

February Gardening Guide

By Patricia Porchey

Is your lawn taking a winter break? Has its green color faded or does it have a reddish appearance? Are you mowing less often? Does it require watering less often? The answers to all the above is probably “yes.” In the winter, growth and metabolism is reduced on most plants, including grass. Bermuda, Bahia and St. Augustine may actually turn brown and go dormant if the weather gets unusually cold, but dormancy is a natural state which protects it until the weather warms. Come spring, new leaf growth will emerge.

Cultural practices which promote cold injury are poor drainage and over watering, excessive fall fertilizing and thatch buildup, insufficient potassium in the fertilizer applied, growing in too much shade and mowing too short. Improper irrigation practices are a source of many lawn problems. Train your grass to be sturdier and more drought tolerant by watering only when it needs moisture. By watering less, often the roots grow deeper and are better able to handle stress. Dormancy reduces the need for water as the roots are unable to absorb moisture in the same way as when they are actively growing. In the winter, every 2-3 weeks is usually sufficient. Only apply $\frac{3}{4}$ inch of water at each application. Run your irrigation system in the early morning so the moisture on the leaves will evaporate and fungal problems can be avoided. Check your rain sensor to insure it is operating properly.

Fertilizer should not be applied until the danger of frost has passed – usually the end of this month. Fertilizing is not recommended after mid October tender new growth that it triggers is more susceptible to cold damage. Redness in the leaf blades reflects low potassium. Select a fertilizer that includes minor nutrients and has at least 30 percent of the nitrogen (N) and potassium (K) in a slow-release form. These slow-release fertilizers are safer environmentally, since they are less likely to leach N into ground or surface water. Since most of our soils are high in phosphorous, select a fertilizer that is low in P, but has K equal to or greater than the N. If you aren't sure how much phosphorous is present in your soil, you can have a soil test done at the Extension Office. The three large numbers across the fertilizer bag reflect Nitrogen-Phosphorus-Potassium. Recommended proportions are 15-2-15 or 12-2-14. Apply up to one pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet. You can use either a drop or rotary spreader, but avoid getting fertilizer on impervious surfaces such as driveways and walks. Sweep it up or it may end up in a storm drain and eventually into our waterways. Also avoid spreading fertilizer within 10-30 feet of a lake.

This is a good time to apply a pre-emergent herbicide to lawns or beds where weeds, such as crabgrass, were a problem last year. And don't disturb the area once it is applied. When using an herbicide make sure it's labeled for your type of grass and the weeds you are trying to control are listed. If your St. Augustine grass has been invaded by Bermuda grass, there is no selective herbicide that will kill one grass only

Gardening activities:

- Consider turning part of your expansive lawn area into beds or a vegetable garden.
- Prepare your spring garden beds.
- Fertilize citrus and other fruit trees this month – approximately 8 pounds for a mature tree.
- As fruit sets on your fruit trees, water on a regular basis if there is no rain.
- Increase mowing height to encourage deeper roots and a warmer microenvironment.

Upcoming educational classes:

- “Landscaping for Wildlife” at Shamrock Park, February 7 at 2:00 pm. Call 486-2706 to register.
- “Backyard Landscaping for Birds” at Twin Lakes Park, February 8 at 4 pm. Call 861-9900.
- “Tropical Fruits” at Twin Lakes Park, February 8 at 10:00 am. Call 861-9900.
- “Pests in and Around the Home” at Shamrock Park, February 14 at 2:00 pm. Call 486-2706.
- “Your Florida Homescape” at Florida House, February 21 at 2:00 pm. Call 316-1200.
- “Invasive Plants” at Twin Lakes Park, March 1 at 10:00 am. Call 861-9900.

Planting guide:

Vegetables & Herbs: Anise, basil, beans, beets, borage, cantaloupe, carrots, catnip, celery, chervil, chives, collards, comfrey, coriander, corn, cucumber, cumin, dill, eggplant, endive, garlic, kohlrabi, leek, lemon balm, lettuce, marjoram, mint, mustard, onion, oregano, parsley, peas, pepper, potato, pumpkin, radish, rosemary, sage, sweet potato, tarragon, tomato, turnip, and watermelon.

Annuals: Ageratum, alyssum, Amaranth, Begonia, browallia, Calendula, Cosmos, dusty miller, Gazania, geranium, Lobelia, marigold, nasturtium, pansy, Petunia, Phlox, Salvia, snapdragon, Statice, stock, strawflower, and Verbena.

Perennials: African iris, Agapanthus, Amaryllis, Amazon lily, aster, Aztec lily, Caladium, Canna, calla lily, Clivia, Crinum lily, Dahlia, Dianthus, foxglove, Gerbera, hollyhock, Shasta daisy, society garlic, spider lily, Tithonia, Viola, and walking iris.

Fruits in Season: Banana, black sapote, carambola, cherimoya, citrus (calamondin, grapefruit, key lime, lemon, lime, orange, and tangerine), Indian jujube, kumquat, loquat, Mysore raspberry, papaya, and strawberry.

Blooming plants: Bush daisy, Bottlebrush, Bougainvillea, Carolina yellow Jessamine, Chinese hat plant, fuchsia skullcap, Jatropha, Kalanchoe, lion’s ear, mahoe, Mexican flame vine, orchid tree, palm grass, Poinsettia, powderpuff plant, purple Tabebuia, silver trumpet Tabebuia, Thunbergia, trumpet vine, Turk’s cap and Walter’s Viburnum, and yellow shrimp plant.

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 am-Noon and 1:00-4:00 pm (941-861-9807). Our satellite help desk at Selby Library is open Wednesdays from 9:30 am-Noon.

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