

July Gardening Guide

By Patricia Porchey

Have you ever considered how much energy it takes to maintain a lawn? In addition to the gas or electricity to power the equipment, there's fertilizer and pesticides, and we can't forget the manpower to operate the equipment. The more often you mow, the more energy is required. One way to reduce the energy and still maintain an attractive turf is to eliminate fertilizing in the warm months and just add chelated iron or ferrous sulfate. The grass blades will green up without the zealous growth that accompanies fertilizer applications. Another alternative is to eliminate lawn areas and opt for more beds and groundcovers. Perennial peanut is an attractive groundcover that sparkles with a sea of yellow blossoms in the warm months.

Insect monitoring is crucial in the summer when damage is observed. This is when chinch bug populations in St. Augustine are at their peak. If yellow or brown patches appear, part the grass blades apart to see if chinch bugs are present. These tiny insects, less than ¼ inch in length, will be on top of the soil. Another method of monitoring is to apply soapy water to an area 2 feet by 2 feet. Within a couple of minutes, insects will scurry to the top to escape. If no insects are present, the declining grass is probably a result of too much moisture. Be sure your rain sensor is working properly and better yet, turn the irrigation system off during the wet season. If you suspect mole crickets in your Bahia grass, use the same soap flush method to monitor. When applying insecticides, spot treat the affected area plus an additional five-foot area. It's not necessary to treat the whole lawn.

Gardening activities

- Weeds in lawns this time of the year are more difficult to control because most herbicides are not recommended when the temperature rises above 85 degrees. Be sure to thoroughly read the label before applying any chemicals.
- Fertilize annuals and perennials monthly unless using a slow-release formula.
- Solarize your beds where nematodes have been a problem. First, remove all existing vegetation and till the soil to activate the nematode population. Rake the bed so it is slightly elevated in the middle, then water the bed well to make it moist down to about 8-12 inches. Cover the whole bed with 4-6 mil of clear plastic (NOT black plastic) and anchor it tightly on the edges. The goal is to reach temperatures above 130 degrees for six weeks. Nematodes and other soil pests such as wilt fungi, insects, and weeds are killed by prolonged exposure to these high temperatures.

Upcoming educational classes:

- "Termites" at Twin Lakes Park, July 12 at 1:00 pm. Call 861-9900 to register.
- "Ants, Ants, Ants" at Shamrock Park, July 13 at 2:00 pm. Call 486-2706 or 861-9900.

- “Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Workshop at Twin Lakes Park, July 13 at 4:00 pm. Call 861-9900.

Planting guide:

Vegetables & Herbs (plant herbs from transplants and vegetables from seeds or transplants): Basil, bay laurel, ginger, horehound, lemon balm, marjoram, mint, oregano, rosemary, thyme, okra, and southern peas.

Annuals: Annuals: Begonia Celosia, Coleus, Cosmos, Crossandra, Dahlberg daisy, Gomphrena, marigold, Melampodium, Nicotiana, periwinkle, Portulaca, Salvia, Torenia, and Zinnia.

Perennials: Beach buttercup, beach sunflower, blue daze, Coreopsis, daylily, Gaillardia, Gaura, Mexican heather, Mexican petunia, Pentas, Rudbeckia, Salvia, shrimp plant, society garlic, and Verbena.

Blooming plants: Allamanda, beautyberry, bird of paradise, blackberry lily, Canna, crape myrtle, Crinum lily, crossvine, dwarf Poinciana, fiddlewood, firespike, frangipani, gloriosa lily, golden dewdrop, horsemint, Jacquemontia, lion’s ear, Loropetalum, Magnolia, Mimosa, natal plum, rain lily, royal Poinciana, Vitex, and yellow Poinciana.

Fruits in season: Avocado, banana, citrus (calamondin, key lime, lemon and lime), fig, guava, kumquat, longan, lychee, macadamia, mango, papaya, passion vine, pineapple, pomegranate, sapodilla, and sea grape.

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 desks at five county libraries are open throughout the summer.

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