

December Gardening Guide

By Patricia Porchey

The sweetgums and red maples are putting on their color show. Not the intensity of northern forests; however, even the fall colors in the north have been affected by the drought in their areas. Our shorter days and cooler nighttime temperatures are triggering the color change and soon the leaves will be dropping from our deciduous trees. These leaves are Mother Nature's way of providing us with natural mulch for our shrubs and flowers.

Winter is a great time to prune cold hardy plants because it's easier to see the branch structure when these deciduous plants are barren of leaves. It's still wise to follow these mandates for what to prune:

- Prune young trees to encourage good limb structure. Time spent now will mean less cost to prune large branches later. Besides, removing large branches is always stressful to a mature tree.
- Remove dead and broken branches as well as branches that are rubbing each other.
- Remove diseased branches with canker, galls, or "witches broom". Make your cut six to twelve inches below the infected area. To avoid spreading the disease to other plants, sterilize tools after each cut with a solution of one part Pine Sol or its equivalent to three parts water. Chlorine bleach is no longer recommended as it can corrode tools.
- Remove branches touching buildings as they can cause structural damage as well as provide access for insects into the structure.
- Thin the canopy to allow air movement, but do not top trees as this makes the trees more susceptible to damage from insects, disease and wind.
- Remember to leave the "bark ridges" at the top and the "collar" swelling at the base of each branch cut to affect good healing.
- Do not use pruning paint as this can encourage insects and disease in the wound.

Gardening activities

- Remove seedpods and brown fronds from palms; however, do not give palms a "hurricane cut" as this actually weakens the buds and exposes them to wind damage.
- Prune only temperate plants now. Wait until the end of February or first of March to prune cold-sensitive plants.
- Prune the roots of trees and large shrubs to be transplanted in January or February.
- Reduce watering during the winter months. Watering every two weeks instead of weekly is usually sufficient for turf, trees and shrubs. However, vegetables and flowers will need more frequent irrigation.
- Mulch to conserve moisture around your plants, but leave some air space at the base of the plants. Leave the ground bare under your citrus trees so heat absorbed in the daytime can radiate into the canopy on cold nights.

Blooming & planting guide

- Vegetables & Herbs: Anise, beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrot, cauliflower, celery, chervil, collards, coriander, dill, eggplant, endive, fennel, garlic, kale, kohlrabi, leek, lettuce, mustard, onions, peas, parsley, pepper, radish, rutabaga, sage, spinach, squash, strawberries, Swiss chard, thyme, tomato and turnips.
- Annuals: Begonia, Calendula, foxglove, geranium, Impatiens, Lobelia, ornamental cabbage and kale, petunia, Phlox, Salvia, statice, strawflower, and Verbena.
- Perennials: African iris, aster, blue daze, blue sage, Buddleia, bush daisy, candytuft, Dianthus, Gerbera daisy, Pentas, Salvia, Scabiosa, Shasta daisy, Verbena and Viola.
- Blooming plants: Allamanda, Bauhinia vine, bottlebrush, Cape honeysuckle, Cassia, Chinese hat, Jatropha, lion's ear, Mexican flame vine, Mexican sunflower, orchid tree, Philippine violet, red and yellow shrimp plants, silver trumpet tree, Thunbergia, and Tibouchina.
- Fruits in Season: Avocado, banana, carambola, cherimoya, citrus (calamondin, grapefruit, key lime, lemon, lime, orange, tangelo and tangerine), hog plum, Indian jujube, kumquat, papaya, pecan, persimmon, pomegranate, and sea grape.

Upcoming classes

If you want to know more about the environmentally-friendly landscaping known as Florida Yards & Neighborhoods, there are five programs being offered this month. You can now register for classes online at <http://sarasota.extension.ufl.edu/EdSched.htm> or call 861-9900.

- “Florida Yards & Neighborhoods: Nine Landscape Principles” at North Port Library, December 4 at 12:30 p.m.
- “Florida Yards & Neighborhoods: Nine Landscape Principles” at Venice Library, December 6 at 10:00 a.m.
- “Bedbugs” at Shamrock Park, December 6 at 2:00 p.m.
- “Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Workshop” at Twin Lakes Park, December 12 at 4:00 p.m.
- “Florida Yards & Neighborhoods: Nine Landscape Principles” at Gulf Gate Library, December 14 at 2:00 p.m.
- “Florida Yards & Neighborhoods: Nine Landscape Principles” at Fruitville Library, December 17 at 2:00 p.m.

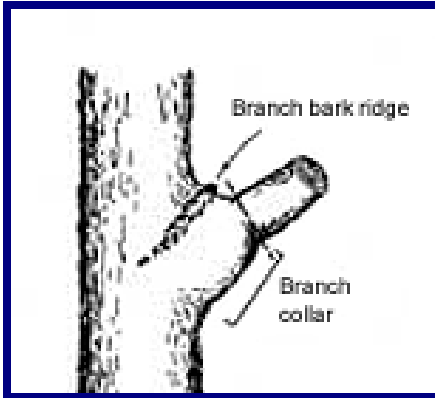
For information

If you have questions concerning your landscape, please call or visit our office at Twin Lakes Park on Clark Road east of I-75.

The **Master Gardener Help Desk** is open Monday-Friday from 9:00 a.m.-Noon and 1:00-4:00 p.m. (941-861-9807). We have weekly satellite help desks at the four south county libraries and at the **Downtown Farmer's Market** every third Saturday of the month.

(Patricia Porchey is an Urban Horticulture Agent with University of Florida/IFAS Sarasota County Extension. Website: <http://sarasota.extension.ufl.edu>)

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Correct method for removing a branch.