U p c o m i n g  E v e n t s

Tour de Farms—a self-guided tour of local farms. For information and to pick up a map, call the UF, IFAS Putnam County Extension or, visit the website at: http://slowfoodfirstcoast.com/index.html

Green Industries Best Management Practices Class—Friday, 4/29. 8:00 AM—3:30 PM, Pre-registration required by 4/27. Cost—$25.00 includes breakfast and lunch and all materials.

Note—the GI-BMP class is required for businesses that apply fertilizers in St. Johns County. Call the office, 386-329-0318 for details and to register.

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The Edible Landscape
Joe Seward
UF, IFAS Horticulture Agent
Putnam and St. Johns Counties

As words like “green” and “sustainability” work their way into the lexicon, people are looking for ways to use less energy, conserve and protect water supplies, burn less fossil fuels and, generally, be more conscious of how their actions affect our environment. Small things like, fewer trips to the grocery store, turning the water heater off when not at home and turning the water off when brushing your teeth can really add up to real savings when done consistently. I’m talking money folks!

How does this ethic fit into the landscape? What can a homeowner do to be more energy efficient and sustainable in the home landscape? Most landscapes are not productive at all. They are energy consumers. It takes gasoline to mow a lawn and electricity to prune hedges or blow leaves off the sidewalk. And it takes a tremendous amount of water to keep the lawn alive. And you get little in return aside from aesthetic pleasure. A typical landscape produces nothing other than yard waste. cucumbers, squash, herbs, onions, peaches and many other crops. It has arbors, trellises, living fences a compost bin, hydroponic gardens and many other examples of alternative growing methods of growing edible plants.

Another aspect of this demonstration project is that everything in the garden is made of commonly available materials that can be purchased at local sources. The architectural elements are easy to build and are attractive. This is also an organic garden. We will be using no chemical pesticides in the garden. Instead, we will be employing Integrated Pest Management (IPM) principles (another topic) using only insecticidal soaps and horticultural oils to control insect pests.

So, what does this have to do with energy conservation and sustainability? Well, suppose you are at home, cooking and, you need a tomato. Most folks will jump in the car, drive to the store and buy a tomato. The price you pay for the tomato is multiplied by the cost of the gas you burned and your time. If you have an edible landscape, you saved the gasoline and your time and chances are good that the tomato that you grew is better than what you could buy at the store. This is true of anything else you will grow in your edible landscape. Also, most edible landscape will use less water, fertilizers and pesticides than a typical lawn and landscape. If you tour the demonstration at FPWACS, you’ll see that the possibilities are great. There are few limitations to growing fresh, home-grown fruits and vegetables throughout your own landscape.

The FPWACS facility is open to the public during the week from 8:00 am until 4:00 pm. We have another edible landscape demonstration planned as well. I hope that you will take the short drive to Hastings and have a look for yourself. The address is: 595 St. Johns Ave., Hastings, Fl. 32145. The website is: http://hastings.ifas.ufl.edu
Gardens are distractions from the stress and problems of everyday life. Indeed, an article in a recent issue of “The American Gardener” noted a study conducted by Dorothy Matthews, a biologist at the Sage Colleges in Troy, New York, on a bacterium, Mycobacterium vaccae, that is found in soil, air, and plant matter. Mice that were fed M. vaccae ran mazes “twice as fast as the control mice, and exhibited half of the anxiety behaviors. Gardeners inhale these organisms when digging in the soil…from our study we can say that it is definitely good to be outdoors.” As gardeners, we can certainly agree with that; but sometimes, when the gardener is distracted, unusual things can happen. Recently, this gardener decided to unwind by gently hose watering my water deprived landscape. This can be a mindless chore, and I was keeping my mind entertained by thinking about the then upcoming horticultural show at the Putnam fair; plans for the Miller Intermediate School Children’s garden; and the sad shape my own garden was in, when I glanced down and noticed that I had thoroughly and completed watered my gas meter.

April 16th is the date for the Putnam County Master Gardeners annual plant sale. This takes place at the Agricultural Center from 9 to 2. All plants are gently home raised and are bargain priced. There is also an area that has garden crafts for sale, and a bakery nook so you can munch while you buy.

St Johns River Management reminds the residential homeowner that, as we are on daylight savings time, watering days have been extended to twice a week for lawn sprinkler systems. These restrictions apply to private wells/pumps and all ground water (lakes and ponds). Odd numbered addresses may water Wednesdays and Saturdays; even numbered addresses on Thursdays and Sundays and never between the hours of 10 AM and 4 PM. Exceptions are newly planted lawns and landscapes or watering in fertilizers or pesticides. Watering by using a hose or a low volume irrigation system is allowed at any time. Lawn watering in Florida accounts for 50% of residential water use. Do your part, don’t water unless the lawn shows stress. Your lawn will be healthier because the roots will grow deeper.

MILKWEED SEEDS TRIVIA

Here’s an interesting fact about milkweed seeds. During World War II, schoolchildren gathered these fluffy seeds by the sackful, and sent them to a collection center. There the fluff was stuffed into life preservers and aviator apparel. The seeds are naturally buoyant and, packed into garments, they kept many a man afloat in rough waters until help could arrive.

Hard to imagine that little bit of fluff could do such a mighty piece of work.

Notes for the April Garden
By Barbara Fisher ,Contributor

The citrus bloom is about finished, but it was impressive this year with many happy pollinators telling success stories back at their hives and nests. Spring arrived with a bang; everything blooming at once. Last year, the Scarlet Milkweed did not bloom well, but it looks as though this will be a banner year. Asclepias curassavica is naturalized from tropical America and is now a Florida wildflower quite at home in the residential landscape. It reseeds happily, and is beloved by pollinators. It will often have scads of small yellow aphids living along its’ stems; but these are indigenous to the milkweed and will not migrate to your other plants.

I have just seen my first hummingbird. If you are feeding, remember that the recipe for their food is to mix ¼ cup of sugar into one glass of water; boil for 2 minutes and let cool before adding to the feeder. Change the food every 2 days or whenever the food becomes cloudy. Do not add red food color. Do not clean the feeder with soap or bleach; use vinegar and a bottle brush and rinse well.

If you have a vegetable or herb garden, it is time to plant tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, squash, beans and melons. These plant need pollinators, so be very careful about using pesticides that can harm the bees, wasps, butterflies, and moths that do this job for us. Herbs such as basil, parsley, oregano, lemon verbena, chives, and scented geraniums can be planted in pots or in the ground. Remember to plant extra parsley and dill for the swallowtail and monarch caterpillars. Annuals to add to the garden are zinnias, salvia, marigolds, portulaca, and sunflowers. If your grass is ready for cutting, make sure your blades are sharp and properly adjusted. Mow St. Augustine and Bahia to 3” (4” in the shade).

Research for the above is courtesy of IFAS (Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences) and the Putnam County Extension Service, a joint project of the University of Florida and Putnam County.
I started my bucket garden to save space in the garden so of course I had to contain the plants by growing them vertically. When growing tomatoes in buckets and vertically it helps to learn to prune the plants. Most of us know about removing the lower leaves to set the plant in deeper and stimulate root growth, but pruning can be helpful also. Pruning may reduce the number of tomatoes grown, but that means the tomatoes that do grow—grow larger (works for me) and it helps to prevent diseases, mildews and blights (even better). Tomatoes do not like to set fruit once it reaches 90-95*. In Florida that does not give us much growing time for one of our favorites. Cherry and grape tomatoes will continue to set fruit through the summer, but those big lovely ones are more temperamental. As the types of tomatoes I preferred to grow were indeterminate I wanted to keep the plants more compact and get those big tomatoes.

Pruning starts by deciding if you want to encourage one main stem or two and at times the decision was taken out of my hands if I let a sucker get to big and removing it might cause more harm than good. To prune, you remove all the “suckers”. The branches aren’t really sucker branches but giving them a name makes it easier to explain. Hopefully this diagram will help you understand what a so called sucker is. Just pinch them off with your fingers when they are small. If the suckers get to big you will have to use pruners. I try to catch them before they get that big. The plant is loosely tied to the stake as it grows. With the suckers removed the plant looks like a single vine growing up the stake.

You may want to maintain more than one stem on your tomato plants. Pruning doesn’t mean you can only have a single vine. It means cutting back growth. A pattern will form starting from the bottom of the plant, moving upwards: stem, leaf branch, flower cluster, leaf branch, flower cluster, etc. and of course the growing tip of the tomato. There will be no branching off the main stem for the plant unless you decide you want a 2 stemmed plant. You may find you prefer a 2 vine over a 1 vine to protect the plant from sun scald. I’ve grown them both ways and never could make up my mind if there were advantages to one over the other. My advantage was to get big, early, tomatoes and pruning my plants helped me achieve my goal: contain the plant in the space, get my fruit to set before the temperatures got to high and get big tomatoes. Tomatoes do not have to be pruned. They will still grow if left to sprawl without any care, they were designed that way; but you probably won’t get any more tomatoes then with a well pruned and tended tomato plant. Also, please make sure to keep up with the nutritional needs of the plants, don’t forget the calcium, blossom end rot can ruin the best laid plans. I learned that one the hard way. EDIS has information on growing tomatoes and their nutritional needs.

**Plant of the Month—Passion Flower**

*By Pat Hoar*

**Passionflower - Botanical name:** Passiflora

Early Christian missionaries discovered passionflowers in South America in the 1500s. They named the bloom for the way its intricate parts can symbolize elements of the passion of Christ. The lacy fringe of petals represents a halo or crown of thorns, the five stamens are the five wounds, the three stigmas are the nails from the cross and the 10 petals are the 10 most faithful of Christ’s apostles.

**Bloom Time:** Summer to fall

**Hardiness:** Zones 7 to 9, varies with species

**Size:** 15 to 50 feet long

**Flowers:** Purple, lavender, blue, pink, red, yellow, and white—Fragrant

**Light needs:** Full sun or partial shade

**Growing Advice:** Grow from seed or nursery plants. Provide support for its tendrils to grab and twine. In colder areas, the plants should receive southern or eastern exposure and be protected by a building or wall.

**Prize picks:** Blue passionflower is popular for its blue-to-white flowers and evergreen or semi-evergreen foliage. Incense sports 5-inch wide violet flowers.
For Garden Color—Plant Zinnias

By Karen Cassels

Every summer my garden is full of zinnias of every color. I don't even have to plant them. Although they are considered an annual, the dead flowers fall off and they reseed my garden and grow back the next year. I keep them under control until the vegetables stop producing, and then I let them take over. The bees and the butterflies love the zinnias! My garden may look a little wild, but it is wild with color from the zinnias and the beautiful butterflies that they attract.

Zinnias are very easy to grow. They produce an abundance of bright and often multi colored, 1-7", single or double flowers from early summer until the first frost. There are hundreds of different Zinnia hybrids on the market, and more are being added each year. These wide ranging hybrids include dwarf Zinnias that grow to no more than 12" tall and produce 1-4" flowers in a rainbow of colors, to immense 3 foot plants that are covered with massive 8", blood red blooms! The dwarf varieties of Zinnias are well suited for growing in containers. The taller varieties make excellent cut flower arrangements.

Zinnias should be planted 12-24" apart in rich, well drained garden soil. Actually they love light sandy soil, so guess that’s why they do so well in my garden. They require full sun to bloom, but will appreciate a little afternoon shade in the hottest regions. Zinnias dislike having wet foliage, so if possible, they should be watered with a soaker hose. Once established, your Zinnia will only need watering during extended periods of drought. They should be planted where they have good air circulation to help prevent powdery mildew.

Feed every 4-6 weeks with a balanced, all purpose fertilizer. Deadhead regularly to keep plants flowering until fall. I let the deadheads fall to the ground – and next year I will again have beautiful zinnias!

You can sow Zinnia seeds directly into the garden after all danger of frost has passed. Sow your seeds about 12" apart and cover them with ¼" of fine soil. Firm lightly and keep evenly moist. Zinnias are excellent as bed for masses of color, of mixed borders for summer color and flowers. Some of the compact varieties containers and continuous color in hot spots.

Zinnias are native to Mexico. One of the most unique is the Envy Zinnia—note the color!

Insects of Hardwood Foliage

By Pat Hoar

Have you found one of these in your landscape? They are everywhere in mine. Every time I turn around, I find another one. So I did a little research on the Internet and this is what I found.

Common Name

FOREST TENT CATERPILLAR

Mature larva of the FOREST TENT CATERPILLAR. Or Tent Caterpillar

Species: Malacosoma disstria

Common Hosts:

- Black tupelo Nyssa sylvatica
- Oaks Quercus spp.
- Sweetgum Liquidambar styraciflua
- Water tupelo Nyssa aquatica
- Plums Prunus spp.
- Other hardwoods

Description:

Adult -- light brown head and body; front pair of wings same color plus 4 angled dark brown stripes; wingspan approximately 32 mm.

Pupa -- size of adult; reddish-brown; enclosed in a pale yellow cocoon.

Larva -- size variable, approximately 60 mm long when mature; light blue head mottled with black, brown body with yellowish-white keyhole spots on back bordered by pale blue lines, body brown; sparse white hairs. Egg -- shiny black mass cemented around twigs (may contain 100-400 eggs).

Importance

Oak and gums are the most preferred and severely defoliated trees. Several consecutive years of severe defoliation will stress trees. In combination with other stress factors, death may result.

Biology and Habits

Adult moths emerge from cocoons in late spring, close to time of oak leaf expansion or unfolding. The larvae feed together initially, but then disperse to other trees. Pupation occurs between leaves or in the soil or soil litter.

Number of Generations

1 generation per year.

Signs of Infestation

Loss of foliage. Falling frass (dark pellets of caterpillar excrement). Caterpillars clustered on lower trunks and branches of trees. Branch dieback and/or crown thinning.

Control

Predators, parasites, disease, and unfavorable weather usually keep caterpillar populations at low levels. Outbreaks do occur, but usually subside in 1 or 2 years. Prune small branches that have egg masses and destroy. Promote tree vigor and health to aid in the recovery from defoliation. Use an approved insecticide for high-value trees.
**What to Plant**

**Annuals:** New varieties of coleus do well in sun or shade and provide vivid colors and patterns for months. UF’s latest are Big Red Judy, Electric Lime, Frilly Milly, Pineapple Splash to name a few.

**Bulbs:** Louisiana Iris thrives in most soil types and makes a beautiful cut flower.

**Seeds:** This is the last month to plant annual flower seeds that need to germinate before hot weather returns.

**Vegetables:** Continue planting warm season crops. Mulch well to prevent weeds and provide irrigation if there has been a lack of rainfall.

**What to Do**

**Pests:** Monitor landscape plants weekly for aphids on tender new growth.

**Fertilize Lawns:** Apply a complete fertilizer after all danger of frost is past since fertilizing too early can damage the lawn.

**Citrus:** Now is a good time to check citrus trees for scab disease. Apply a copper fungicide when new leaves appear and again when 2/3 of the flower blossoms have fallen.

**Divide Perennials and Bulbs:** Divide clumps of bulbs or herbaceous perennials to expand garden beds or pass along to friends.

**Lawn Problems:** Many lawn problems mimic insect damage. Confirm the damage is being caused by insects before applying a pesticide.

**Caladiums:** Replant bulbs that were dug last fall and stored for the winter.

**Shrubs:** The peak planting season is here and there are a wide variety of shrubs that can be added to the landscape now.

**Mulch:** Mulch conserves moisture during dry weather and minimizes weeds in landscape beds. Be “Florida Friendly” when choosing mulch. We discourage the use of cypress. Instead, use a by-product mulch like pine bark or eucalyptus or even utility mulch. Ask your garden store to start carrying melaleuca mulch.

**Do Every Month**

- Adjust irrigation based on rainfall.
- Deadhead flowers to encourage new blooms.
- Monitor the garden for insects.
- Plant trees, shrubs, and perennials and water until established.
- **Mow lawns** at recommended heights:
  
  St. Augustine & Bahia: 3-4”

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