

## March Gardening Guide (2009)

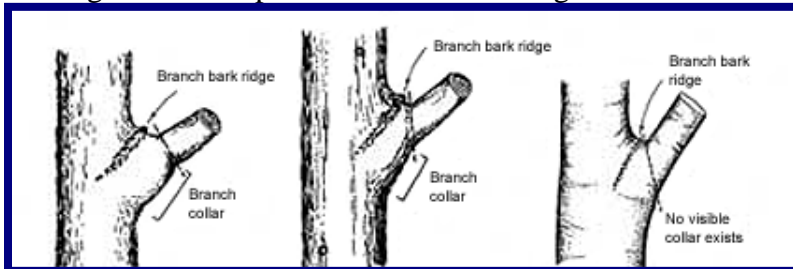
By Patricia Porchey

After an unusually cold winter for us, there is more damage to our plants than we would normally see. Before you start removing damaged areas, however, first determine if branches are really dead. These three tests will help you. First, newly emerged leaves, triggered by the warm springtime temperatures, will show you that branches are still alive. Second, test the branch for flexibility; if it's stiff and brittle, it is probably dead. Third, scratch the bark to see if it's still green; green means it is alive.

Once you have removed the dead branches, you may decide to do some structural pruning. If you only remove about 25% of the total growth at one time, this will allow you to shape the plant without stressing it. Structurally prune spring-blooming plants only after they have bloomed

Once you've determined pruning is needed, here are some guidelines to follow to maintain a healthy plant.

- Remove the dead wood on the periphery or interior areas of plant.
- Remove all broken branches.
- Remove a branch that crisscrosses another branch, resulting in bark stripping. Keep the branch that is structurally best for the plant.
- If there are diseased branches with canker, galls, or "witches broom," make your cut six to twelve inches below the infected area. After each cut, the pruners should be sterilized. Make a sterilizing solution with 80% water and 20% bleach or with 70% water and 30% Pine Sol, or its equivalent. The tools need to remain in the sterilizing solution for 5 minutes and then rinsed before reusing.
- Avoid leaving stubs where you remove larger branches by leaving only the "bark ridges" at the top and the collar swelling at the base of each branch cut.



### Drought alert

After three years of drought, and a fourth on-going, rain has become a scarce commodity for our plants. During the winter months while our nights are still cool, irrigating twice a month is usually sufficient for healthy turf, shrubs and small trees. It's not necessary to water large trees because of their extensive root systems. However, fruiting plants will need sufficient moisture to fully develop their fruit in a timely manner.

Don't be misled by plant characteristics; even "drought-tolerant" plants may or may not survive during a prolonged drought period. Supplemental watering may be needed to keep the plants from undergoing tremendous stress. Monitor plants regularly to see if

they need water. Symptoms in appearance indicating the need for supplemental water are dull-colored leaves and wilting.

### **Blooming & planting guide**

- Vegetables & Herbs: Anise, basil, beans, beets, borage, cantaloupe, chervil, comfrey, corn, cucumber, cumin, kohlrabi, lemon balm, lettuce, marjoram, mustard, okra, oregano, peas, summer savory, sweet peppers, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, radish, summer squash, tarragon, thyme, tomatoes, and watermelon.
- Annuals: Ageratum, alyssum, Begonia, Browallia, Celosia, coleus, Cosmos, Dahlberg daisy, dusty miller, Gazania, geranium, Impatiens, Lobelia, marigold, Nicotiana, Petunia, Phlox, Portulaca, Salvia, Torenia, Verbena, and Zinnia.
- Perennials: African iris, Amazon lily, blood lily, blue daze, Caladium, Canna, Coreopsis, Crinum lily, daylily, Gaillardia, Gerbera daisy, Gaura, gloriosa lily, Mexican heather, milkweed, Pentas, Salvia, Shasta daisy, and society garlic.
- Fruits in Season: Banana, carambola, citrus (calamondin, grapefruit, key lime, lemon, lime, orange, and tangerine), jaboticaba, kumquat, loquat, strawberry, and papaya.
- Blooming plants: Angel's trumpet, azalea, blue flag iris, blue sage, bottlebrush, Bougainvillea, Buddleia, cape honeysuckle, Carolina Jessamine, citrus, dwarf Indian hawthorn, flame vine, fuchsia skullcap, geranium, lantana, Mexican flame vine, Nemesia, orchid tree, silk floss tree, society garlic, Surinam cherry, Walter's Viburnum, and white bird of paradise.

### **Upcoming classes**

Call 861-9900 to register for the following classes.

- Florida Yards & Neighborhoods: Creating Your Florida Yard, Elsie Quirk Library, 10:00 a.m. Mar.3
- Living Baskets, Twin Lakes Park, 10:00 a.m. Mar. 4
- Florida Yards & Neighborhoods: Creating Your Florida Yard, Venice Library, 10:00 a.m. Mar.5
- Creating Wildlife Habitat in and around Ponds, Shamrock Park, 2:00 p.m. Mar. 5
- Organic Vegetable Gardening, Orange Blossom Community Garden, 18<sup>th</sup> & Orange, 1:00 p.m. Mar. 7
- Chinch Bugs & White Grubs, Twin Lakes Park, 10:00 a.m. Mar. 11
- Florida Yards & Neighborhoods: Creating Your Florida Yard, Twin Lakes Park, 4:00 p.m. Mar. 11
- Insects Out There: What Bug Is That? (2-hour nature walk), Curry Creek Preserve, entrance 1.5 miles south of Laurel Road on Pinebrook, Venice, 10:00 a.m. Mar.13
- Florida Yards & Neighborhoods: Nine Landscape Principles, Fruitville Library, 2:00 p.m. Feb. 16
- Annuals & Perennials for your Landscape, Twin Lakes Park, 10:00 a.m. Mar. 18
- Stinging Insects, Twin Lakes Park, 1:00 p.m. Mar. 18
- Partnering with Pollinators, Shamrock Park, 2:00 p.m. Mar. 19

- Organic Vegetable Gardening, Laurel Community Garden, Forest & Collins, Laurel, 10:30 a.m. Mar. 21
- Hurricanes & Trees, North Port Library, 10:00 a.m. Mar.24
- Sex in the Garden & other Plant Propagation Methods, Twin Lakes Park, 10:00 a.m. Mar. 25
- Spiders, Twin Lakes Park, 1:00 p.m. Mar. 25
- Food Choices & Your Carbon Footprint, Twin Lakes Park, 4:00 p.m. Mar. 25

**For information**

The **Master Gardener Help Desk** now has an email address: [mghelpdesk@scgov.net](mailto:mghelpdesk@scgov.net) to answer questions. It is open Monday-Friday from 9:00 a.m.-Noon and 1:00-4:00 p.m. You can call (941-861-9807) or visit our office at Twin Lakes Park on Clark Road east of I-75 with landscape questions. We also have weekly satellite help desks at the four south county libraries and every third Saturday of the month at the **Downtown Farmer's Market**.

(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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