Fall is a time of thanksgiving and when many crops are harvested. National Farm City Week is celebrated throughout our country the week before Thanksgiving, Nov. 18-24.

We have much to be thankful for, including an abundant, safe, affordable and dependable food supply. Many of our farms in Duval and neighboring counties are being replaced by developments but we still have farms throughout the northeast Florida area. Farm City Week is a very appropriate time to recognize those that work so hard to produce our food.

Many of us were raised on farms or had grandparents that worked the land. Our youth are losing this connection and the local grocer is the only contact they may have with farmers. Take time during the holidays to teach your kids or grandchildren about gardening. Share your expertise and experiences to plant a seed that they may also be stewards of the environment and enjoy the fruits of their labor.

Plant a fall garden growing some easy crops like radishes, lettuce or potatoes. This is a great time to garden in northeast Florida with the cooler temperatures. Select a sunny spot and get growing!

Have you ever used the Jacksonville Canning Center? The facility is located just behind our building on 1010 North McDuff Avenue. They are open Monday through Thursday from 8AM to 4:00PM. There is a fee of $7.50 per hour per group. You can create products in cans or jars. Cans are provided for a fee of .65 for a quart and .45 for a pint and jars you bring yourself. Get a group of friends and a good recipe and call 387–8860 to make an appointment. It’s not too late to create some delectable gifts for the holidays.

Upcoming Class: December 14, 2005 from 10AM-1PM at the Duval County Extension Office. Learn how to winterize your landscape and grow an herb garden. Herbs will be for sale. Call 387–8850 to register.
Timing is everything with Christmas cactus. What’s a Christmas cactus during the holidays without blooms? Christmas cactus, like poinsettias and chrysanthemums, are considered short day plants. They produce leaves when the days are long in the summer and form flower buds in response to shorter day lengths in the fall. Cooler temperatures associated with fall also help stimulate flower production.

Christmas cactus grown in a location that receives only natural lighting will come into flower naturally because of the shorter day length. If plants are exposed to any artificial light, like a streetlight, plants will not set flower buds. To make sure plants bloom in time for Christmas, plants should only be exposed to daylight from 8am to 5pm, also referred to as short days. They can be moved to a closet or any other dark area from 5pm to 8am each day. This short day treatment lasts for 6 weeks. Plants maintained for 6 weeks of short day treatment will bloom 10 weeks after short days were initiated. It’s too late to start treatment now for Christmas but you can plan for next year.

There is some confusion when referring to Christmas, Easter, versus Thanksgiving cactus. There are at least three distinct types with minor variations in leaves (joints) and flowers. All will bloom at the appropriate times if grown under natural lighting conditions. Or, they can all be forced to bloom at Christmas and are hence referred to as “Holiday Cactus”.

Growing Tips:

Plants grow best in bright light and should be placed within 6’ of a window or closer. Once new growth begins following bloom, prune plants to force branching. The last pruning should be done in late spring. This will create branching and increase the number of flowers.

There are many different soils to choose from. Just make sure the soil is well drained and light. If the soil holds too much water, the plant stems or roots will rot. Combinations of peat moss and perlite, vermiculite, or builder’s sand are all acceptable choices. Try a mix of 2 parts peat moss to 1 part perlite for a rich, but well drained media.

Watering is one of the keys to success with these plants. Allowing the soil to dry out will cause the flowers to drop whereas a soil that is too wet will lead to disease problems. Use a light, airy soil media that is rich in organic matter.

Fertilize every month or every two months depending on the growth of the plant. If it’s a fast grower, monthly fertilizer applications would be best. Soluble fertilizers or slow release products are both acceptable.

A common problem with Holiday cactus is bud drop. This typically occurs because of a change in environment, especially high temperatures. To avoid bud drop, do not place the plant in a draft or near a heat source (vent, fireplace, television). Other than high temperatures, the other thing that causes bud drop is watering. Plants purchased from a greenhouse for the holidays should not dry out. When the top of the soil, about an inch down, feels dry to the touch, add water. Water until it comes out from the bottom of the container but discard the excess water.

These plants are easily propagated by placing cuttings of 2 or 3 jointed sections in a moist sand. Stick 3 or 4 cuttings per 4” pot or 5 to 6 cuttings in a 6” pot. Keep them in high indirect light and keep them moist until rooted. Once rooted, transfer them to one of the mixes mentioned above. Cuttings are typically taken in the spring following a flush of new growth.
Things to Plant in November & December by Terry DelValle

There are many annuals for planting in cool weather. For both November and December, plant carnation (China doll), delphinium, dianthus, foxglove (digitalis), larkspur, ornamental cabbage, ornamental kale, pansy, petunia, Shasta daisy, snapdragon, and violas. Remove old flowers on snaps, petunias, and pansies to encourage new blooms.

Two plants that were outstanding at the 2004/2005 U of FL trials at Gainesville were Delphinium Aurora Deep Purple (on right) and Intensia Phlox (lower right). Due to the cool spring in 2005, these plants provided color into May.

Bulb-type plants include African lily (Agapanthus), amaryllis, anemone, Aztec lily, calla, crinum, daylily, elephant ears, freesia, hurricane lily, hyacinth, Iris spp., Ixia, kaffir lily, Lily spp., Moraea (African lily), narcissus, pineapple lily, shell ginger, snowflake (Nov. only), society garlic, spider lily, Star-of-Bethlehem, (Ornithogalum spp.), walking iris, ranculus (buttercup), spider lily, tritonia, tulip (Dec. only), voodoo lily (Dec. only), watsonia, and zephyr lily.

Chill non-prechilled spring flowering bulbs (tulips and hyacinths) and place in the refrigerator for 2 months. Keep them away from ripening fruit/vegetables because the ethylene produced can cause flowers to abort. Once chilling is completed, plant them in the landscape or leave them in the fridge until planting.

Composting by Terry DelValle

Cold weather will soon create an abundance of organic treasures. Turn these organic treasures into compost and mix them into plant beds to save money on water and fertilizer.

What can be put into compost piles? Grass clippings, small pieces of pruned shrubs and trees (shred if large), old garden plants, kitchen wastes, and tree leaves. Kitchen wastes that can be used include coffee grounds, egg shells, and vegetable and fruit scraps. Avoid using any meat products because this will attract unwanted critters and create unpleasant odors. Do not add diseased plants or weed seeds.

To create a compost pile, it can be as simple as piling layers of material on the ground or placing them in a circle made of chicken wire. The minimum size is 3 1/2’ high X 3 1/2’ wide for optimum heating. Build the pile by alternating 4” layers of brown and green materials, starting and ending with a 4” layer of coarse brown material. To speed up the process, add a 1” layer of composted animal manure or 1 cup of 12-12-12 fertilizer per 25 square feet of surface area, and a 1” layer of soil or starter compost. Add water to moisten the layers as you go.

As the pile is decomposing, it helps to turn the material. This speeds up the process and helps it to heat up evenly. Composting takes from 6 weeks to a year depending on the materials used and the temperature. For more information on composting, go to http://compost.ifas.ufl.edu/tutorial/BuildPile.htm.
Urban Gardening Update  
by Sara Cimbalik, Urban Gardening Program Assistant

Finally the temperatures are cooling down; however, the rain has been a drowning factor in the garden this season. If damping off has been a problem with your seedlings, you’re not alone. Hopefully the environmental factors will be more conducive for the winter gardens. As the holiday season is approaching, it isn’t too late to plant a garden. ‘Tis the season for beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, Chinese cabbage, collards, kale, kohlrabi, leek, mustard, onions, parsley, radish, spinach and strawberries, which can all be planted in November and December, with the exception of strawberries. Strawberries should be set in the ground no later than mid to late November. For the specifics of planting and varieties refer to: http://edis.at.ufl.edu/VH021

Gifts From the Garden by Sara Cimbalik

If your time this season would rather be spent in the garden rather than shopping for gifts, look no further …… I have the solution for you. If you’re an avid herb grower or even a beginner, giving a dish garden is the perfect gift to give. Dish gardens can be created in all different shapes, sizes and colors of containers. Before selecting plants, choose the container. Some factors to consider are how heavy the container will be once potted (clay vs. plastic) and how well it will drain. Make sure there is some type of drain hole in the bottom and if not, make one. Choose a potting media that will drain easily and not hold too much moisture as herbs can tend to drown. A good mix you can make yourself consists of equal parts of potting soil, vermiculite, perlite, peat moss and sand. Select the culinary herbs to go into the dish garden. Choose them by growth habit, light requirements, water requirement and life cycles. A couple of good combinations are:

- Parsley
- Dill
- Oregano
- Thyme
- Onion chives
- Cilantro
- Fennel

Place the plants in an arrangement that is best suited for their growth habit. For example, if you have a cascading type plant like thyme, plant it near the edge so it may fall over the side. Keep the kitchen garden moist but not overly wet. Fertilize lightly with a weakened water soluble solution such as a 20-20-20 or use a slow release fertilizer. Make sure it gets proper light and air circulation. Be sure to trim the herbs to promote new growth. This is an inexpensive and fun gift to give and will make every cook or gardener’s holiday wish come true!

The Rosemary Christmas Tree by Sara Cimbalik

We’ve all seen those cute little rosemary plants that are shaped like Christmas trees that hit the stores around the holiday season. I’ve been inundated with questions as to how to get them to live past the holidays. These trees go against the grain in retrospect to growing rosemary. They’re tightly compacted, a haven for pest and disease! To extend their life make sure to repot them into a larger container (2-3 inches bigger) than the one they are in. Once repotted, let it adapt to its new container for 2-3 weeks. Trim part of the plant out, trying to keep as much shape as you can. This will allow for better air circulation. However, don’t remove any more than 1/3 of the growth. Trim a little at a time, as over-pruning can put too much stress on the plant, leading it to death. Hopefully these hits will extend its growing season.
Consumers have demanded an increase for organic foods. In the United States, organic production is on the steady increase of about 12% each year. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) hosts the National Organic Program (NOP) which states the regulations and guidelines for certified organic production. These regulations and guidelines can be found at http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/indexIE.htm. However, if you're growing your own vegetables, organic practices can easily be incorporated into your garden. Organic gardening differs from “conventional” gardening mainly in the areas of fertilization and pest control. Organic gardening incorporates large quantities of organic material into the soil. These are usually in the form of animal manures, plant manure, cover crops, compost, or mixed organic fertilizer. Some of the benefits of adding organic matter include improved soil tilth and structure. In turn this allows the soil to hold water and nutrients better, support microbial activity and can help vegetables survive stress from nematodes. Animal manures should be aged for at least 30 days or composted. Sewage sludge should not be used. Manures should be broadcast evenly over the plot and incorporated into the soil by roto-tilling or spading. The table below shows how much to incorporate based on type.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Manure</th>
<th>Lbs/100 sq. ft</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cow, Horse, Hog</td>
<td>25 lbs/100 sq. ft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poultry, sheep</td>
<td>12 lbs/100 sq. ft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other animal-rabbit, goat, and exotic grasseaters</td>
<td>10-12 lbs/100 sq. ft</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mulching with organic matter such as leaves, pine straw, sawdust or grass clippings have multiple benefits. These include conserving soil moisture and nutrients, reducing soil erosion, reducing crop loss due to nematodes, suppressing weed growth, and providing a barrier between fruit and soil, which reduces rot. Mulch should be applied on the soil surface around the plants.

When infestation of garden pests are high, controlling by natural means can become difficult in the organic garden. Below is a list of practices that can help reduce losses without using chemical pesticides:

- Plant resistant varieties
- Selecta pest-free transplant
- Handpick insects
- Spade garden early so vegetation has time to rot before planting
- Keep out weeds which harbor insects and diseases
- Summer fallowing and soil solarization helps control nematodes
- Dispose of severely diseased plants before they contaminate others
- Water in morning so plants aren't wet at night
- Cutworms: place cardboard or a tinfoil collar around plant stems at ground level
- Rotate garden areas
- Crotolaria spectabilis and marigolds when planted as cover crops tend to reduce some nematodes
- Encourage natural predators

If you're looking for a new method of gardening, try organic gardening this season. It may present new challenges; however, you will know exactly what has been applied to your home grown produce.
Gardening Tips for Nov/Dec by Terry DelValle

- Now is a great time to install landscape plants so roots have a chance to grow before warm weather kicks in next spring. Plan for minimal maintenance so look at the mature height/width to avoid unnecessary pruning as plants age. Call SUNSHINE before you dig @ 1-800-432-4770. Dig the hole 10% less than the height and as wide as possible. Cut circling roots and make several vertical slices 1" deep through the rootball. Locate topmost root from plant’s trunk and make sure it’s even or slightly higher that surrounding soil. Build a berm using mulch at the edge of the rootball to channel water to roots. Water well to eliminate air pockets and to wet the rootball. Water daily for two to three weeks and then gradually cut back water (frequency depends on weather conditions).

- Based on studies, irrigation for lawns and landscapes account for 50% of home water use. We need to be conservative, but keep in mind, these are typically our driest months. The average rainfall for November is 2”, December 2.5” and January 3.3 inches. As weather cools, water lawns in the absence of rainfall at the rate of 3/4” one time per week. Woody plants should be watered less frequently with 3/4” every 10 to 14 days.

- Continue to mow lawns removing no more than 1/3 of the top growth. Rake leaves as they fall on lawns to keep soils warm and prevent disease problems.

- If a freeze is predicted, water plants 24 to 48 hours before the freeze. Citrus fruit will be damaged when temperatures drop below 28F for at least 4 hours. If a freeze is predicted for this duration, harvest fruit that is ripe before the freeze. If fruit is not ripe, take a chance and leave fruit on the tree because citrus will not ripen once picked. Prior to a severe freeze, protect graft unions of young citrus by banking clean sand around the trunk just above the graft union. Wrapping the trunk with layers of newspaper or insulation like bubble wrap will also help add heat.

- Wait until deciduous plants are dormant to prune. Do not prune spring flowering trees and shrubs now as flower buds will be removed. Examples include azalea, redbud, Japanese magnolia, dogwood and spirea.

- As weather cools, spray plants to control scale problems. Horticultural oil or dormant oil will control scale without damaging plants. Make sure to spray the under and upper surface of leaves for good coverage.

- Mole crickets are obvious now because of their size but now is not the time to treat. Wait until spring to treat as young are more easily controlled with pesticides.

- Crabgrass is prolific and is a tough weed to control with herbicides. Preemergent herbicides are only effective if the weeds die back and are germinating from seed. To keep crabgrass from germinating from seed next year, apply a preemergence herbicide containing pendimethalin in mid December. A newer product on the market for crabgrass control is AgraLawn Crabgrass Control. One of the main active ingredients is baking soda, but this product combines other ingredients like cinnamon, corn and wheat flour and claims to be less toxic than straight baking soda. For control, apply to green leaves of the crabgrass when dew is on the grass or mist lightly before application. Do not treat if rain is predicted. Expect some damage to the treated lawn area.
American Holly *Ilex opaca*

by Larry Figart, Urban Forester

The weather is finally starting to cool off. The holidays are fast approaching. Many folks decorate their homes with garlands of holly. Have you ever wondered why the holly tree was chosen to represent such a big part of the holiday season?

First a little about the tree. American holly is a medium sized tree that gets to about 45 feet in height at maturity. It has a pyramidal shape with a 15-20 foot spread.

The leaves are thick, leathery and armed with pointy spines. The leaves persist on the branches for a few years and then drop off in the spring. When the tree is stressed it may drop most of its leaves creating a bare appearance.

The flowers are small white and fairly inconspicuous. Male and female flowers are produced on different trees. Therefore, only female trees produce berries. For good fruit production, male trees should be located somewhere in the nearby neighborhood or surrounding woodlands. Berry production is highest in full sun on female trees.

The fruit is a drupe that starts out green and ripens late in the fall. It will persist on the tree for several months, which makes it a good wildlife food source.

The American holly can grow well in full sun to partial shade. It should be planted on fertile, well drained but moist soil. It prefers slightly acid soils below 6.5 pH.

Now back to some holly folklore. The pagan Druids appear to be the first culture to find meaning in hollies. They viewed holly as a sacred plant because of its ability to remain green and produce berries in the winter. The Romans used holly as a gift to their god Saturn, and decorated idols of Saturn with holly boughs for Saturnalia, the mid-winter feast. Later, in order to avoid persecution from the Romans, Christians decorated their homes in holly as well. As Christian customs grew, the symbolism of holly lost its pagan association, and became a symbol of Christmas.

Soon it will be time to brave the crowds and select a Christmas tree. Here are some hints to help you keep your tree attractive throughout the season.

First, you should select the right place for your tree. It should be convenient to an electrical source. It should be in a spot that does not get direct sun. Nor should it be below an air duct that will blow warm dry air on it when your heater comes on. Make sure it is not near a fireplace, and that it is out of the normal traffic patterns. Measure your ceiling height, as well as, the height of your tree topper. Nothing is more frustrating than having a tree that is too tall.

Now it is time to find a tree. As you are choosing a vendor, consider these things: the unwrapped trees should be stored in the shade or in a cooler to remain fresh. The unwrapped displayed trees should be in water. A fresh tree will have soft pliable branches. Scotch and white pine and Douglas and Balsam fir have naturally good needle-holding qualities, while spruce trees tend to lose needles quickly. Run your hand through the branches. Very few needles should come off in your hand. The sap on the tree stump should be sticky and moist, not hard or caked. The vendor should make a fresh cut on the base of the tree. If you are traveling with the tree on top of your vehicle consider taking a route home that enables you to drive a little slower. The wind from driving at high speeds can dry the tree out quickly. When you get home, place the tree in a bucket of water until you are ready to set it up. After the tree is set up and decorated, make sure that you fill up the water reservoir and replenish the tree’s water daily. A properly cared for tree should last throughout the season.
Trouble controlling chinch bugs in your lawn? According to recent studies at the University of Florida, some chinch bugs are developing resistance to the same kinds of insecticides (pyrethroids) that have been used repeatedly over the last 5 to 10 years.

How can you help? Be conservative when fertilizing and mow lawns at the proper height. Water as needed to avoid stress on the lawn. Spot treat problem areas instead of the entire lawn to avoid killing beneficial insects and rotate products. Active ingredients that were effective in UF tests include Bifenthrin, Carbaryl, clothianidin, or trichlorfon.

If you have a pest control company maintaining your landscape, apply water if directed after a pesticide application. If you notice chinch bug damage, notify the company before the problem gets out of control.