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Did We Miss Winter?

February temperatures were extremely mild and it appears that many of us completely missed a freeze event this winter. At the beaches and in other protected areas, plants that are normally burned back by the cold are thriving. Some gardeners are still harvesting tomatoes from last year.

Are we going to get a freeze in March? Not according to the National Weather Channel who is predicting above average temperatures for March and then a return of normal temperatures for April and May. Based on these predictions, seems like it's safe to move forward with planting warm season vegetables and flowers.

Just keep in mind that if the plants escaped injury from cold weather, so did the insects. Normally we plant early to beat the pests but that may not work this year. Maybe the beneficial insects like this lady bug in the picture will rise to the occasion and help us out.



Upcoming March/April Classes

- Canning Classes:** \$20 per person, pre-payment & pre-registration required. Call 255-7450 to register.
- Saturday, March 11, 9 am—Noon, Lemon Curd
 - Monday, March 20, 9 am—1 pm, Pressure Canning Green Beans
 - Monday, April 3, 9 am—Noon, No Sugar Products: Pomegranate Jelly & Honey & Thyme Blackberry Jam
 - Saturday, April 8, 9 am—1 pm, Roasted Tomato Soup (Cans) & Cheese Crackers
 - Monday, April 17, 9 am—1 pm, Chicken in a Can—Appetizers

Call 255-7450 to register for classes below

Wednesday, March 8, 6pm-8pm, Springing into Summer, University Park Library, University Blvd. Spring preparations for landscape and vegetable gardens, right plant in the right place, and watering with recycled items.

Wednesday, April 5, 6pm-8pm, Landscape Design 101, Regency Square Library, Regency Square Blvd. Learn the basic principles for your yard and garden. Attendees who register will receive "The FFL Guide."

Wednesday, April 12, 9:30-12:30pm, Spring into Gardening, 2892 Loretto Rd., Mandarin Garden Club. Learn how to grow microgreens, fruit options for landscapes, and compost techniques. Registration fee: \$10.

Wednesday, April 19, 7pm-8pm, Butterfly Gardening 101, Mandarin Library, 3330 Kori Road. Find out how to attract butterflies to your landscape. Attendees will receive color pamphlet on Florida Wildflowers & Butterflies.

Saturday, April 22, 9am-1pm, Master Gardener Plant Sale and Gardening Expo. See page 3 for details.

Master Gardener Plant Clinics: See page 8 for list of locations and dates.

Things to do in March/April by DeValle

Flowers

- ◆ Deadhead and prune back cool season annuals to force more blooms or pull out and replace with warm season annuals.

- ◆ Pick off old camellia blooms from plants and the ground below to reduce the risk of camellia blight in next year's flowers. The same is true of azaleas once they finish blooming.



- ◆ Clean up dead leaves from cold damaged plants. Plants like gingers and firespike can be cut down to the ground. Prune ornamental

grasses to remove the brown leaves before new growth emerges. Other plants like salvia, firebush and hibiscus should be pruned back when new buds start to break along the stem.

Fruits and Nuts

- ◆ Start fertilizing blueberries using an acid-forming fertilizer like an azalea gardenia blend. Young plants benefit from frequent but light applications starting in Feb. or March and continuing every other month with the last application in October.
- ◆ Remove fruit from newly planted trees to help them get established. Putting energy into producing fruit will reduce the ability of the plant to establish a strong framework (roots & shoots).
- ◆ Thin peaches and nectarines so that fruit are spaced about 6" to 10" apart to produce quality fruit. Do this when the fruit are the size of a nickel before the pit starts to harden.

Trees & Shrubs

- ◆ Prune spring flowering trees and shrubs soon after blooming, if needed.
- ◆ If fertilizer was not applied in February, apply in March around young trees and shrubs at the rate of 1/2 pound up to 1 (if slow release) pound nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. Broadcast over the area underneath the plant extending to the drip area. Keep fertilizer away from the base of plant stems/trunks.
- ◆ Start fertilizer program for palms using a palm fertilizer. Analysis should be 8-2-12-4. 100% of nitrogen, potassium and magnesium (1st, 3rd and 4th numbers) should be in slow-release form. Apply in March and repeat in June or July. Do not use a higher nitrogen fertilizer and/or one that is quick

release because it creates a potassium deficiency in older leaves.

Lawns

- ◆ Hand pull cool season weeds in lawns and landscapes to remove weed seeds that lay in wait for next fall. Spot treat to manage warm season weeds. For more information, go to

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep141>.

- ◆ Change irrigation clocks to twice per week if needed on March 12 when daylight savings time begins.

- ◆ Don't routinely add sand to your lawn in the spring. This practice can introduce weed seeds, nematodes and diseases to your lawn. It's okay to fill in low spots with a good quality sterile sand mixed with some organic matter but only add an inch or two at a time. Once the lawn has spread to cover the top of the soil, repeat the practice again to make the low area level with the existing lawn.



Yellow woodsorrel cool season weed



Avoid the practice of topdressing turf with sand. Use to fill low areas only.

Photo Credit: Bryan Unruh, UF/IFAS Turfgrass Specialist

Vegetable Garden

- Harden off vegetable transplants by placing them outside in a protected area (partial shade). Another method is to allow plants to wilt slightly before watering. Plant outside on a cloudy day or late in the afternoon to reduce stress.
- Monitor plants for insects like aphids and small caterpillars and depending on the pest, treat with a product like insecticidal soap or *Bacillus thuringiensis*/Dipel (caterpillars).
- Wait for soils to heat up before planting seeds like beans and okra. Avoid adding mulch to soils until they heat up and seeds germinate.
- Fertilize vegetables throughout the growing season to keep plants productive. Frequency will depend on type of fertilizer used and soil type.

What to Plant in March/April by DeValle



Zinnia profusion: install as transplants or direct seed

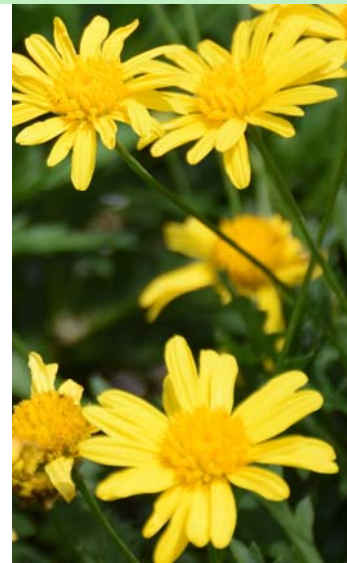
availability), lobelia, marguerite daisy, marigold, milkweed, nicotiana, ornamental pepper, pentas, phlox, rudbeckia, salvia, strawflower, thunbergia, torenia, verbena, vinca (periwinkle) and zinnia. In April, add to the list coleus, portulaca, and sweet William. Remove from the list ageratum, alyssum, amaranthus, baby's breath, balsam, begonia, browallia, calendula, cosmos and strawflower.

Bulbs to plant in March include achimenes, allium, alstroemeria, Amazon lily, Aztec lily, begonia, blood lily, caladium, canna, crinum, dahlia, gladiolus, gloriosa lily, gloxinia, kaffir lily, tiger lily, tritonia, tuberose, voodoo lily, watsonia and zephyr lily. In April add buttercup (ranunculus), lily, marica (walking iris), moraea (African lily) and spider lily; remove

Based on predictions, it appears to be safe to move forward by putting in warm season plants. In March, annuals to plant include ageratum, alyssum, amaranthus, asters, baby's breath, balsam, begonia (nonstop, tuberous, wax), blue daze, browallia, calendula, celosia, calliopsis, cleome, cosmos, dusty miller, exacum, gaillardia, gazania, geranium, hollyhock, impatiens (limited

crinum lily.

Some great perennials to try are beach sunflower (*Helianthus debilis*), blackberry lily (*Belamcanda chinensis*), bulbine, bush daisy (*Euryops pectinatus*), chrysanthemum, cigar flower (*Cuphea micropetala*), coneflower (Echinacea), Stoke's aster, firebush (*Hamelia patens*), firespike (*Odontonema strictum*), firecracker plant (*Russelia*), flax lily (*Dianella tasmanica* 'Variegata'), gaura, Gerbera daisy, lantana, pentas, plumbago, salvias, gingers, and verbena.



Bush Daisy
Euryops pectinatus

Vegetable gardening season kicks in as weather warms up. This is a transition time between cool and warm season crops. Cool season veggies that can be planted in March are beets, carrots, celery, collards*, endive, kohlrabi, leeks, lettuce, mustard*, bunching onions, parsley, English peas, potatoes, radishes and turnips*. Those with an asterisk can also be planted in April. Warm season crops to plant include beans, sweet corn, cucumbers, eggplant, okra, southern peas, peppers, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, squash, tomatoes and watermelon. For list of recommended varieties, go to <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/vh021>.

Master Gardener Plant Sale & Gardening Expo



Vietnamese Hollyhock

Save the date!!! Saturday April 22 from 9am to 1pm is the 1st Duval County Master Gardener Plant Sale and Gardening Expo to help celebrate Earth Day. Bring the entire family as there will be fun activities for the kids!!

Shop for plants that are adapted to our area while attending seminars and visiting with Master Gardeners at educational displays. Learn how to make a grow bucket, a rain barrel, a bee house and more. Bring soil samples to drop off for pH testing and any gardening questions to ask the Master

Gardener 'Plant Doctors.' 4-H will sell snacks throughout the day & help carry your plants. Bring cash or check book; no credit cards.

A few of the plants for sale include native milkweed (*A. tuberosa*), bee balm, blue-eyed grass, coreopsis, fringe trees, gaura, gaillardia, redbuds, rudbeckia, salvias, sedum, Vietnamese hollyhock, passionflower vine, herbs, succulents, vegetables and more.

Seminars

9:30-10 Heat Tolerant Vegetables & Herbs
10:30-11 Flowering Plants to Add Landscape Color
11:30-12:15 Water Saving Landscape Techniques

Tomato Types to Choose From

By Mary Puckett

The tomato, *Solanum lycopersicum L.*, originated in Central and South America. It grows best at temperatures of 70 to 85°F during the day and 60 to 70° during the night. If you haven't started to plan for your warm-season vegetable garden, now is the time to get started.

In general tomatoes fall into two categories: hybrid and open-pollinated.

- Hybrids are the first generation offspring of two distinct parents that have been hand pollinated. The goal is to produce a tomato plant and fruit that offer better disease resistance, higher yield and good flavor. A disadvantage is that they don't come true from seed and revert back to the dominant parent. This means you have to buy new seed instead of saving seed each year.



Heirloom tomatoes are known for their taste, shape and color

- Open-pollinated plants are varieties that produce seed that is "true to type" providing stable traits from one generation to the next. An heirloom is generally considered to be a variety that has been passed down through several generations of a family because of its valued characteristics. Craig LeHoullier and Dr. Carolyn Male, tomato experts, have classified heirlooms into four categories:

- Commercial Heirlooms: Open-pollinated varieties introduced before 1940, or tomato varieties more than 50 years in circulation.



The Brandywine tomato plant is an heirloom, with potato-leaved foliage and bears large beefsteak-shaped fruit.

- Family Heirlooms: Seeds that have been passed down for several generations through a family.

- Created Heirlooms: Crossing two known parents (either two heirlooms or an heirloom and a hybrid) and dehybridizing the resulting seeds for however many years/generations it takes to eliminate the undesirable characteristics and stabilize the desired ones, perhaps as many as 8 years or more.
- Mystery Heirlooms: Varieties that are a product of natural cross-pollination of other heirloom varieties.
(Note: All heirloom varieties are open-pollinated but not all open-pollinated varieties are heirloom varieties.)

There are several different tomato types to choose from. Compare the characteristics of each with what you want in a plant.

- Cherry and Grape: The round cherry comes in red, orange, yellow and black. The grape is shaped like an elongated sphere (just like a grape). They both have a high sugar content, are bite-sized, and are perfect to eat right out of the hand or use in salads, garnishes and sauté's.



Cherry, Super Sweet 100

Juliet, the 1999 All America Selections winner produces clusters of grape-shaped tomatoes great for salads, salsas, and pasta sauces.



In general, cherry tomatoes have thinner skin and are more prone to splitting while grape tomatoes typically have very thick flesh and are resistant to splitting. Our favorite and reliable cherry varieties include: Super Sweet 100, Sun-Gold and Black Cherry A favorite and dependable grape type is Juliet, noted for its high yields and crack resistance.

Tomatoes continued... by Mary Puckett

- Plum: Also called a Roma tomato that is typically meaty and uniformly elongated, taking on an egg-shape. It is ideal for cooking and canning because of its low water content. Rutgers Improved is a good canning and slicer variety.

Rutgers Improved An heirloom, that has an excellent flavor and reliability, especially as a canning variety. Compact with 6 oz. red fruits with thick walls.



- Pear or Teardrop: This bite size tomato mirrors its two names. It is milder than a cherry tomato but its uses are the same. Yellow Pear is an heirloom that can grow to a height of 8' and is best enjoyed fresh.

Yellow Pear, an heirloom with 1-1/2" yellow pear-shaped fruit that are clear yellow. They have a mild flavor and are great for fresh eating or for making tomato preserves



- Slicer or Globe: They are smooth and round, and range from golf ball to baseball size. They are perfect for slicing and salads. Celebrity is an old time favorite.

Celebrity A 1984 All-America Selections winner. Exceptionally flavorful, firm, 7 to 8oz fruit on strong vines with good cover and outstanding disease resistance. Productive and widely adaptable.

- Large Fruit and Beefsteak type: Has a jumbo, irregular pumpkin-like shape and is typically wider than they are tall. Brandywine and Black Krim are two beefsteak favorites.

Over the years there have been many improvements in tomato varieties. As a gardener you may choose hybrids, heirlooms, or a combination of both. Whatever you decide, make sure it is what's best for your garden.

References:

Tomato Varieties for Florida

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/HS/HS118900.pdf>

Growing Heirloom Tomato Varieties in Southwest Florida

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/HS/HS17400.pdf>

Craig LeHoullier

Dwarf Tomato Breeding Project

Dr. Carolyn Male

Ph. D in Microbiology

Blossom End Rot (BER) usually occurs on the blossom end of tomatoes causing the fruit to turn black. Although this is a calcium deficiency, it is often caused by a lack of water to move the calcium into the plant.



Once the problem occurs, it's too late to apply calcium foliar sprays to the fruit. The key is prevention by making sure there is adequate calcium in the soil prior to planting and then making sure the soils don't dry out when fruit are swelling. Pay attention to soil moisture when we have spikes in temperature, low humidity, and high winds. Info & Photo Credit: Dr. Josh Freeman, UF/IFAS NREC

Termite Swarmers Are Active By Terry DeValle



Photo Credit: UF/IFAS Eastern Subterranean termite swarmer

Termites are one pest that we always get questions on early in the year. Subterranean termites swarm from January through May, but seem to come “out of the woodwork” especially when weather just starts to heat up following winter.

Termites remain hidden within wood and are difficult to detect. Subterranean termites may be noticed by the presence of winged swarmers, mud tubes, and wood damage. Winged swarmers (reproductive stage) of Eastern subterranean termites emerge from colonies during daylight hours as spring temperatures arrive. The other subterranean termite that is a concern is the Formosan subterranean which swarms in the early evening hours during the months of April-July and are attracted to lights. On warm calm nights during this time period, turn porch lights off at night or switch to a yellow light. Peak swarming season for

drywood termites is similar, usually during in the evening March-May.

After swarming, they break off their wings and burrow into the ground to infest wood to form a new colony. If you find these on a window sill, they swarmed from inside the home and are attracted to sunlight; they are trying to make their way out.

All it takes is a crack the width of a credit card in the slab or around a pipe for termites to gain entrance into your home. The favorite points of entry in a home are the outside foundation walls, kitchens, bathrooms, and attached garages. They must have moisture to survive so inspect for mud tubes around the exterior of the home. If you find mudtubes or swarmers in your home, contact a pest control company for treatment. For more info: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ig097>.



Inspect around the home for mud tubes that connect underground nest with your home

False Rosemary By Terry DeValle



Conradina grandiflora
Large flowered rosemary

Conradina grandiflora goes by many names such as false rosemary, redneck rosemary or large flowered rosemary. It is a native plant with needle-type evergreen foliage in the mint family and is very

aromatic, similar in fragrance to our culinary rosemary. In spring and sporadically throughout the year, it has beautiful lavender flowers which attract butterflies, bees and other pollinators.

It thrives in full sun and is very drought tolerant preferring well-drained sandy soils. Mature size is 3-4 feet tall by 1-2 feet wide. This has great landscape potential as a foundation or border plant that can be used in mass plantings or mixed in with traditional plantings.

Another in the same genus is *Conradina canascens* which is also referred to as false rosemary. This one is a daintier plant maturing at 1-3 feet tall with a spreading

growth habit. It has smaller leaves that have a more silvery green cast plus the flowers are smaller.

It has the same growth requirements as *C. grandiflora* but is a short lived perennial typically exhausting itself after three years. *C. grandiflora* is considered to be a long-lived perennial.

Another plus - these plants may help keep grassy weeds at bay because plant roots are allelopathic and keep grassy plants from establishing (fire protection).



Conradina canascens
False rosemary

Could Your Tools be Spreading Disease?

By Larry Figart, UF/DuVal County Urban Forestry Extension Agent

There are diseases in the landscape that are spread by the very tools that we use to take care of them. When we prune out diseased limbs and branches we could be moving the disease from sick plants and



Sphaeropsis Gall in Holly

spreading it to healthy plants. In this article we will discuss some of these diseases as well as how to clean our tools.

Sphaeropsis Gall is a disease that has been slowly increasing in our landscapes. It is a disease that affects hollies. The reason for the increase is not that the disease is changing, it is that we are starting to use more and more holly in the landscape. Most of our hollies are susceptible. The disease is first noticed when the leaves at the end of branch tips turn yellow. Then as the disease progresses the

branches start to become thicker than the surrounding tissue. In advanced cases a witches broom forms on the diseased branch. Eventually, the diseased branches will die. While this disease can be spread naturally with rain splashed spores, transmission from

tree to tree can be reduced by ensuring our pruning tools are clean.



Fusarium Wilt in a Queen Palm
Brooke Burn, UF/IFAS Extension

Fusarium wilt in Queen and Mexican Fan Palm was first noticed in Northeast Florida around 2008. It is a devastating disease that can kill a seemingly healthy palm in a few weeks. The symptoms start in the lower fronds and quickly move up the crown until all the

fronds are dead. The disease is so quick, the palms often look “freeze dried”, meaning the dead fronds do not droop. Like Sphaeropsis Gall, this disease can naturally spread as spores are carried on windblown rain. However, it typically is spread within landscapes through the use of contaminated pruning tools. There have been many instances where a homeowner loses all of their Mexican fan, or queen palms within six to eight weeks of pruning them. Using clean equipment is key to keep from spreading this disease.

The fungi that causes **Botryosphaeria Canker** is considered an opportunistic fungi. That means it looks for the “opportunity” to affect a stressed or weakened plant. It is typically described as a weak pathogen. Think of it as the predator that looks to take out the old and diseased plants. So the best way to prevent it is to keep our shrubs and trees healthy and vigorous. Part of that is to prune out any diseased branches.

However, if we do not sterilize our tools, we run the risk of spreading this fungus to healthy portions of the plant.

Other diseases that are commonly spread by infected pruning tools include fire blight, and tobacco mosaic virus.

So far we have read about **why** sterilize pruning tools, now we will discuss the **how**. There have been several studies to determine what works best. Diluted alcohol, a 10% bleach solution, trisodium phosphate, and Lysol all work well. One of the studies also found that Lysol was least corrosive and bleach was most corrosive. The method that is recommended is to have a small bucket of solution nearby and two pruning tools. Alternate pruning tools, leaving one to soak, and switch them when moving to the next plant. Some folks carry spray bottles with the solution in it spraying the tools between cuts. By disinfecting our tools we can avoid spreading disease in our landscape.



Botryosphaeria Canker
Dennis Hamilton, Phillips Garden Center

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Master Gardener Plant Clinics



Duval County Extension Master Gardeners are holding plant clinics on three upcoming Saturdays at locations throughout Duval County. They will be available to answer your gardening questions, provide informative publications on gardening subjects and collect soil samples for pH. For directions on how to take a soil sample go to <http://duval.ifas.ufl.edu/documents/Howtotakeasoiltestsampleweb.pdf>

Saturday, March 18 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Gore's Nursery, 10357 New Kings Road
Phillips Garden Store, 4234 Herschel St.
Proctor Ace, 580 Atlantic Blvd., Neptune Beach

Turner Ace, 784 Marsh Landing Parkway,
Jacksonville Beach

Turner Ace Hardware, 5827 Arlington Road
Lowe's, 9525 Regency Square Blvd. N.
Home Depot, 9520 Regency Square Blvd. N.
Saturday, March 25 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Hagan Ace Hardware, 12501 San Jose Blvd.
Hall's Ace Hardware, 5645 Blanding Blvd
Lowe's, 4040 Oldfield Crossing
Proctor Ace Hardware, 5723 University Blvd
Trad's Garden Center, 8178 San Jose Blvd
Saturday, April 1 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Lowe's Northside, 13125 City Square Dr.
Lowe's Westside, 5155 Lenox Ave.
Home Depot, 855 Lane Ave.
Turner Ace Hardware, 13164 Atlantic Blvd.
Rockaway Nursery, 510 Shetter Ave.
Earth Works, 12501 Beach Blvd.
Lowe's, 12945 Atlantic Blvd.

Once you have read this newsletter, turn "A New Leaf" and pass this information on to a friend.
Terry B. DeValle
Extension Agent-Environmental Horticulture

For individuals requiring special accommodations, please contact our office (904-255-7450) within a minimum of 5 working days of the program. For persons with hearing or speech impairments, when contacting our office please use the Florida Relay Service at 1-800-955-8771 (TDD).

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