

February Gardening Guide

By Patricia Porchey

Nature doesn't always show us the impact of stress immediately. The dip in temperatures a few weeks ago left many landscapes with little noticeable change - only a smear of bronzing on a few leaves. However, a couple of weeks later, leaves were suddenly cascading off the more cold-sensitive plants. An example is Allamanda which in a normal winter suffers bronzing with some leaf drop and dieback on periphery branches. The rest of the plant keeps some leaves and readily produces new leaves in March. This year, Allamanda has no leaves remaining.

Of course, the temptation is to immediately get out the pruners and remove the unsightly naked branches. It's better to wait until the end of February when the forecast ushers in springtime temperatures. Any new growth encouraged by pruning will cause the plant to be more vulnerable to cold damage should the temperatures drop again.

The end of this month also is the time to fertilize all your plants. Apply no more than one pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet to turf grass and make sure the nitrogen is at least 50% slow-release form. If you have palms, apply a palm fertilizer marked 8-2-12+4Mg. This means the bag contains 8% nitrogen, 2% phosphorus, 12% potassium and 4% magnesium. The nitrogen and potassium should be 100% slow-release form. It's recommended that any turf area within 50 feet of a palm be fertilized only with a palm fertilizer and not turf fertilizer. Do not apply any fertilizer within 10 feet of a water body.

Citrus and other fruit trees need to be fertilized with citrus fertilizer marked 8-0-8 or its equivalent with the nitrogen in 50% slow-release form. Vegetables and annuals need to be fertilized with slow-release fertilizers whenever possible.

Gardening activities

- Apply a pre-emergent herbicide to lawns or beds where weeds, such as crabgrass, were a problem last year. This product inhibits the germination of those seeds produced last year. Don't disturb the area once it is applied.
- When using an herbicide make sure it's labeled for your type of grass. If your St. Augustine grass has been invaded by Bermuda grass, there is no selective herbicide that will kill Bermuda without also harming the St. Augustine.
- Prepare your spring garden beds with organic amendments.
- As fruit sets on your fruit trees, water on a regular basis if there is no rain.
- Do not spray pesticides on your fruit trees while they are in bloom.
- Cooler nights are turning fruit peel colors and making the fruit sweeter. Sample a fruit even if it's still showing green to see if it's ripe inside.

Blooming & planting guide

- Vegetables & Herbs: Anise, basil, beets, borage, cantaloupe, carrots, catnip, celery, chervil, chives, collards, comfrey, coriander, corn, cucumber, cumin, dill, eggplant, endive, garlic, green beans, 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, Dianthus, foxglove, Gerbera, hollyhock, Shasta daisy, society garlic, spider lily, Tithonia, and Viola.
- 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, Kalanchoe, lion's ear, orchid tree, palm grass, Poinsettia, powderpuff plant, purple Tabebuia, silver trumpet Tabebuia, trumpet vine, Turk's cap and Walter's Viburnum.

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.

- “Creating Your Florida Yard” at North Port Library, February 5 at 12:30 p.m.
- “Mulch” at Shamrock Park, February 7 at 2:00 p.m.
- “Creating Your Florida Yard” at Venice Library, February 14 at 10:00 a.m.
- “Invasive Plants-Identification & Control at Twin Lakes Park, February 14 at 2:00 p.m.
- “Alternative Pest Management Practices” at Twin Lakes Park, February 15 at 2:00 p.m.
- “Termites” at Shamrock Park, February 21 at 2:00 p.m.
- “Creating Your Florida Yard” at Fruitville Library, February 25 at 2:00 p.m.
- “Rainbarrels, Earthboxes, & Composters” at Twin Lakes Park, February 26 at 2:00 p.m.
- “Alternatives to Turf” at Twin Lakes Park, February 27 at 12:30 p.m.
- “Farm to School-Local Food for Healthy Kids” at Twin Lakes Park, February 27 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 every third Saturday of the month at the **Downtown Farmer's Market**.

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