Attract Butterflies with Saltbush

The tiny, white to greenish blooms and fuzzy-looking fruit of the saltbush come into flower at a time when few other small trees and shrubs are flowering. Also referred to as groundsel, it is native to coastal and interior wetlands throughout Florida, often seen in its native habitat with wax myrtle, buttonbush and marsh elder. As a large shrub, filler, or massed in difficult soil situations, saltbush can become nice addition to many landscapes.

Saltbush is an oval to rounded, freely branched, multi-stemmed, hardy, semi-evergreen to deciduous, cold-tolerant shrub usually not exceeding 2 feet in height. Its leaves are 1 to 3 inches long and about 1 1/2 inches wide, often deeply toothed, and shiny to grayish green. Saltbush could be used more frequently near retention basins and drainage ditches. It has a good tolerance to brackish water, hence the common name. However, no water is required, even on a dry site, once this plant is established. No serious pests are normally seen on the plant. However, some maintenance can improve its appearance. With proper care to remove recurring dead wood, nice small-tree specimens can be created. Additionally, saltbush will readily reseed and spread beyond its planting site, so culling out the undesirables may be necessary.

Saltbush provides nectar to butterflies. Photo: Ted Bodner, Southern Weed Science Society, Bugwood.org

As the monarch butterflies migrate through the Panhandle, saltbush, Baccharis halimifolia, is a must
visit. Adult butterflies are highly mobile and dynamic creatures with a life expectancy of only a few weeks. During that brief period, they must find a mate, reproduce, seek out food and shelter, and avoid being eaten. To meet these high-energy demands, most adult butterflies rely on sugar-rich nectar as fuel. They are strongly attracted to large clusters of small-tubed flowers that form a stable platform on which to alight. *Baccharis halimifolia* meets the needs of countless butterflies each year.

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**Native Pyramid Ants**

Because of our experience with stinging fire ants in Florida we are often concerned when we encounter ants in our landscape. And, while our first thought might be to apply insecticide treatment to the area, we should adhere to the first step in pest management—before you treat know the insect you need to treat. If you cannot identify the ant then take it to your county extension office so they can identify the specific ant species you have. This is important because there are native ants found in our area that are not harmful and can serve a purpose in the landscape.

The pyramid ant is one native ant species that does not require pesticide treatment. Pyramid ants are found throughout the state in sandy, dry soils. They build a small nest with a central entrance hole and the workers are often seen searching for food on top of the soil. Their food sources include live insects, such as winged fire ants, and honeydew excreted from piercing sucking pests. The ants move very quickly on top of the soil but don’t be too alarmed because pyramid ants do not sting.

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**Add Fall Color to Your Landscape**

Fall is the culmination of the gardening year. Many flowering plants are at their peak. And it’s time to start planting for the new year.

Pride of Barbados, *Caesalpinia pulcherrima*, with its orange and yellow flowers is at its peak in the fall garden. Other showy plants in the fall garden are cape honeysuckle, *Tecoma capensis*, with its bright orange flowers; *Tibouchina* (purple flowers); yellowbells, *Tecoma stans*; and bush allamanda.
Various varieties of *Heliconia psittacorum* have flowered all summer and are still going strong in early fall. Though they will not overwinter here, they are a great choice for a summer annual. Most types prefer bright light but need protection from full sun.

Sky vine, *Thunbergia grandiflora*, is at its best in the late summer and fall. The vine dies back in the winter but is still perennial in north Florida. You can plant it now.

Fall is the time to plant cool season annuals such as petunias and dianthus. Don’t wait until spring.
Nemesia has also proven to be a wonderful cool-season annual for north Florida. It has a very long flowering period. Plant it late September to October.

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Fungicides and Landscape Disease Management

Not all plants die because of diseases. Many plants are killed by environmental stresses which look like disease. For example, overwatering will kill plants by inducing root rots. Disease occurs when a pathogen infects a plant and disrupts its growth or kills the plant over time. Fungi, bacteria and viruses are the most common plant pathogens.

Environmental factors influence disease development in the landscape. When the environment favors the host plant, disease is unlikely to occur. When environmental factors favor growth of the pathogen and infection of the host, disease is more likely to occur. The disease triangle includes the host, the pathogen and the environment. For a disease to occur all three must be present. Some have included “time”, and have called it a disease table.

It is often difficult to determine which disease is causing the problem, because there are a wide variety of problems that occur on many plants in the landscape.

Correctly diagnosing disease problems is critical because treatment recommendations are vastly different for different disease problems. To diagnose your plant disease problem you can:

• Contact your county extension agent;
• Consult a Master Gardener or other knowledgeable plant person;
• Submit a sample to your local Extension Office; or
• Consult a lawn and landscape professional.

Fungicides can be classified by how they work on the fungus and how they work on the plant.

Proper cultural controls will help prevent disease. Proper irrigation schedules, fertilization schedules and planting the right plant for the right place reduces the chance of some diseases becoming a problem. If new plants are being established in your landscape, take care to choose a strong and healthy plant that is not already infected with a pathogen. To do this, look for signs and symptoms of plant disease on the plant and root system. It is a good idea to only purchase plants from reputable and licensed nurseries. Inspect "bargain" plants carefully.

Only by knowing what is causing the problem, can you determine how to manage and how to prevent the problem from occurring again.

Contact fungicides are sprayed onto plants and act as a protectant barrier from pathogen infection. They prevent infections from occurring when applied before symptoms
are visible, but infections that have already occurred will continue to develop.

Systemic fungicides move into the plant to some extent depending on the chemical. Some systemic products exhibit curative action which means the disease is stopped at the current state of development.


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Plant Fruit Trees in the Fall

The fall season is a great time to plant new varieties of fruit trees in your landscape. Fall plantings can give fruit trees a head start over those planted the following spring.

Sometimes gardeners want to plant fruit trees simply because they want a variety of fruit at their fingertips. Other times it might be because they just want to try their hand at it. Fruit trees can add an extra dimension to a landscape because of the healthy, good-tasting fruit they produce. Fruit trees also offer seasonal ornamental beauty to a yard or garden. Their colorful blossoms in spring are followed by attractive foliage and developing fruit. When properly maintained, fruit trees will provide beauty and great eating every year.

Fruit trees require a lot of maintenance and patience in order to produce a successful crop. It is essential to remember that north Florida can be a tough place to produce high-quality fruit, so don’t get discouraged. It is very important to select only those fruit trees that are adapted for north Florida and coastal areas. In order for fruit to develop, trees require a certain amount of chilling hours. The term "chilling hours" refers to the number of hours that the temperature is below 45 degrees Fahrenheit, but also above freezing. Chilling hours are very important. North Florida only receives 400 to 700 chilling hours per season; therefore, select only those varieties that have the lowest chilling hour requirements to help ensure an abundance of fruit for the next year.

Map showing average winter chill hours for the state of Florida.

Photo: Figure from UF/IFAS EDIS publication HS250

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Preparing for a Fall/Winter Vegetable Garden

Fall is a great time for growing vegetables, especially greens and leafy ones. With the resurgence of interest in growing your own vegetables it’s important to remember that first time gardeners and veteran gardeners alike should start with a plan. That means deciding what you and your family like to prepare and eat. Write down the names of the vegetables and allocate space for each, by what they grow in, rows or beds.

If you are preparing raised beds for the first time, or in a new garden spot, take a soil sample and send it to a reputable lab. University labs such as those at the University of Florida, Auburn University or University of Georgia, have the expertise and internal quality controls to give recommendations on garden and other crops and lawns. Pull your samples soon and be able to apply any needed lime or fertilizers in a timely manner. Lime usually takes 2 to 3 months to dissolve and become available to the plants. Be sure to rotate root crops such as carrots and potatoes to new areas every third year to avoid nematode and fruit quality problems.

Practice field sanitation—remove all summer grown plants first. Clear a strip around the garden at least six feet wide so that thrips, whiteflies, and aphids will not have instant or immediate access to your fresh, green vegetables. Weed control will help cut down on host plants for these insects.

Use resistant varieties of the cool season crops when available. Check with your local extension agent for a list of disease resistant hybrids that are offered to the homeowner. Mosaic viruses and spotted wilt viruses have no chemical cures presently. Some beans, snow peas, and English peas are resistant to certain diseases, but will need to be monitored for fungi after leaves form.
Use fungicide treated seed to help ensure a good stand. Some yellow squash crooknecks and straightnecks, such as Prelude and Multi-Pik, are resistant to mosaic viruses, but will still need insecticides to control the rindworms, cucumber beetles, and others that may attack the stalks and young fruits.

Another crop that can be planted in the fall is Irish potatoes. Seed potatoes might have to be special ordered through your garden or farm supply store. Use fungicide treated seed pieces to avoid germination and early disease problems. Plant a small amount in a short row or two and prepare to cover the plants if early frost(s) or freeze(s) occurs. Potatoes can be harvested within 85 to 100 days of planting, even earlier for a “new” crop. Insects are still considered to be a problem on potatoes, so monitor for potato weevils and others such as flea beetles and tuberworms. Rotate to areas in the garden that have not had potatoes or sweet potatoes in three years or more.

For further information, contact your Master Gardener Desk or the local Extension Office.

How to Hire a Tree Service

If you need to hire someone to care for, remove or prune your trees, there are a few things you should check before you select a service. First, check to see if they are a certified arborist. A certified arborist (not just a member, but one who is certified by the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA)) is someone who has demonstrated a basic knowledge of tree care through the completion of a comprehensive exam on tree trimming, care and removal. A tree surgeon is a title that requires no training. A certified arborist must earn continuing education. This helps them keep up-to-date with the latest techniques for safely removing or caring for your trees. You can find currently ISA certified arborists on the ISA web page (http://www.isa-arbor.com/findArborist/findarborist.aspx).

Second, check to see if the company is a member of professional organizations such as The International Society of Arboriculture, American Society of Consulting Arborists, Tree Care Industry Association or the Florida Arborists Association. The Yellow Pages list tree-cutting companies (including arborists) under "tree." No licensing is required for these companies other than a regular occupational license.

Third, ask if they are insured. Personal and property damage liability insurance and worker’s compensation insurance are also very important. A good company will have certificates of insurance issued directly to you from their insurance carrier. Copies of policies shown to you may be out of date. To determine if a business has workers compensation, contact the insurance carrier listed on the policy you have been shown or the Florida Department of Labor and Employment Security. Below is their address and phone number and Web page address. At the Florida Department of Financial Services Web page check the proof of coverage database (compliance) section in the Division of Workers Compensation Bureau of Compliance page.

A business may have been issued an exemption from workers compensation. A wallet-sized card will bear the seal of the State of Florida, have an authorization signature and will list the business name, address, the exempted individual and an effective date. Note, that having this does not limit the homeowner’s liability if a worker is injured on your property. Also, do not depend on the yellow pages for any of the aforementioned information because it may be out of date.
Bruce Smith, an ISA Certified Arborist, demonstrates proper technique and personal protective equipment.

Photo: Theresa Friday, Santa Rosa County Extension

Always have a signed contract with the total dollar amount and completion date of work to be performed. Read the contract carefully before signing, as any document. You should receive a legible copy. This will help protect against possible future disagreements over what services were suggested and agreed to.

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Pine Tree Substrate (PTS) an Alternative to Peat, Bark

Researchers in the Department of Horticulture at Virginia Tech, headed up by Dr. Robert Wright, are using whole pine trees to make a new nursery potting material. Word of this product is spreading rapidly in the industry and it is becoming known as pine tree substrate (PTS).

To create the substrate, whole lobolly pine trees are chipped and then a hammer mill is used to break the chips down to smaller particle sizes. Various screens are used with the machine to yield wood particles of specific sizes for growing different kinds of plants. The material is then amended with lime, slow release fertilizer and a micronutrient formulation according to the plant genera being grown. Research continues on this new product.

So far, 51 different genera of plants have been successfully produced in PTS by Dr. Wright and his team. The product has been named Woodgro and a patent has been applied for. There is much interest among growers and commercial substrate producers.

Calculations based upon the cost of pine chips at five to six dollars per cubic yard make it conceivable to produce this nursery substrate for less than $15 per yard, compared to over $40 per yard for some standard peat based products.

Get two or more free estimates of the work you want done. If you need professional advice on what should be done, a consultation fee may be appropriate. Remember, quality of work might be more important than price. Ask them to prioritize what tasks are most important to accomplish your goals (such as which trees are most hazardous or which trees are most expensive) so that you can conform your plan to your budget.

Ask for a complete written estimate of all services they recommend before you sign a contract. This should be on a formal estimate sheet with complete details of all work intended to be performed. This should include tasks such as disposal of debris, cleaning work area, stump grinding, removal of wood or if they will cut and stack firewood.
The loblolly pine was found to produce the most stable substrate product and best plant growth among 12 tree species that were evaluated. Photo: Dan Mullins, Santa Rosa County.

According to Dr. Wright, PTS could allow for the decentralization of the horticultural substrate industry and associated transportation costs. Commercial substrate producers could locate near where nurseries are concentrated and where pine trees are grown in abundance.

This new product should be of interest to nursery managers, garden center operators and gardeners. The latest information concerning PTS can be found in the August 1, 2008 issue of the American Nurseryman magazine, pp 26 – 32.

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Garden Tips for September and October

Divide overcrowded amaryllis in the fall  
Photo: Theresa Friday, Santa Rosa County Extension

Flowers

- Cut back leggy herbaceous flowering plants and remove old flower stalks. Re-fertilize in order to obtain one more color burst before cool weather.

- Prepare beds for the planting of cool season annuals. Some plants to establish for fall, winter, and early spring include: pansy, petunia, snapdragon, larkspur, bachelor button, calendula, alyssum, dianthus and candytuft.

- Divide and replant perennials and bulbs that have grown too large or need rejuvenation, such as ajuga, amaryllis, canna, daylily, liriope and mondo grass.

- To get a holiday cactus or poinsettia to bloom for Christmas be sure it is NOT getting light at night. Starting approximately October 1st, put the plants in a dark area that receives no light from 5 p.m. to 8 a.m. Keep putting it in the dark at night for one month for the cactus, six to eight weeks for the poinsettia. Place the plant in its normal growing area during the day so that it gets sufficient light.

Trees and Shrubs

- September is your last opportunity of the year to fertilize shrubs and trees in the landscape.
• This is probably the worst time of year to do major pruning of shrubs. Late summer and fall pruning can stimulate tender growth that might be damaged by low winter temperatures.

• Fall is a better time than spring for planting trees and shrubs. They respond well to planting late in the year because our relatively mild winters allow for root growth. Fall-planted shrubs are well on their way toward having their roots established before hot weather arrives next spring.

• Pine needles make excellent mulch and needles typically fall during September and October. Rake and use them in the vegetable and flower garden as well as in shrub beds. Apply generously to obtain a depth of 2 to 3 inches on the soil surface after they have settled.

Vegetables

• Prepare the fall vegetable garden by incorporating organic amendments into the soil. Allow about 3 weeks between the incorporation of amendments and planting. Cool-season vegetables/herbs that can be planted include: beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, Chinese cabbage, collards, kohlrabi, mustard, onions, parsley, radishes and turnips.

• Begin planting strawberries in mid to late October. Set out strawberry plants in the garden, in planters or in “strawberry jars”. For more information view the UF/IFAS publication "Strawberries in the Florida Garden" (http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/VH029).

Lawns

• September will be the last month to fertilize lawns using a nitrogen-containing fertilizer. Unless a soil test indicates that the lawn needs phosphorus, use a low or no-phosphorus fertilizer such as a 15-0-15.

• For green grass this winter, overseed the permanent lawn with annual ryegrass during October and early November. Though a well kept winter lawn can be attractive, it requires a commitment. Regular mowing, irrigation and a couple of light, supplemental applications of fertilizer will be required during the winter in order to keep the lawn looking its best. For more information view the UF/IFAS publication "Overseeding Florida Lawns for Winter Color" (http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/EP098).

• If winter weeds are a recurring lawn problem, apply a pre-emergence herbicide in early October. Follow label directions carefully. For more information view the UF/IFAS publication "Weed Management in Home Lawns" (http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/EP141).

Take the Survey

In a continuing effort to improve the information we provide to you, please take a few minutes to complete a short online survey. Visit http://local-host:8082/lyra/newsletter/survey.html to take the survey. Thank you

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Take the Survey

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<td>647 Jenks Avenue, Suite A</td>
<td>Panama City</td>
<td>32401-2660</td>
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