

Hillsborough County Extension Service
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Retail garden professionals are widely used by the general public as sources of expert information. The goal of this publication is to increase the flow and quality of information reaching the consumer through the retail garden

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FNATS IS COMING!

The granddaddy of horticulture trade shows in Florida, the **Florida Nursery and Allied Trades Show** is set for September 16-18 in Orlando. Thousands of horticulture professionals from around the state will make the annual pilgrimage to see the latest plants and products, catch up with old friends, make new friends, talk to growers and to vendors of soil, mulch, fertilizer, equipment, information and numerous other products

This year's **FNATS National Horticulture Short Course** includes separate breakout sessions for landscape professionals, growers and retailers. New to FNATS this year is the FNGA's Model Garden Center **inside FNATS!** Designed with the help of Robert Hendrickson, a retail garden consultant, the model will stimulate great ideas for anyone working in or selling to the retail garden industry.

Admission to FNATS is \$10 I before August 31st, \$15 after August 31st. Admission covers all three days of the show. The show runs Thursday and Friday from 9-5 and on Saturday from 9-4. **For more details call FNGA at 1-800-375-3642** or see the website at <http://www.fnga.org>

New HCC Horticulture Faculty!

A big welcome and congratulations to **Thelma Miller-Anderson**, a new full-time horticulture faculty member at Hillsborough Community College in Plant City. Dr. Anderson has her B.S. and M.S. in Plant and

Soil Science and her Ph.D. in Horticulture and comes from Southern University in Baton Rouge, LA. Dr. Anderson will give HCC's horticulture program a boost and add to the great faculty already in place. **Welcome aboard, Thelma!**

Horticulture Classes Starting at HCC

Now is the time to start that degree you've been thinking about. HCC is offering a wide variety of classes - Horticulture Science, Plant Identification, Irrigation & Water Management, Soils & Fertilizers, and Plant Propagation. All of the classes are offered in the evenings or on Saturday so you can develop yourself professionally without having to go to school full time. Classes are offered both on the Plant City campus and at the City of Tampa Parks Department at Lowry Park. A complete class schedule is included later in this newsletter. For more information, please call Fred Webb at 813-757-2104 or Joan Raynor at 813-757-2112.

HCC offers FCNP Class

Hillsborough Community College is also offering the Florida Certified Nursery Professional class. The class will run from Sept 13 through November 29 on Monday and Wednesday nights from 6:30pm - 9:30pm. If you have employees and wish they were better trained or more knowledgeable, send them to this class. It provides great basic horticulture training. If you would like to participate in the next FCNP class, or know someone that would, please contact Fred Webb at HCC.

Phone: 813-757-2104

Fax: 813-757-2148

Determining Plant Problems Over the Phone

This article is part three of a series concerned with helping retail garden employees become better plant problem solvers, especially over the phone. Over-the-phone problems are difficult because none of the visual clues or symptoms are available. The information required to solve the problem must be obtained verbally. In future articles, the topics will be: Irrigation Information to Ask For, Other Information to Ask For, and Jumping to Conclusions. This article concerns "**Chemical Information to Ask For**". NOTE: This information, in its entirety, can be found on the Web at : http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/scripts/htmlgen.exe?DOCUMENT_MG078

Chemical Information to Ask For

To help determine if chemicals were involved in the problem, here are some questions to ask.

1." What have you fertilized with, how long ago and how did you fertilize?"

Purpose of the Question: Some customers use weed and feed products at the wrong time of year and many use them improperly. If these products were used, how far from shallow rooted plants, were they used? Was there a lot of rain afterwards that could have floated the product down to the plants? Did they treat the whole area the same whether it had weeds or not, or did they go over the weedy area a second time, thus over-applying the chemical? If they used straight fertilizer, was it the right time of year and were the plants under moisture stress at the time? Were the plants wet at the time of fertilizing? How close to the main stems did the customer get with the fertilizer?

2. "What other chemicals could have been applied around these plants?"

Purpose of Question: Most customer's perception of what can cause a problem is quite narrow. When answering these questions, many say "only an insecticide or fungicide applied by their lawn spray company." Except for the remote possibility of gross incompetence by the spray company's employee, these chemicals can be eliminated as a potential cause for a plant problem. Instead, ask about these additional items to expand the possibilities:

Have you cleaned your sidewalk or pool deck with strong chemicals, such as Muriatic acid?

Have you cleaned the exterior of your house with TSP? (trisodium phosphate)

Where does your septic tank drain field run?

Where does the backwash from your pool or your neighbor's pool go?

Have you replaced the siding on your house or put on a new roof lately?

(Source: *Written by Ray Zerba, Clay County Extension, Edited by Dave Palmer, Hillsborough County Extension*)

Quotable Quote:

"If you're going to sweep the floor, sweep it better than anybody in town. And if you're going to play guitar, really, really, really get in it, and don't be jivin'." **Carlos Santana**

Invasive Plants Being Phased Out?

The Florida Nurserymen and Growers Association (FNGA) and the Florida Exotic Plant Pest Council (FLEPPC) have reached a voluntary agreement to encourage growers to phase out 11 species identified as invasive. Characteristics considered include the mode of spread and reproduction of the plants, specific varieties of a species known to be invasive, and potential alternative plants to be substituted for the invasive plants. Ben Bolusky, FNGA's Executive Vice President, says that before any further recommendations are made regarding potentially invasive plants, university researchers will develop criteria on how to measure invasiveness. The 11 species chosen for phase-out are:

- Albizia lebbek (woman's tongue)
- Bauhinia variegata (orchid Tree)
- Bischofia javanica (Bischofia)
- Cupaniopsis anacardioides (carrotwood)
- Macfadyena unguis-cati (cat's claw vine)
- Melia azedarach (Chinaberry)
- Nephrolepis cordifolia (sword fern)
- Psidium guajava (guava)
- Rhoeo spathacea (oyster plant - large variety)
- Syzygium cumini (java plum, jambolan)
- Thespesia populnea (seaside mahoe)

(Source: *Ornamental Outlook, Aug '99*)

CARPENTER ANTS

BACKGROUND- Carpenter ants are large ants with colors ranging from black to reddish brown. They nest in wood, usually in damaged wood or damp rotten wood, where they carve out galleries. They prefer wood with a moisture content of over 15%. They are difficult ants to eliminate. It is difficult to track Carpenter ants back to their nest. Baits are not always effective on Carpenter ants. If your customer has what they believe to be Carpenter ants, they may need professional help to eliminate them.

DIET - Carpenter ants do not eat wood. Their diet is quite varied including assorted fruits, vegetation, insects, meats, sugar, grease and fat and insect honeydew. The workers do bring food back to the nest to share.

REPRODUCTION - Once winged carpenter ants have swarmed and mated, the males die and the female establishes a colony. The colony does not produce swarmers until about 3 years later. Some literature indicates that carpenter ants may form parent colonies and satellite colonies, but that the satellite colonies are dependent on the parent colony as they have no queen, no eggs and no larva. That's the good news. If you can find the parent nest and eliminate the queen, then the colony and its satellites will die. The bad news is that the ants are nocturnal (operate mainly at night) and nests are difficult to find.

TRAILS - Evidence varies as to whether Carpenter ants leave pheromone trails or not. Recent research suggests that they do leave trails between parent and satellite colonies and trails to food.

FORAGING - Workers foraging for food leave the nest in late afternoon or early evening and may not return to the colony until near dawn. These ants may forage up to 100 yards from the nest, roughly equivalent to a human traveling 8 miles from home.

PREVENTION OF CARPENTER ANTS

- 1) Eliminate wood-to-ground contact by removing soil or mulch as necessary
- 2) Correct moisture problems around the structure such as drainage problems, leaks, etc
- 3) Replace water-damaged or decayed wood
- 4) Cut back trees and vegetation to reduce the access of the ants to the structure
- 5) Seal cracks and other openings around the structure
- 6) Remove dead stumps and other wood from nearby the structure
- 7) Store firewood or other wood away from the structure. Keep only enough stored wood or firewood as will be used seasonally
- 8) Use barrier treatments around structures with such products labels for such use.

CONTROL OF CARPENTER ANTS

- 1) Find the nest - very difficult!
- 2) Dust the nest if indoors. Dusts offer long residual in dry areas and can be tracked into the nest by foraging ants. Use products appropriately labeled such as boric acid.
- 3) Drench the nest with appropriately labeled products.
- 4) Bait with boric acid products, usually 1%-2% products appear to work best. Switch between several protein and sweet formulations to determine which currently works best.
- 5) If the nest is in a live tree: Carpenter ants in trees are not directly harmful to the tree. Plugging or sealing tree cavities are not advised. This will not prevent decay nor prevent carpenter ant activity.
Available controls are not likely to permanently rid a tree of carpenter ants, so re-treatment every year may be necessary.

- 6) Call a professional.

(Sources: Fact Sheets ENY-203,259 & local extension publications)

New Guide for Florida Shrubs

The University of Florida Press has released “**Your Florida Guide to Shrubs**” by Ed Gilman and Robert Black. 172 shrubs and small trees are listed along with such information as hardiness rating, pH tolerance and whether the plant is a butterfly / hummingbird attractant. Additional sections are titled “Selecting and Planting Shrubs” and “Establishing and Maintaining Shrubs” and include the latest research data. Also included are appendixes of plants for hedges, wet soil and drought. Call 1-800-226-3822 to order. (Source: *Stephen Pategas in Ornamental Outlook, Aug '99*)

Liatris - Florida Friendly Plant of the Month

by Loretta B. Hodyss - Ornamental Horticulture Extension Agent and County Extension Director of St Johns County

Liatrus (LY-at-rus) common Names: Blazing Star, Gay Feather, Snakeroot.

This striking wild flower grows in full sun, and sandy well-drained soil. The plant is Native to North America and ranges from the Mid-western states to Florida. In Florida, we are likely to see it in summer and fall in dry pinelands. The showy flowers appear on cylindrical upright spikes up to 4 ft tall.

Why is it a Florida Friendly Plant?

These plants grow in difficult sandy dry sites, once they have been established. Plants

should be spaced 12-15 inches apart. Bulbous corms (a specific type of bulb) support a very fibrous root structure which must be well drained. Moist, slow-to-drain soil is not suitable. Fertilize to establish. Minimal fertilization is needed after that. Plants grown from seed will take two years to bloom, corms are likely to bloom in the first year.

Nurseries occasionally carry gallon sized pots of *Liatris*. In a pot, the soil needs to be very light, with good drainage. Cut flowers last in water for a week or more. Flowers are known to attract butterflies and have the interesting habit of opening from the top of the spike and progressing down the flower stalk. The flowers are purple or white and appear above grass-like tufts of medium green leaves. Two cultivars have become popular “Kobold”, a deep rosy purple flower, and “Floristan” with white flowers. Propagation in the garden is by division done in the spring.

Suggestion: This is the bright spot of color your customers are looking for in the summer garden, when most flowers have given up from the heat.

What is “Selling” ?

Dave Palmer

Many believe selling to be “talking someone into buying what they don’t want”. Nothing could be further from the truth. Selling is no more and no less than good communication. And what, pray tell, is good communication? Thoughtful questions in between lots of listening. Sales starts with fully understanding what business you’re in. When asked, most folks in retail garden will say they are in the business of selling plants and related items.. I don’t agree. I believe retail garden professionals are in the business of providing their customers with successful gardening experiences. If your customer is already an experienced gardener, your job is pretty easy - just help them find the information and products they want, because they’ve already learned to be successful gardeners. If your customer is new to gardening, your job is a bit more difficult. How do you know whether a customer is new to gardening or an old pro? By talking to them as though you were a neighbor, not a salesperson. By asking questions. By helping them make decisions and explaining the reasoning behind the decision. By asking questions you may find out they are planning to plant impatiens in a very sunny spot. Why? Because they love the look of impatiens and never thought about impatiens’ growing requirements.

Retail garden sales consists of understanding the heart of the job, good communications skills, some gardening knowledge, and caring about the customer. This “simple” combination is, in fact, fairly rare. The gardening knowledge is the easiest part. The communication skills and caring parts are the hardest to teach. For an ongoing education on the art of sales, read Jeffrey Gitomer’s weekly column on “Sales” in the Tampa Bay Business Journal. Some of Jeffrey’s tips:

- 1) Get interesting - walk up to the customer with a question
- 2) Talk in terms of them - no one wants to hear about you (unless it will help them succeed)
- 3) Customers want to know how they can succeed.

!Don’t Forget - E-mail your name, home address, store name, number and location and the words “Retail Gardener” to get on our e-mail list.!! Mail to : dkp@gnv.ifas.ufl.edu

Soil pH

Question: Occasionally a customer wants to raise or lower the pH of their soil. What is this pH stuff all about?

Answer: pH refers to how acidic or alkaline a soil is. Sometimes acidic soil is referred to a “sour” and alkaline soil is referred to as “sweet”. pH is measured on a scale from 0 to 14 with a pH of 7 referred to as neutral, neither acidic nor alkaline. If soil has a pH below 7 it is acidic and if

soil has pH above 7 it is alkaline. Most plants grow best in a pH range of 5.5 to 6.5. Some plants, such as azaleas, gardenia or ixora grow best in soils that are more acidic - a pH range of 4.5 to 5.5. Other plants do best in a high pH soil, that is, a pH over 7. All plants have a pH range that they grow best in.

Question: How do I know the pH range of a particular plant? How do I know the pH of my soil?

Answer: Many publications include a listing of pH ranges for common plants. Some information is available on-line at: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/scripts/htmlgen.exe?DOCUMENT_MG092

A number of types of pH test kits are available, or have the customer call the local County Extension office - many have a pH testing service for a small fee.

Question: Can soil pH be adjusted? Under what conditions should soil pH be adjusted?

Answer: Soil pH can be adjusted, but only temporarily. Natural soil conditions will eventually prevail - sometimes quickly, sometimes more slowly. Whether soil pH should be adjusted depends on the situation. To adjust the soil pH slightly to put in a vegetable garden is fine because it's a temporary planting. Changing a high pH soil to grow azaleas or gardenias is very difficult if not impossible. It would be a never-ending uphill battle. The problem in this situation is not soil pH, but plant selection. It is much better to properly select plants for specific conditions, such as pH, than it is to permanently adjust conditions, such as pH, to grow an inappropriate plant.

Question: Assuming the situation is appropriate, how can pH be raised or lowered?

Answer: First, get the soil tested so the existing pH is known. Never attempt to change soil pH without testing. Ask the customer to measure the area under consideration and read the directions on the product. Usually, dolomitic limestone is used to raise pH and sulfur is used to lower pH. Soil pH usually changes slowly, and it is difficult and dangerous to try to change soil pH quickly.

Conclusion: Help customers pick plants that are suited to their soil pH, rather than try to change their soil pH to suit inappropriate plants. If they do want to raise or lower the pH of the soil, encourage them to test their soil first, read the product label and use the product properly. Soil pH should be changed only moderately and slowly to avoid damaging plants. Most Florida landscape plants are tolerant of a wide range of soil pH. (*Source: Florida Certified Nursery Professional Manual (FCNP) published by FNGA*)

Just a Thought:

“Doing your best” is actually the process of **trying** to do your best.

FNGA Chapter Auction

On October 22nd the Tampa Bay Chapter of FNGA will hold their annual **Ornamental Plant & Allied Article Auction**. For the last 30+ years, FNGA has used this event to raise money for their Scholarship Fund for Youth Ornamental Horticulture Activities. The auction starts at 6:15pm at the Florida State Fairgrounds in the Charlie Lykes Arena. Retailers, landscapers horticulturists, gardeners and the general public are invited to participate. This is an excellent opportunity to purchase, **below wholesale**, items such as:

Native landscape shrubs and trees

Drought tolerant shrubs

and Ground covers

House Plants

Potting soil, pesticides, sprayers, clippers, pots, fertilizer, irrigation supplies, books, etc

Annuals / perennials

Hanging Baskets

Dish Gardens

Free Parking - Use the Orient Road Entrance and be sure to bring a **large enough vehicle** to carry your purchases home. Nothing can be left overnight.

Florida's Squirrels

Florida is home to 3 species of tree squirrels and one species of ground squirrel - the gray squirrel, the fox squirrel and the flying squirrel are the tree squirrels and the eastern chipmunk is the ground squirrel.

Squirrels are probably the most widely encountered mammal in Florida. Squirrels belong to the rodent family and the primary difference between squirrels and other rodents is the bushy tail. All rodents are gnawing animals and can chew through almost anything. A rodent's front teeth grow constantly, so they must be worn down or they will grow to the point where they inhibit eating and the animal will starve.

Squirrels usually produce 2 litters of 2-4 young each year. The young are on their own in about 2 ½ months. They are vegetarians and eat mostly fruits and nuts, but will eat the eggs and young of birds and certain types of insects.

The three main problems caused by squirrels are chewing, digging, and living inside attics or other parts of houses. Homeowners typically attempt to solve squirrel problems by using various repellents, either chemical odors, like mothballs, or visual, like snake or owl decoys. The fact is that repellants rarely work on squirrels.

For most situations, especially where a squirrel has taken up residence inside a customer's home, squirrel problems are best solved by physically removing the animal by means of a live trap when "living with the problem" is not feasible. Call your local office of the Florida Fish and Game Commission for a list of those in your area that are licensed trappers. (Source: UF/IFAS Fact Sheet SS-WIS-33 by Craig Huegel)

Calendar of Events

Sept 11-17 Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, Sarasota - **Free Admission Week**. Call for details 941-366-5731, ext. 10

Sept 16, Florida Certified Nursery Professional (FCNP) Exam, Orange County Convention Center, Orlando, FL. Call Marilyn Sileven, at FNGA 1-800-375-3642 or <http://www.fnga.org>

Sept 16-18, 1999 - FNATS (**Florida Nursery & Allied Trade Show**) - Orange County Convention Center, Orlando FNGA 1-800-375-3642 or <http://www.fnga.org>

Oct 22, Tampa Bay Chapter of FNGA holds it's annual **Ornamental Plant & Allied Article Auction** - 6:15pm at the Charlie Lykes arena in the Florida State Fairgrounds. Call Roger Newton for further information 813-744-5519x147

Mar 3-4, **Tampa Spring Expo 2000** hosted by TBWG at the Tampa Fairgrounds.. Call for details 813-655-1914 or <http://tbwg.org>

Interesting Websites

Wildlife Website - The University of Florida, IFAS, and the Extension Service have a website dedicated to wildlife at: <http://www.wec.ufl.edu/Extension/>

Topics include "Landscaping for Wildlife", "Florida Wildlife Resources Handbook", "Wild News" a Florida wildlife newsletter, and information on nearly any Florida critter you can think of, including Butterflies, Frogs and Toads, Hummingbirds, Purple Martins and many more. Also included is a link to the wildlife resources of EDIS - types of problems caused by wildlife, specific information on many species, and conservation and management issues. An excellent and informative site.

Palm Nutrition Guide

An great resource for information on palm fertilization and nutritional disorders of palms, including color photos. http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/scripts/htmlgen.exe?body&document_EP052

An Introduction to Ornamental Grasses and Grasslikes for Southern Gardeners

<http://www.hortdigest.com/archives/7-99/ornamentalgrasses.htm>
and

A Gallery of Ornamental Grasses and Grasslikes

<http://www.hortdigest.com/archives/7-99/grassgall.htm>

These two articles by Mack Thetford of the University of Florida are an excellent combination - the Introduction explains the basics of this versatile group of plants and the Gallery provides specifics. Lots of color photos throughout.

Tampa Bay Wholesale Growers (TBWG)

<http://www.tbwg.org/expo-2000.htm>

has upgraded their site. Their Plant Locator is now included on the site, along with a list of common and botanical plant names, and a registration form to print for the upcoming Spring Expo.

Florida Nurserymen and Growers Association (FNGA) has also greatly expanded and upgraded their website. <http://www.tbwg.org>