outlet needs to be higher than your collection vessel or high enough to gravity feed your landscape plants. There is no need to elevate the drum if you plan on dipping water out of the top of the drum.

There is a lot of water out there to be harvested. For a general calculation you can collect about one half gallon of water per square foot of roof area during a 1 inch rainfall. One typical ½ inch rainfall event in Central Florida will fill a 55 gallon rain barrel.

Florida CFO Alex Sink, in the September 12, 2008, edition of Consumer E-views states that a rain barrel can collect 3000 gallons of water each summer. That’s 60 barrels of water! A full rain barrel will provide enough water to irrigate 240 square feet of garden space, the equivalent of ½ inch of rainfall.

In the next issue’s article, we will discuss a straightforward way of constructing a workable rain barrel from a 55 gal. barrel with a minimum number of tools and basic carpenter skills! I will include lots of close-up pictures so that you can make one in time to harvest what little water we get during the months of January to May.

Sources:
How to Make a Rain Barrel, Monroe County Extension Service Handout

Even a couple of 5 gallon buckets—if you use the water—can be a “water harvesting device”!

Here’s a wider view—not too bad!

The Complete Roots & Shoots

With full color photographs is available online:
http://osceola.ifas.ufl.edu/mg_archive.shtml
(click on the year you want, then the issue)

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**Holiday/ Harvest Twig Wreath**

**Supplies Needed**
1. Wire Clothes Hangar
2. Heavy scissors or snips
3. Flexible, light wire (florist’s wire, etc.)
4. Interesting twigs and branches
5. Pine cones of various sizes
6. Colorful berries, seed pods, etc.
7. Sticky glue or glue gun (older kids or with parents helping!)

Untwist hangar and bend into a circle; re-twist it closed.

Gather twigs into 5 or 6 bunches; bundle with 2 or 3 loops of light wire at one end.

Attach bundles to wire circle with light wire, covering entire hoop, overlapping bunches.

Add pine cones, berries, seed pods using light wire.

Hang on your bedroom door.
Central Florida
Gardening Calendar
October-December Planting Guide

Annuals
Set out seasonal annuals: snapdragon, Shasta daisy, foxglove, Pansy, and Petunia plants. In November, also plant statice, carnations, Calendula, and Dianthus. All are for December planting.

- Fertilize annual flowers during soil preparation and then monthly.
- Plant perennials: African iris, African lily, Amaryllis, Anemone, Cyclamen, pineapple lily, Aztec lily, Calla, Crinum daylily, elephant ears, Gladiolus, Iris, Kaffir lily, Lilium, shell ginger, society garlic, spider lily, walking iris, Watsonia, and zephyr lily. In November, can also plant hurricane lily, pineapple lily, Dutch Iris, Ixia, and Ranunculus. Montbretia, tulip and voodoo lily bulbs, in addition to the above can be planted in December.
- Plant cold hardy trees, shrubs, and groundcovers, and transplant those which have been root pruned throughout the year.
- In December, plant bare root apple, pecan, peach, persimmon, pear, grape and blueberries. Potted trees may be planted at any time of year. DO NOT FERTILIZE AT TIME OF PLANTING.
- Set out strawberry plants in October and November for best fruiting.
- Plant beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, celery, cauliflower, Chinese cabbage, collards, kohlrabi, lettuce, mustard, onions, English peas, radish, rutabaga, Swiss chard, spinach, and turnips.

Landscape Care

- Water during dry spells, especially azaleas and camellias. When rains stop, water 1-2 times weekly.
- To conserve moisture, apply mulch around plants (except Citrus) at least 2” to 4” deep but avoid covering the crowns of low-growing plants.
- Replenish mulch in existing areas.
- Winter residents only have until the end of October to lightly fertilize landscape plants which have been neglected over the summer. (It’s best to complete regular fertilizer applications by late September to prevent cold damage to new growth.)
- Continue to fertilize annual flowers monthly.
- Don’t do any major pruning - allow plants to harden off for winter.
- Outdoor poinsettias and azaleas have set their buds so do not trim them again until after they flower.
- Remove old flowers from annuals to extend blooming.
- Bulbs can be divided and reset after foliage yellows and dies.
- Root cuttings of deciduous plants.
- Refrigerate Narcissus, daffodil, crocus, tulip, and hyacinth bulbs for winter planting. These bulbs require chilling for 60 days at 40°F or 120 days at 50°F.
Horticultural oil sprays control scale insects on dormant trees and shrubs. Check weekly for thrips and scale insects.

Seasonal Tips
- Harvest mistletoe for decorations. Since it will kill the tree if allowed to grow, remove the parasite by cutting it out of the tree. Cut off the limb it is growing on. Cut just above another main limb which is closer to the trunk.
- Soak fresh cut greenery in water for several hours before using in arrangements.
- Do not expose poinsettias, Kalanchoe or Christmas cactus to artificial light at night.
- Read seed catalogues and plan your Florida garden for the coming year.
- Clean, oil and store equipment not in use. Drain gas tanks and lubricate engines.

Cold Protection
- Prepare to protect plants from cold weather and frost. Outdoor tropical plants (Schefflera, croton, Dieffenbachia, pothos, Philodendron) should be protected from temperatures below 55°F. Have boxes, blankets, hay, plastic, lights, etc. ready for early freeze protection.
- Protect citrus from temperatures below 28°F. If banking with soil, be sure to cover the bud union (where it was grafted) 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.
- Move outdoor houseplants to warm locations. Clean pots and leaves and control insects and diseases before moving plants inside or into greenhouse.

Citrus
- Keep weeds away from citrus to avoid flaking bark from foot rot disease.

Other Fruits
- Fertilize banana, avocado, and guava in October.
- Graft avocado trees through February. Grafted trees produce quality fruit in 3-5 years.
- Harvest avocado, figs, papaya, pecans, pears, and pomegranate.

In December, if it is cool, prune blueberries for stronger plants and bigger berries. Prune grape vines for baskets and wreaths and form while the vines are fresh.

Vegetables
- Dig sweet potatoes as needed.
- Begin harvest of fall crops. Water during dry weather.

Protect beans, cucumbers, eggplant, melons, okra, peppers, squash, tomatoes, and small plants
When people from other states call me and ask what is happening in Florida, they are always shocked at my answer. They find it hard to believe that a person has to battle wild hogs in this day and age. However, it seems that this has been our most urgent problem for a few months now.

Not only have these hogs rooted up our woods, wildflowers, and swamp by night, but a group of them on another street has even attacked in the middle of the day. This means that they decided to terrorize my husband on three occasions while he was out jogging near their favorite territory. He says that it is rather scary to hear the snorting and turn around to see those big things running toward you like that. He also says that the sound of hooves pounding the pavement behind you does not help your mental outlook at all. One day, he found a steel rake in someone’s trash pile by the road and picked it up in case he needed to defend himself. However, it seems that there was no need for it after all, and he said that the rake was rather heavy to run home with. Now it is being used to smooth out the damage the hogs have done to our own property.

This damage can best be described as disgusting. These large, non-native beasts create large craters surrounded by tall piles of uprooted plants and flowers, and a person cannot easily walk through all of this before it is fixed. To make matters worse, the rains have come and filled the craters with water. In the larger swamp, the hogs have caused ground that was once firm to be reduced to quicksand and mud. With the protective cover of wildflowers gone, plenty of highly invasive torpedo grass has begun to take over.

Armed with a rake and a hoe, my husband bravely set out to repair all of the holes, while I tackled the removal of the torpedo grass. Of course the hogs had to return when our best wildflower patch began to recover. After fixing it all again, my husband made use of the remainder of our hog wire which he had picked up by the side of the road about a year ago. Now we at least have the best wildflower area fenced off. It seems that the hogs staged a major revolt after discovering this new fence, and they rooted up most of our lower trail outside of it.

After restoring the trail, we decided to try to come up with some additional methods of defense. Still hoping not to have to do anything drastic, we decided to trick the hogs into thinking that a person was out in the swamp at night by hanging my husband’s sweaty shirts out there each evening. Since my husband’s job requires him to work outside in the heat, the shirts have quite an aroma. We even put up stakes to hang the shirts on. This idea has worked part of the time, but if it rains before the hogs come out, it does no good.

Our next strategy will be to fence in a few more areas of redroot plants, which are indeed "hog heav ens." While leaving large corridors for other more harmless animals to pass through, this method should also be cheaper than fencing off our entire property. Even though we hope not to have to try it, construction of hog cage traps is another good option, because several hogs can be trapped at once. rooted up by pigs, either. Also consuming large amounts of acorns, the hogs directly compete with wild turkeys, deer, and squirrels.

There is a very informative University of Florida bulletin (WEC 192) titled "Control and Management of Wild Hogs in Florida", which contains many useful tips. At the time this article was written, there were about 500,000 wild hogs in Florida.

We had thought about hanging the scented soap in the trees again to repel them, but then remembered how much the hogs seemed to enjoy eating it before. Apparently, it didn’t bother them at all to foam at the mouth. In fact, there seems to be a large variety of things that hogs love to eat. While red root, also called bloodroot, is their favorite dish in our yard, I have also heard of them eating young turtles, turtle eggs, ground-nesting birds and their eggs, seedling trees, flower beds, corn, chickens, and young lambs and goats. It is not uncommon to see a whole lawn

We are still waiting for our battle with these hogs to be over so that we can go back to putting larger cages around our deer delicacies, pulling grass out of flower beds, and killing millions of weeds. We have decided that these tasks are not so bad compared to the attack of the wild hogs.