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Letter from the Editor

To our readers:

Hello All,

Spring is just around the corner and it is once again time to plan the spring garden. One of the biggest problems gardeners often encounter in Central Florida is the poor soil. The soil here is mostly sand with very little organic material or nutrients. Adding compost to the soil is the best way to improve it. While compost is available in bags at most home improvement stores, making your own is by far the least expensive option. On page 7, I have reprinted the article that Alan Douglas wrote a couple of years ago about composting. Alan has the dirt on dirt and is considered to be an authority on soil improvements.

Another important and probably the most overlooked aspect of gardening is the soil pH. On page 5 I have included an article about soil and pH. This article describes how the pH of your soil can affect how plants grow no matter how much fertilizer is applied. So if your grass, shrubs, or vegetables aren’t growing up to your expectations get a soil test before spending money on fertilizer.

The unseasonably cold weather here has taken a toll on some landscapes and our Plant Clinic has been busy answering questions and giving advice about cold damage. Sandi Switek answers some of those questions at From The Plant Clinic on page 4.

Getting out in the garden after a hectic day at work is therapy for me. On Page 9 new Master Gardener Mariela Perre has written a nice article how she changed her yard work drudgery into a relaxing pastime to look forward to.

As a vegetable gardener I am frequently asked what kinds of vegetables can grow here in Florida. I often reply to grow what you like to eat. But after a little more thought on the subject, I have included a list of easy to grow vegetables on page 10. While almost all vegetables will grow in Central Florida these are ten of the easiest and popular choices.

Our central Florida gardening calendar and planting guide beginning on page 11 contain excellent planting information, cold weather protection, and pruning suggestions.

On Page 13 Sandi Switek tells of her encounters with the elusive Florida Scrub Jay.

J.R. Denman, 
Roots & Shoots Editor
Preserving Strawberries By Donn Barclay

With spring arrive fresh strawberries, one of the great joys of the natural world! Unfortunately, my experience with them has been that I can never eat them fast enough, often having to throw out part of the package due to mold. No matter how fast I eat them, I seem to always lose a hefty percentage to the fuzz.

Last summer there was an article in the NY Times Food section about an experiment the author conducted, having been faced with the same problem. Over a period of about four weeks he discovered that if he dipped the fresh berries in boiling water then cooled them immediately, the mold spores seemed to be defeated without adversely affecting the taste or texture of the berries. Then he could keep the berries in his fridge for up to 16 days.

The first time I tried it I didn’t have the ice bath ready and ended up cooking the berries. After a few tries I learned to have the ice bath ready about the time I set out 6-8 qts. of water to boil. Once the water comes to a boil I dump in the berries. After a slow count to ten (about 10 seconds) I get them out with a strainer or Chinese soup skimmer and put them right into the ice bath. After about ten minutes or more I spread the berries out on paper towels, pat them dry, and put them back in the fridge. I have done this to three quarts of berries now, and they last well over a week. In fact, I forgot I had one in the refrigerator and rediscovered it after 18 days, still with no sign of fuzz.

Are they perfect this whole time? No. The hot water bath wilts the leaves and turns them a dusky gray-green—not attractive if you are setting out a fancy platter and want them to look good. But since I only slice them over my morning cereal this system works well for me.

Storing Pesticides Safely

Don't stockpile- buy only the amount you will need in the near future.

Follow all storage instructions on the pesticide label.

Store high enough so that it is out of reach of children and pets. Keep in a locked cabinet in a well-ventilated utility area or shed.

Store flammable liquids outside your living area and far away from an ignition source such as a furnace, car, outdoor grill or power mower.

Never store in cabinets with or near food, animal feed or medical supplies.

Always store pesticides in original containers, complete with labels that list ingredients, directions for use and first aid steps in case of accidental poisoning.

Never transfer pesticides to soft drink bottles or other containers. Children or others may mistake this for something to eat or drink.

Use child-resistant packaging correctly- close the container tightly after using the product.

Do not store in places where flooding is possible or in places where it might spill or leak into wells, drains, ground or surface water.

If you can't identify the contents of a container, or if you can't tell how old the contents are, dispose of it in a safe approved manner. Check with the public waste management office to see how to do this.
QUESTION: My St. Augustine grass looks dead now that the cold weather has hit it. Does this mean that I should begin to feed and water it more often to help bring it back?

ANSWER: The temperature would have to drop below about 22 degrees in order to permanently damage your grass. Normally this only happens in North Florida. In our location, it is normal for the grass to turn brown after a cold spell, and then green up again sometime after temperatures begin to warm up. Although it may be tempting, it is not a good idea to feed a lawn until about March 1. Supplemental water may also be unnecessary as long as the grass remains brown and dormant, since roots may not even be able to take up the water. This fall, try not to fertilize with nitrogen after October 15, and mow as high as possible, in hopes of minimizing cold damage in the future.

QUESTION: I have some banana plants which have looked terrible ever since the period of cold weather hit them. Should I cut them down to the ground and hope that they come back?

ANSWER: You can leave the dead leaves on the plant for as long as you can stand to look at them. However, if the wind begins to cause the branches to peel off of the pseudostem (trunk), the leaves should be taken off right away, since the trunk is actually nothing but tightly rolled leaf stems. The trunk is usually less likely to be damaged than the leaves, and should be left standing unless it dies and turns mushy. New shoots should begin to emerge from the top eventually. If this does not occur, and new shoots only appear from the ground, then it will need to be cut down.

QUESTION: My orange trees made it OK through the cold weather, but my Key Lime tree looks dead. What did I do wrong? Should I have turned on the sprinkler system to protect it?

ANSWER: No, I don't think that the sprinkler system could have saved your tree. In spite of all of the recent dramatic photos of ice-covered citrus trees, it is not a practice that a homeowner can use to prevent a lime tree from freezing. A rotating sprinkler can cause more harm than good, and will not save a tropical tree such as a Key Lime. Your orange tree survived because it is just a hardier tree. Other hardy trees include tangelos, tangerines, grapefruits, limequats, and kumquats.

FROM THE PLANT CLINIC
by Sandi Switek, Plant Clinic Coordinator

Master Gardener Plant Clinic
Open M-F 8-5
Master Gardeners on duty, 9-3
Phone: 321-697-3000   Email: oscmg@osceola.org
Bring plant or insect samples to Plant Clinic at:
Osceola County Extension Office
Heritage Park        Kissimmee, FL
Se habla Español
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

The scale is courtesy of The Pacific Institute for the Mathematical Sciences
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, isobutylidene 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.

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
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.
- Supressing 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.

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

... 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.
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.
The Positive Psychology of a Well Tended Garden

By Mariela Perre Master Gardener 2009

Gardening at home has evolved and turned to be my psychotherapy, a way to deal with life matters, a way to relax by immersing in Nature and delighting my senses, a way to tune in with myself, a way to re-charge energy exhausted by daily commitments. My garden has become my most intimate sanctuary.

About ten years ago my 3 year old daughter and I were faced with a sad life circumstance. Weekend after weekend, I was forced to take care of our lawns. I had a job in the travel industry that required international traveling and I was first time mother without a husband and an immigrant in the USA.

I remember landing in Orlando after a business trip and worrying about two huge priorities, one was how to pick up a few fresh groceries on my way to pick up my daughter after the long business trip and two, finding time away from my young daughter in the subsequent days to take care of the grass in an effort to avoid a nasty letter from the homeowner’s association. Taking care of my garden was a necessity, not so much a pleasure.

Every week-end, I buried myself in yard work, mowing, edging, then pulling weed by weed and thinking “is there an end to this?” I never seemed to be able to give them priority. It was not until I invested in wind chimes and two bird baths, metal torches and my favorite glass lantern one year that I found two wooden rocking chairs next and finally a simple fire pit for the backyard and few terra-cotta bricks to design accent flower beds by the front of the house, that I realized the importance of having all these elements positioned in certain way to make them eye-catching and mind-quieting when sitting and contemplating the yard work done or when inviting friends over to end up sitting by the fire pit and engaging in the best conversations ever!

Contemplating a well-tended garden makes a difference in people’s energetic disposition. The Sun means energy to the plants and so it means to us. Shaping and forming a garden with the basic elements that work in harmony with Nature can flow gently at a steady pace to influence those who live in it, positively.

Today, taking care of my garden is a necessity as well as a healing oasis where I Joyfully step out daily for soul cleansing and mind clearing.

I managed to save that tree by climbing up on it like a monkey and trimming it by hand and even using my legs in place of tools I never owned.

Seeing the tree growing new branches gave me a whole lot of confidence in my ability to apply a remedy. It gave me a wonderful happy feeling about life and living. I confirmed that you really have to trust your gut feeling and the energy of the Universe to do its work.

Budget has always been a challenge and when it came to garden furniture, I was always looking for the best deals.
If you would like to get into vegetable gardening but not sure just what to grow, here are a few easy to grow crops to get started with. Most vegetable plants as well as seeds can be purchased from the garden centers at most home improvement stores. A planting calendar for Central Florida can be obtained at the County Extension Services office.

**Radishes.** Anyone can grow a radish. They will do well in poor soil, and you can have a crop in just a few weeks. Radishes like cooler temperature, so plant in early spring or late fall.

**Salad greens.** Arugula, corn salad, lettuce, and spinach. Grow your favorite or try a mix. Some seed companies sell mixed salad greens packets for spring and fall gardens.

**Green beans.** Easy to grow. Choose a bush variety if you don’t want to bother with staking them up. If you get a big crop, you can blanch and freeze or can them. Start from seeds in the spring as soon as the chance of frost has passed.

**Onions.** Usually purchased as sets of 60 or more plants. If they do well, you can harvest the bulbs. If not, you can cut and eat the greens.

**Strawberries.** Ripe berries are really sweet and the plants are very hardy. Not all strawberry varieties grow well in Central Florida, so be sure to check with the supplier.

**Peppers.** Both hot and bell peppers are easy to grow. Start with plants. Leave the peppers on the plant to ripen in a range of colors.

**Bush Zucchini.** This squash won’t take up too much space in your garden even though it’s very prolific. Starts easily from seeds and you only need but a few plants to get a bumper crop.

**Tomatoes.** No garden would be complete without tomatoes. Choose strong, healthy-looking plants and plant in full sun. Tomatoes freeze and can well.

**Basil.** Compliments tomatoes and is easy to grow from seeds or transplants. Most herbs are easy to grow so try different varieties.

**Potatoes.** Easy to grow and stores well. A simple way to grow potatoes is to plant them in straw rather than soil. Seeds are whole or cut sections of potatoes, sold in early spring.
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 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.
Since I pretty much live in the wilderness, people have often asked me if I have ever seen any scrub jays. “No, I never see any here” was my standard reply for the first few years. Even though we had left almost all of our land natural and undisturbed, it seemed that the house sitting in the middle of the woods was enough to scare them away. Although my husband and I were enjoying many other birds and animals in our small piece of the world, we wanted to see the elusive blue bird called the Scrub Jay.

After doing a little reading and studying, I found out that Florida Scrub Jays are pretty much restricted to living in areas of scrub oaks. These areas occur only in peninsular Florida down to about where the Everglades begin. I also found that supposedly every remaining scrub oak forest in this central area of the state is already inhabited by Scrub Jays, and that a young bird must wait for an older bird to die somewhere in order to get a territory of its own. Since the upland areas of my yard support a pretty respectable scrub oak forest filled with Myrtle Oaks, Sand Live Oaks, Bluejack Oaks, and Chapman Oaks, I decided that maybe there was hope after all. Perhaps I just never noticed these birds.

However, another year went by before I actually saw any evidence of Scrub Jays. Then one day, when I just happened to look out the front window, something blue flew across the front yard. It didn’t look quite like a regular Blue Jay, but it was about the right size to be one. As it darted across a Myrtle Oak tree, I noticed the absence of the black neck ring, along with a lack of stripes on the wings, and the presence of a long tail. The flash of blue coloring was dazzling in the sunlight for a brief moment before the bird disappeared. After this first glimpse of a real Scrub Jay, I continued to watch for it for a while but it seemed to be gone.

More recently, I have begun to notice Scrub Jays in the fall, when the trees are loaded with acorns. However, these shy birds always wait until I am inside the house, or at least inside the screen porch, to appear. Whenever the acorns are all off of the trees, the birds seem to totally disappear.

I always wondered where the birds could be hiding during the rest of the year. Eventually I came across some information which stated that Scrub Jays are seldom seen, even in areas where they are common. I was sure that this must be the case in my yard, since they do not migrate, but remain in their territories. When I later learned that Scrub Jays spend most of their time on the ground searching for insects and seeds, as well as nuts, the mystery was solved. No bird or animal can be seen on the ground here, with the thick covering of fetterbush, lyonia, tar flower, and palmetto, in addition to the oaks.

It seems that I have been living and co-existing with Scrub Jays full-time for about 4 years and never knew it until recently. Even though these feathered yard-mates are not often visible, it gives me a great deal of satisfaction to finally realize that they really have chosen my yard to live in.

I recently heard of someone taming his Florida Scrub Jays a bit by feeding them peanuts. Most likely, I will let mine stay wild, and I will be happy enough just to know that they are always out there and hopefully always will be.
• 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.
• 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. Over-ripe 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. • Keep weeds and grass away from the trunks of citrus.
• To prevent citrus scab on fruit, spray with a copper fungicide when 2/3 of the petals have fallen.

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