

# The Backyard Gardener

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## Coordinator's Corner

Traditionally, the end of December is the time we review our accomplishments for the year past and focus on our goals for the coming year. First and foremost, I want to thank each Master Gardener for your personal commitment and for the outstanding effort you have put forth in 2010. This has truly been a banner year. We have logged over 7,000 volunteer hours by bringing quality horticultural programs to our Volusia County neighbors. The "Ag in the Classroom Summer Day Camp" and "Ag in the Classroom Casual Gardening series" both won national awards. We also spent a total of 1,675 hours earning CEUs and upgrading our skills. Great job everyone!

2011 is finally here and we have a clean slate and a new set of challenges. Over the past few months, I have been gathering ideas and information on ways to take our program to the next level. Several concerns kept popping up

and after a lot of thought, we have refined them into three initiatives for 2011: Community Town Meetings, Calculating Master Gardener Volunteer Hours, and a Master Gardener Forum.

Community Town Meetings: We will be contacting a Master Gardener in each of our communities asking them to set up a meeting in their locality with Master Gardeners, civic leaders, and concerned groups on how we can use our special talents to help us plan future goals cooperatively.

Calculating Master Gardener Volunteer Hours: We would like to clear the confusion by restating how hours will earn credit toward our annual commitment. ALL volunteer hours worked are counted toward your annual total. However, in keeping with the spirit of our Master Gardener Mission Statement, twenty hours must be spent working on approved educational projects. An educational project

is one where we work directly with residents of Volusia County sharing the research and knowledge from the University of Florida.

Master Gardener Forum: All the details aren't worked out yet, but the goal is to have a spot on the VMS site where we can all share concerns, thoughts, and suggestions that are important to us. This would free up valuable meeting time for issues that affect everyone.

We have a terrific Master Gardener program here in Volusia County and a great group of Master Gardeners. Let's all pull together in 2011 to become the best program in Florida.



Karen Stauderman  
Master Gardener Coordinator  
Residential/Urban  
Extension Agent

## Cold Weather Lawn

Have you seen your grass go from green to brown? If it is brown, is it dead? When will it recover? During these bouts of cold temperatures and frost/freeze nights, most yards are brown. This is a normal plant response that signals the lawn is dormant or

sleeping and not dead. You may experience some damage to the leaf blades, but the stolons and roots will remain healthy.

Our Florida friendly turf grasses such as St. Augustine, Zoysia, and Centipede can tolerate the Florida climate

with the occasional freezing temperatures. If you have some doubt, dig down in the soil for signs of green. This indicates the lawn will recover. Here are a few tips for winter lawn care from the Florida Sod Growers Association (FSGA):

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THE BACKYARD

GARDENER

## Scrub Plants

If you are concerned about your landscape surviving under dry conditions, consider scrub plants. They were adapted from pre-historic times to an upland, desert-like environment and are acclimated to poor, sandy soil. Most are endangered. They usually have small, tough-textured leaves, often like tiny bristles or have hairs that help them retain moisture. They may look gnarled or twisted.

There are many endemic to Florida. These are the plants which have depended upon periodic fires for their regeneration, as the ash from the fires provided nutrients for new growth.

Scrub plants have a special beauty all their own, such as the St. John's Wort (*Hypericum reductum*),

found in dry flatwoods growing in full sun in light sandy soil, with no supplemental watering. It is a lovely, delicate looking plant with tiny yellow flowers. Another attractive native is the Florida Gayfeather, grass-like and wispy with spikes of lavender blooms summer through fall. Adam's Needle or Beargrass is another scrub plant in the Agave family. Low-growing, its lance-shaped leaves laced with little hair-like filaments lends a distinctive look to the landscape and it thrives in well-drained sandy soils, with no extra watering required. The blooms are tall panicles of ivory.

For a shrub, consider the Rusty Lyonia (*Lyonia ferruginea*), a member of the Heath family which in-

cludes blueberries and azaleas. The green and cinnamon of the leaves and the crooked wood of the trunks is unique and beautiful. It is both evergreen and hardy.

If you need a tree, though small, try the Pygmy Fringetree. It's a slow grower, but will reward you with clusters of showy fringe-like blooms in spring. It has been described as "trouble-free".

From small to large, there are scrub plants to fit your needs. Cluster them or space them out with big clumps of Rosemary, both scrubby and aromatic. You will be cultivating endangered species while conserving water. Drought-tolerant scrub plants have a rare beauty at no cost in time and effort.

Rebecca Turner ('06)

## My Mind's Made Up (so please don't confuse me with the truth)

Occasionally, I come across information which disproves a long cherished belief. The latest victim is the idea that poinsettias are poisonous. For many years I have conscientiously advised my children, grandchildren and more recently my great grandchildren about the dangers of eating poinsettias. Secretly, I have been rather pleased with myself that my efforts have been so successful. I am not aware of a single child in our family dying from eating a poinsettia.

Recently, I came across an article that very convinc-

ingly, debunks the idea that poinsettias are poisonous. Apparently it started early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the young child of an United States Army officer was supposed to have died from eating a poinsettia leaf. Even though the newspaper story was retracted very quickly, the idea took hold and has grown ever since. It peaked in 1975 when a group of concerned citizens applied to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission to require a warning label on all poinsettias.

The entomology department at Ohio State Univer-

sity thoroughly tested all parts of the plant and affirmed that no toxins are present. The American Medical Association agrees, as does the American Veterinary Medicine Association. Both agree that aside from occasional vomiting, there were no severe reactions in humans or their pets.

My choice is simple, I can find a new cause to champion or I can ignore this information... Well, that's a no-brainer.

Brian Chesher ('95)

## Landscape Trellises

One of the most valued decorations used in landscaping is the trellis. Basically trellises serve the same purpose as a large pot or other container. They are an effective way to separate a prized plant from the rest of the landscape and give it a starring role.

These hardworking garden features often seem to go unnoticed when covered with a mass of foliage and flowers. The success of the structure depends upon placement so it can

effectively showcase the plants. The trellis should be chosen to harmonize with not only the plant, but more importantly, the landscape scheme as a whole.

There is a wide variety of these garden structures to choose from. Though there are plenty of white lattices and fan shapes, with a little imagination almost anything that stands upright can actually work as a trellis. They may be just simple

structures of wood, plastic, or iron, but they can definitely draw attention to a prized flowering vine.

You may have thought of the trellis as having only a 'supporting' role, with the real stars being the plants that grace them, but truly it is the form and structure trellises bring to landscapes both large and small that makes them a major player indeed.

*Brian Chesher ('95)*

## Chrysanthemums Galore!

During the months of September and October, the city of Lahr, Germany is decorated for the world famous Chrysanthemum Flower show. It is held in the Black Forest (famous for cuckoo clocks and black forest cakes).

Chrysanthemums are displayed over the city on walls, houses, and gardens. Beautiful flowers arranged in every colorful combination decorate the streets. Visitors come from around the world to see this amazing sight. Christel Johnston ('10) recently came back from Germany with



brehtaking photos. We know you'll agree; only pictures can describe the beauty.

*Christel Johnston ('10)*

## Remembering Carl

Master Gardener Marinus Carl Loth passed away December 25, 2010. Born in Djati Negara, Indonesia he served in the Dutch Air Force. He retired as an engineer with Lockheed-Martin in Orlando and served as a UF Volusia County Master Gardener since 2007.



He will be greatly missed in the plant clinic where he loved helping the residents of our county. He is survived by his wife Johanna (married 55 years) and his three daughters (Marion, Maureen, and Maryke) along with seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Donations may be made in his name to Coronado Community United Methodist Church in New Smyrna Beach.



Crafts make by  
*Lisa Brooks ('10)*



## Whatever Happened to the Chaste Tree?

In the book *Landscape Plants for Florida Homes*, published in 1958 by the Florida Department of Agriculture, under the section titled "Trees Especially Recommended for Florida Homes" the author refers to the Chaste Tree (*Vitex, angustifolia*). He describes it as a small tree (up to 20'), with attractive lilac blossoms.

The five-parted, lacy, leaves are beautiful during mid-summer when the fra-

grant, 7" flower spikes appear, the author says. *Flori-data.com* seems to feel the same way about the Vitex and are fans too, commenting on the flowers as ranging from violet to deep purple, often being mistaken for the blooms of the Butterfly Bush. Vitex is hardy from USDA zones 6 – 10, hardly ever bothered by pests or disease, will grow in sun or shade and in almost any well drained soil. So... what's not to like!



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*Brian Chesher ('95)*



# USDA Hardiness Zone Map

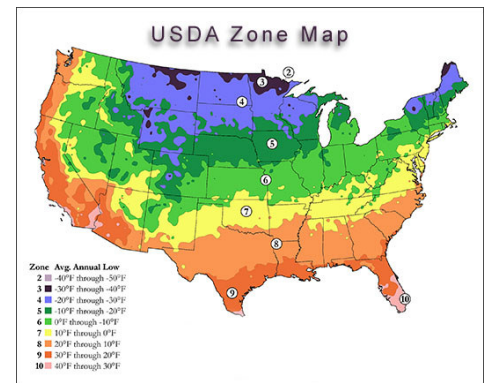
Hardiness zones have been mapped since 1927 and revised many times. The USDA zone map, based on cold tolerance, was first published by the Department of Agriculture in 1960 and revised in 1990. It is the most widely used, but is not the only one.

The American Horticultural Society (AHS) has a map based on the average number of days per year above 86 degrees Fahrenheit (°F), as shown in the AHS book, *Garden Plants and Flowers*, published in 2004. The USDA map shows a range of average cold temperatures below which a plant won't survive, 40-41°F.

There are at least five other zone maps as well, using different approaches to map geographical cli-

mates. Any zone map, though, should be used only as a general guide, because there are a host of factors which influence the success of a plant, such as the type of soil, exposure to sun and wind, humidity, soil nutrients, or even "urban heat islands", which may mean a specific urban location is mapped as being in a hotter zone.

Of course, it is possible to somewhat alter the "average" zone guidelines, such as planting next to a wall to avoid wind damage or planting something under an overhang to avoid the harshest frost. Most gardeners believe if a plant is shaded, it will be more protected from freezing temperatures as well as from the worst searing heat. Also, container garden-



ing allows conditions to be changed to suit the plant.

Exotics can be grown in greenhouses in colder areas. In short, hotter or colder conditions can be artificially maintained, but for most in-ground plantings, choose a plant that is suitable for your zone. Remember, weather is variable from year to year.

*Chesher ('95) & Turner ('06)*

## Diversity of Home Tours



The garden tour of Mark and Judy Loftus in DeLand was held on October 27, 2010. It is a beautiful jungle with lots of shade.



The tour continued down the block with the garden of Lewis and Sue Jarvis. It was sunny and a modern display of colorful well manicured plants. Both properties were a real treat and very different.



On Saturday, December 11, 2010 Master Gardener Saundra Hudson ('08) gave a home tour of her landscape in Daytona Beach.

The attending visitors also learned about the uses of some unusual herbs: how to grow, harvest, and store them properly.

The beauty in her diverse landscape is testament to her expertise in growing all kinds of plants.



*Birgit Kiessling ('10)* Pictures courtesy of *Birgit Kiessling ('10)*

## Cold Continued...

1. Cut back on irrigation so that the soil is moist, but not saturated. Overwatering causes additional problems later on. Use water sparingly.
2. Wait to apply fertilizer until all danger of frost is past. Extra fertilization will not speed recovery and may encourage tender new growth which may be damaged by more cold weather.
3. Service your mower so that it operates more efficiently, and sharpen or replace your blades. Additionally, adjust and upgrade your irrigation system.

Be patient, your lawn will begin to show signs of spring green up in April. It will take up to four weeks for the green uniform color to return. If you still have spots in your lawn that look dead, you have had "winter kill." These will usually be small and the lawn will often recover on its own. Larger areas that remain brown without recovery of new growth by late spring may need to be replaced.

For more information, contact your local University of Florida Horticulture Extension Office or the Florida Sod Growers Association ([flsodgrowers@aol.com](mailto:flsodgrowers@aol.com)).