

Green Garden News

Wait to Prune Cold Damaged Plants

Most winters we go back and forth with freezing weather for a short time followed by spring-like weather for a while. This cycle will occur numerous times during an average winter here in North Florida. When warm weather returns following a freeze we have a tendency to think spring is here. And the first impulse of many gardeners is to cut away the dead leaves and branches from cold injured plants. But this really isn't a good idea.

As a result of the first killing frost or a freeze, some popular landscape plants will look like dead sticks. An example is Mexican Heather. The plant goes from having green leaves and possibly some flowers to suddenly having nothing but brown leaves and stems.

It suddenly is no longer attractive in the landscape. It could even be described as an eyesore. Of course the plant's caretaker wants to solve this problem by taking out the pruners and removing the dead tops.

With many tender ornamentals such as tropical hibiscus, Mexican heather, many of the ornamental grasses including Gulf Muhly, gingers, banana plants, etc., severe cold may kill them all the way down to the soil line. Don't give up on them too soon. Allow enough time for them to revive after warm weather returns in spring. At that time, carefully remove the dead shoots and leaves.



On some woody plants, pruning too soon will stimulate young, tender growth. The typical scenario is that we have a freeze in late fall or early winter. The homeowner notices cold injured areas (usually on new growth) on some tree or shrub as a result of the brief freeze. He or she then prunes out the cold injury. Then we have warm weather for a week or two, which stimulates new growth just behind the pruning cuts. The next freeze then kills all of the young, tender shoots. The plant now looks bad and the homeowner prunes again, followed by warmer weather, new growth, another freeze.

As a rule, it's difficult to tell how much damage has been done until plants start new growth in the spring. If you prune immediately after a freeze, you may cut away live wood that doesn't have to be lost. Also, leaves and branches, which have been killed, can help protect the rest of a plant against further cold injury.

On average, our last killing frost occurs around the middle of March. As spring approaches, you'll have a better idea of what survived and what did not. In the meantime, try not to do anything to stimulate new growth too soon.

—by Larry Williams, Extension Faculty, UF/IFAS Okaloosa County Extension.

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January Gardening Tips

Flowers

- Refrigerated bulbs such as tulip, daffodil and hyacinth should be planted in prepared beds.
- Start seeds of warm season flowers late this month in order to have transplants in March.
- There's still time to transplant some cool season annuals such as carnations, foxglove, pansies, petunias and snapdragons.
- Re-fertilize cool season flowerbeds using a liquid or dry form of fertilizer. Be careful not to apply excessive amounts and keep granules away from the base of stems.
- Finish dividing crowded perennials. Don't wait until spring for this job.
- Plant bare root roses immediately after they are purchased.

Trees and Shrubs

- Plant trees and shrubs. This is an ideal time of year for transplanting larger specimens.
- Plant bare root plants such as deciduous ornamental shrubs and trees.
- Prune dormant shade trees, if needed.
- Stick hardwood cuttings of fig, grape, honeysuckle, althea, Catalpa, Forsythia and Wisteria.

Fruits and Nuts

- Apply dormant oil spray to peach, plum, nectarine and other deciduous fruit trees. This practice is necessary when growing the stone fruits in locations along the Gulf Coast. Note: This applies to the flowering peaches and cherries since they are susceptible to the same pests as their fruiting cousins.
- Plant bare root deciduous fruit trees.
- Prune dormant fruit trees if needed.

Vegetable Garden

- Start seeds of warm season vegetables late this month in order to have transplants in March.
- Lime (if needed), and begin preparing vegetable gardens for the spring planting.
- Cool season vegetables that can still be planted in the garden are: beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, Chinese cabbage, kale, kohlrabi, leek, mustard, bunching onions, parsley, English

peas, Irish potatoes, radishes and turnips.

- Irish potatoes can be started from January through March by planting seed pieces 3 to 4 inches deep in rows. Always purchase certified seed potatoes.

Lawns

- Check soil moisture during winter and water as needed.

Stinkhorns

Noticed an awful smell in your yard lately? It could be due to stinkhorn mushrooms. The stinkhorn fungus is a decomposer. From this view point it is considered beneficial because it helps break down decaying plant material. Management options include:

Tolerance: Learn to live with them as they do represent beneficial organisms to the soil ecology in Florida. Keep windows closed during periods of mushroom production to minimize the odor problem.

Eradication: Hand-pick the "egg" stage before it ruptures and put it in a zipper bag in the garbage. Small or new colonies may be eradicated through the complete removal of an area of mulch to the depth of the native soil. No guarantees with this method.

Environment alteration: Use of non-mulch ground covers, such as ivy, jasmine, liriopse, mondo grass, etc., will serve to reduce stinkhorn incidence in a landscape. Distance large mulched areas away from the house. There are no legal effective or practical chemical control options.



Selecting Firewood-Use of Fire Ash

The weather in North Florida doesn't get as cold as it does further north, but every once in awhile there is a nip in the air and a toasty fire in the fireplace feels mighty nice. How do you choose the best wood for your fire place? What can you do with all the resulting ash?

In Florida, we have a number of native and introduced species of trees to choose from. Pound for pound all wood burns about the same. A pound of good dry hardwood will produce about 8600 B.T.U.s of heat energy when burned. Because of high resin content, some pine wood may produce over 9000 B.T.U.s. Hardwood and some tropical woods are denser than pine, and on a volume basis contain more heat value.

The denser (heavier) woods have the highest energy values so choose from the high-density group. Species with high-density wood are: live oak, red oaks (including water and scrub oaks), white oaks, hickory, dogwood, Eucalyptus, and Australian pine (Casurina). Species with medium-density wood are: beech, cherry, ash, sycamore, elm, Magnolia, gums, and red maple. Species with low-density wood: willow, cottonwood, and tulip poplar.

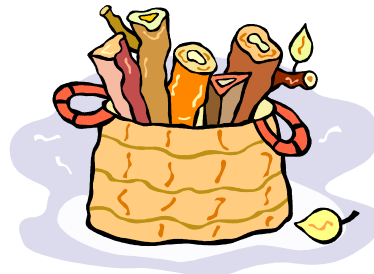
Most people have a personal preference when it comes to choosing firewood. Oaks, hickories and ash are usually preferred. Live oak is one of the heavier woods. It burns well, stores well and is widely available. One problem is that it's difficult to split. Red oaks are plentiful and easy to split. They often have a sour odor when freshly cut. Ash has often been called the best firewood. Blackjack and other scrub oaks are preferred by some almost to the exclusion of other woods.

Dead, damaged and diseased trees along city streets are commonly felled by city crews but left for removal at the owner's expense. This wood is often available to the person who is willing to sacrifice an afternoon or weekend. Utility companies trim trees along right-of-ways which sometimes produces a good supply of wood available to an alert public. Check with local utility companies on their policy for removing wood.

Once you have selected your wood, cut it, stacked it, burned it in your fireplace or wood stove, what do you do with the ash? Numerous gardening books and news articles suggest incorporating these ashes in the garden or landscape soil.

Wood ash does have a nutrient value, but the amount depends on the species of wood. Generally, wood ash contains less than 10% potassium (K), 1% phosphate (P) and trace amounts of micro-nutrients such as iron, manganese, boron, copper and zinc. Wood ash does not contain nitrogen (N).

Wood ash contains about 25% calcium carbonate, a common liming material used to raise soil pH or soil alkalinity. Wood ash has a very fine particle size, so it reacts rapidly and completely in the soil. Although small amounts of nutrients are applied with wood ash, the main effect is that of a liming agent. As soil alkalinity increases and the pH rises above 7.0, nutrients such as phosphorus, iron, boron, manganese, copper, zinc and potassium become tied up in the soil and less available for



plant use.

It's difficult to make recommendations for the use of wood ash because soil varies from garden to garden. Before adding wood ash, do a pH test on your soil.

In general, acidic soils (pH less than 5.5) should improve by adding wood ash. Soils that are slightly acidic (pH 6.0 to 6.5) should not be harmed by the application of 20 pounds per 100 square feet annually. Till the ash into the soil to a depth of about 6 inches. Do not add wood ash to soils that have a pH 7.0 or above.

Plant tolerance to alkaline soil also should be considered. Some plants, such as asparagus and juniper, are more tolerant of slightly alkaline conditions than "acid-loving" plants, such as potatoes, azaleas and blueberries. Don't use wood ash on acid-loving plants.

—Source: *Selecting Firewood*, D. Mitchell Flinchum, Sept., 2006, District director, and professor in Forest Resources and Conservation Dept., UF/IFAS. *Wood Ash in the Garden*, B. Rosie Lerner, Nov., 2000, Extension Consumer Horticulture Specialist, Purdue University.

Upcoming Events

Every Tuesday: *Plant Diagnostic Clinic.* This free clinic is open to the public from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Tuesdays at the South Santa Rosa Service Center at 5819 Gulf Breeze Pkwy.

January 1, 2007: Extension Office Closed

January 15, 2007: Extension Office Closed

January 19, 2007: Florida Arbor Day

Horticulture Classes at PJC

Pensacola Junior College will be offering classes geared to landscapers and horticulture professionals starting the week of January 8, 2007. Please call 850-484-4433 or e-mail to acompton@pjc.edu for more information.

Spring course areas are: plant identification, pest and plant disease identification, greenhouse crop production, turf/golf course management, and soil science.

Classes are offered as either evening, late afternoon-evening, or day classes to fit the needs of all students. All classes run for a semester--16 weeks.

Invest in your future! Taking college classes at PJC is very affordable. There are scholarships available for horticulture students and you might qualify for financial aid (please call 484-4410 for more information).

You may enroll as a certificate seeking student (certificates require only 4 or more classes and do not require math or English classes), as a degree seeking student, or you may audit the courses (which means you can take the course for educational purposes for non-credit but you are not required to take tests or exams).

Course descriptions: for more information visit our website at <http://itech.pjc.edu/acompton/> and follow the links for the individual course websites.

- **Plant Materials for Landscape Use and Lab.** Ornamental trees, vines, shrubs, and ground covers for landscape use with emphasis on their identification, characteristics, adaptability and use.

You may request permission to have the pre-requisite waived for this course so that you may enroll without having taken the pre-requisite course. Call 484-4433.

- **Turfgrass Management and Lab.** A twelve week basic course in the establishment and maintenance of turfgrass areas. Considers soils, fertility, drainage, grasses and mixtures, maintenance and pest control; includes use of turf grasses in residential and institutional lawns, athletic fields, and golf courses. Several field trips will be taken to local golf courses, residential and institutional lawns. Students are expected to participate in practical exercises.

- **Greenhouse Crop Management and Lab.** Greenhouse production and marketing of foliage and flowering house plants, holiday pot plants, bedding plants, and cut flowers. Construction, maintenance, and utilization of various types of greenhouses and related plant production structures.

- **Pest and Pest Control and Lab.** This course is designed to provide information on identification and control of plant diseases, insects and weeds in woody ornamentals. Information on fungicides, bactericides, insecticides, nematocides, herbicides, EPA regulations and preparation for licensing exam will be included. Study and use of equipment and chemicals for their prevention and control. Students are expected to participate in use of chemicals and spray equipment. Occasional field trips are required.

- **Introduction to Soil Science** A study of the relationships of soil water, fertilizers and plant roots. The course will include soil properties, classification, management and use. The social issues surrounding soil water use will be covered. The laboratory period will give students practical experience in the above areas.

Questions and Answers

Q: I have heard that poinsettias can be successfully planted outdoors after the holidays. Is this true?

A: Yes, but only after we're through with freezing weather. For complete information on how to care for you poinsettia, check out the online publication *Poinsettias for Florida, Indoors and Outdoors* at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG352> or call your local Extension Office and request a copy.

Q: My Camellia leaves are turning yellow and there is a white cottony looking mass on the underside of the leaves. What is it?

A: The tea scale, *Fiorinia theae*, is probably the most common and damaging pest of camellias and dwarf burford hollies. It is also a pest of many other ornamental and fruiting crops. The tea scale was first discovered in 1900 on tea plants collected in India, thus its common name. It was probably introduced into the United States when the demand for ornamental camellias resulted in plants being imported from Asia. By 1908, tea scale was already a pest on camellias in South Carolina. The tea scale is found primarily in the southeast but has spread west to Texas and California.

The tea scale's development depends upon the climate where it lives. Here in Florida, the tea scale remains active throughout the year. The adult immobile female lays her eggs under her protective armor. Females lay eggs for several weeks and eggs hatch continuously. This results in overlapping generations almost year-round. Within 10 days, the first nymph hatches and is called the "crawler" stage. The crawler leaves the protection of the mother's armor and moves about the plant looking for soft tissue into which they insert their piercing-sucking mouthparts. The crawler is the only stage in which the infestation is actively spread. This is also the easiest stage in which to kill the tea scale. When they find a good location, they settle down and will molt several times. The adult female remains immobile and her soft armor hardens in time. The fuzzy appearance we are fa-

miliar with (sometimes described as laundry lint) is seen in severe infestations when crawlers, immature males and females cluster together. Depending on temperature, the tea scale's life cycle takes between 45 to 65 days. In warmer climates like Florida, scales reproduce continually throughout the year.

Because their piercing-sucking mouthparts drain the plant of nutrients, the most common symptom is a yellow stippling (chlorosis) of the leaf's upper surface. Heavy infestations can result in unsightly plants, fewer and smaller blooms, twig dieback, and eventually plant death. Controlling tea scale can be particularly problematic because it is hard to get an insecticide on the scale itself. Factors that make spray contact difficult include:

- The tea scale's habit of heavily colonizing the undersides of older foliage
- Their protective waxy covering
- A year-round life cycle makes targeting the vulnerable crawler stage difficult

Control measures include cultural, chemical and biological methods. If only a few leaves are infested, hand picking and destruction of infested leaves is very effective. For camellias, pruning difficult-to-penetrate canopies is an effective way to provide for better coverage of chemical sprays. Be sure to prune appropriately. We are also fortunate to have several wasps that have been reported to parasitize tea scale in both Florida and Georgia.

The female wasp will insert a single egg into the tea scale. Parasitized scales have detectable holes chewed out in



their armor by the emerging wasp. If a spray is necessary, consider using the least toxic alternative of horticultural oil. It is essential that thorough coverage of the leaf's under-side is achieved. Repeated applications (2-3) made between seven to 10 days apart may be necessary to manage a tea scale infestation.

Master Gardeners Honored

The Santa Rosa County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who provide research based horticulture information to the residents of this county. They are an important component in meeting the needs of a fast growing county.



In 2007, they volunteered a total of 7934 hours in various projects including plant clinics, public gardening classes, demonstration garden maintenance, the Panhandle Butterfly House and much more.

Recently a banquet was held to thank them for their generous service to the community and their ongoing support of UF/IFAS Santa Rosa County Extension.

Special honors went to:

- Larry Busbee: Master Gardener of the Year
- Clarence Frontz: Master Gardener of the Class
- Norene Gideon: Evergreen Award for dependable Service.



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