

The Backyard Gardener

VOLUME 1 ISSUE III

MAY—JUNE 2010

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Seeing Red in the Garden

For those who can't get enough of red blooms in the garden, the marigold 'Safari Red' is a dream come true. These russet-red, anemone-flowered French marigolds make a superb show in packs, pots, and garden displays. Their extra-large blooms on compact plants make a bold statement as the flattened large lower petals work their way up to ruffled centers. Height 10–12 inches, spread 6–8 inches.

In the University of Flor-

ida 2003 Field Trials at the Gulf Coast Research and Education Center, specimens were judged, in part, on color and overall performance. Bodger Seeds' 'Safari Red' won "Best of Class."

The ideal pH ranges from 6.0–6.5 (below 6.0 toxicities may result). Marigolds are efficient at absorbing minor elements. American marigolds in particular will show brown spots from excess toxicities.

Additional sources of

seed include Harris Seeds and at VerdeGo's in Allendale, Florida.

Linda Anderson ('06)



Photo: Harrisseeds.com

Coordinator's Corner

It has been a busy spring here at the Volusia County Extension office. Sunniland Corporation, Dr. Steve Arthurs (MREC-Apopka), and I teamed up to determine if homeowners are accurately applying the correct fertilizer rate using three different forms of fertilizer spreaders.

I wanted to thank all of the Master Gardeners, the University of Florida, and the County staff for willingly being our test subjects. Thanks to all of them, the outcome was quite striking.

As a result of their applications, Sunniland has

created a new Summer Green fertilizer line (6-0-8). It is an organic fertilizer with a lower analysis of nitrogen that contains iron, magnesium, manganese, and humic acid. It is a 50 percent slow-release nitrogen that will be available at BWI, Ace, and a few nursery outlets. To learn more results about the turf fertilizer study, stay tuned for the next issue in the Backyard Gardener. Volusia County makes a difference!

This summer we are hosting the Second Annual Horticulture - Ag in the Classroom day camp

at the Ag Center. We are eagerly anticipating future gardeners and environmental enthusiasts. Also, by the time this goes to print, we will have had our Twelfth Annual Plant Faire. I want to thank all of the Master Gardeners for their hard work and effort. It was fun, even the cleanup. It was a job well done!

Karen Stauderman

Karen Stauderman
Master Gardener Coordinator
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THE BACKYARD

GARDENER

Geraniums 101

John Tradescant, English botanist and plant hunter, wrote about geraniums in the 1700s. They were originally from South Africa, but our garden geranium is actually a descendant of an accidental seedling in a French garden.

The most common type is the *Zonal*, named for the dark circular marking on the sculptured leaf. There are actually two major types: the standard and the French, the latter being more heat and disease resistant.

Geraniums grow all year under good culture. They do not like the hot sun in summer or too much shade in winter and they will freeze. They do well in pots, but do not make good bedding plants in Florida. They do not like excessive water, so remove saucers in rainy times.

Fertilize them with an 18-6-12, one teaspoon per gallon of water, every four to five months. Keep bad places trimmed and use a rose fungicide/pest product if needed.

See IFAS, "Geraniums for Florida", R. Shoelhorn and The Joy of Geraniums, Helen Van Pelt Wilson (Master Gardener Library) for more information on these beautiful plants.

Marty Borkosky ('80)



False Topiary

An easy way to create geometric or representational shapes with plants is to train small-leaved vines to grow on chicken wire shaped over frames. They fill in quickly and look like traditional topiaries without constant clipping.

Plants to use are ivies, small-leaved jasmines, or

protected from cold, the climbing fig (*Ficus plumia*).

Start with a commercial wire frame from any DIY center. Line with sphagnum moss and fill in with potting soil. One ivy will cover 12-18 inches of frame in a season.

For complicated designs, chicken wire can be

shaped over the frame. For interest, mix in variegated versions of the same vine. Train the vines by weaving them into the mesh. Water only when needed and feed with a slow-release granular plant food.

Brian Chesher ('95)

Containerized Water Feature

A variation on container gardening is putting a water feature in a container and using it as a landscape accent. This is a surprisingly simple project.

First, plant a selection of aquatic plants in individual plastic baskets. Examples are dwarf cat-tails and papyrus. Sec-

ond, position a tub or half-barrel where you want it (making sure it is level), add about two inches of washed gravel, and then arrange the plants in baskets on top of bricks placed along the inside perimeter. Add a different plant, such as water lilies, to the gravel base in the center.

Slowly fill the tub or barrel with water, being careful not to disturb the potting mix in the baskets. Rapid growth by the water lilies and papyrus will quickly hide the baskets and the inside of the container. Add water as needed and feed with liquid fertilizer as directed.

Brian Chesher ('95)

Gardening in Containers

Whoever first thought of growing plants in containers is unrecorded, though certainly it started several thousand years ago. Chinese scrolls recorded how to grow small trees and shrubs in earthenware containers; in 1500BC an Egyptian queen had gardens filled with trees growing in pots that could be shifted around at will to create outdoor rooms; King Solomon, reportedly a gifted gardener, is supposed to have had a “garden room” to house his collection.

Container gardening probably reached its zenith in Victorian England. The Victorians loved doing

things in stylish excess and used every imaginable type of container to display their prized plants. One firm made glass window boxes that were mounted on outside walls. Some even encased aquariums and were lit by gas lights.

Today, container gardening seems to have a more practical application, whether it's a lack of yard space, portability for protection from cold, to raise plants up and ease the need to bend, or to show off a special plant. Today's gardener is limited only by imagination.

Brian Chesher ('95)

Feedings

Feeding birds is a popular activity in Florida. Just offer food under reasonably sanitary conditions and keep spillage to a minimum.

A good bird feeder should:

- 1) Be able to hold enough food for two to three days
- 2) Be protected from weather (moldy seed is unhealthy)

- 3) Be kept free from predators
- 4) Be easily seen from your window or patio
- 5) Be maintained year-round

Remember, birds will readily visit your feeding station, but may not become residents until the landscape grows in diversity.

Brian Chesher ('95)



MGs Kathryn Kovach ('08) and Joan Thompson ('09) help out at the Wildflower Festival.

Photo by Kathryn Kovach ('08)

Morning Glory

*I lift my cup
and drink my tea
and look out the window
at my tree.
Dark green, light green
are colors I see.
White blossom flowers
say hello to me.
It's morning time
to make my rounds
to see and enjoy
what nature abounds.*

Jennifer McGouran ('10)

Fire Ant Article - Fact or Fiction?

There are many solutions touted for the problem of fire ants that may or may not be true. One example is an online article purported to be a definitive endorsement of fire ant control by Walter Reeves of the University of Georgia Agriculture Department, who specializes in home gardening.

On his Georgia Gardener radio program, the article says, Reeves announced that club soda kills fire

ants by suffocating them, the CO₂ in the soda displacing oxygen in the mound. Two cups poured in the center of the mound was recommended as sufficient to eliminate a colony in about two days. Testimonials on the radio program asserted it “really works.”

However, one skeptic, in an online link, actually contacted Mr. Reeves about the claim, who responded that he did not endorse the

pouring of club soda on mounds. On his website, WalterReeves.com, he states the “endorsement” was both rumor and exaggeration and that from replies he received, CO₂ does not linger in the ground long enough to kill the ants. He stressed that bait and mound treatments are still the best way to control fire ants.

Rebecca Turner ('06)

Weeding-Controlling Unwanted Vegetation

There are several ways to deal with this oldest of gardening tasks. Hand-pulling gives instant results. Disadvantages are the time it takes and the fact that it disturbs the soil and brings new weed seeds to the surface where they quickly germinate. Despite these drawbacks, hand-pulling is often the best choice for getting non-rhizomatous weeds out of ornamental beds.

Tools such as hoes, cultivators, and hand weeders need more room to operate and they are quicker, but also disturb the soil, bringing up new weed

seeds. If not used carefully, these tools will destroy fine feeder roots and slow down plant development.

Then there are chemicals... available herbicides range from those that are nonselective (will kill most vegetation on contact) to those that can be safely applied to desirable shrubs. Choosing the appropriate one requires some homework. A serious "must" of working with chemical weed control is following the label directions. Mistakes are usually unfixable.

Brian Chesher ('95)

Important Dates to Remember

- ♦ May 20, 2010 - Central Florida Master Gardener Conference
- ♦ June 9, 2010 - Master Gardener Semiannual Meeting.
- ♦ July 23, 2010 - Second Annual Master Gardener Picnic (potluck)
- ♦ October 25 - 27, 2010 - 31st Annual Master Gardener State Conference

Feeding African Violets

One way to feed African violets is to wick them. Cut a piece of wick (try using a piece of old pantyhose) 6-8 inches long, depending on the height and size of your container.

Besides the wick material you will need a reservoir to hold a solution of fertilizer. A plastic cottage cheese container with a hole punched in the lid will work. Push the wick through a hole in the bottom of the African violet pot up

through the soil and put the other end through the lid of the other container into the fertilizer solution. This may be tricky at first, but once completed, place your violet in a decorative pot that hides both plant and fertilizer containers.

Once your violet "takes off," rinse the leaves every so often with tepid water, both on top and underneath. Refill with more fertilizer solution from time to time.

Marty Borkowsky ('80)



Betty Suber ('08)
has found success with
her squash.

Photo by Betty Suber ('08)

Golden Rain Tree - A Beautiful, Invasive Nuisance

Thirty years ago, beguiled by their beauty, I bought two *Koelreuteria elegans* - golden rain trees. After learning how invasive they were, I removed them, but not before the damage was done. They spread into my neighbors' yards, into the right of way behind my home, into fence rows, and back into my yard and flower beds.

Although the neighbors and I removed all the mature trees, the bat-

tle is not over. During the last two years, I have mowed and bagged seedlings and have pulled over ten thousand seedlings from my flower beds and yard.

Attached to the rain tree's papery leaves, which can travel long distances when windblown, are tiny black seeds which germinate prolifically within six to eight days after falling to the ground.

Recommendations for preventing

their spread are:

1. Don't plant them
2. Remove existing trees, if possible, before seeds are produced
3. Remove seedlings by mowing or pulling by hand
4. Do not use rain tree debris in compost

In short, if you are tempted to plant a golden rain tree, DON'T!

Mary Kay Pyles ('03)