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El Niño Weather by Terry DeValle

NOAA/National Weather Service predicts that El Niño will stick around through May 2007. What does this mean for us? That means we're supposed to have a cool, wet winter. Thanks to El Nino, Florida had a mild hurricane season and are not expected to have extreme freezes this winter. El Nino typically brings 40 to 60% more rainfall to Florida during the cooler months so this may impact the way you garden. Elevate rows in vegetable and strawberry beds to improve drainage in the event of excessive rainfall. If temperate crops like apples, peaches and pears meet their chilling requirements, they will bloom as soon as the weather warms up which increases their risk of cold damage. So far, we haven't experienced the cool weather or the increased rainfall so time will tell if we follow the expected pattern.

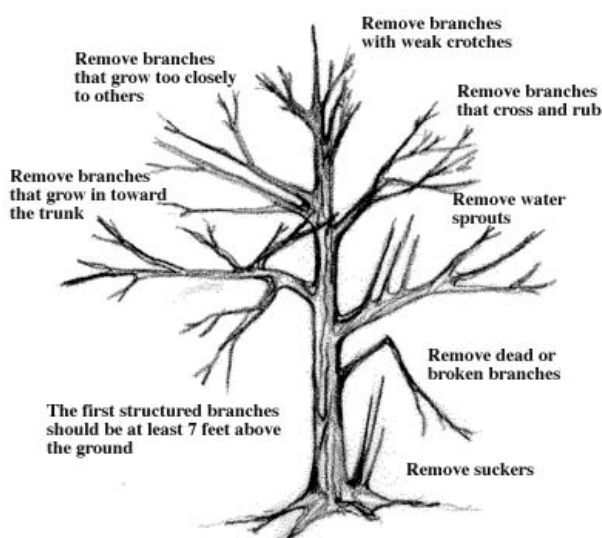
Upcoming Classes

- ◆ **January 13, 10-11AM** at Tree Hill, 7152 Lone Star Rd — Master Gardener, Lassie Lee will speak on "How to create a Wildlife Habitat".
- ◆ **January 18 - 10AM to 12:30PM** - Urban Gardening Field Office, Superior St. (call for directions) Care for Your Edible Landscape— with hands-on grape pruning, fruit for NE FL, cool season vegetables and herbs. Cost is \$5.
- ◆ **January 19— 10-12PM**—Extension Office, 1010 N. McDuff Ave.—Arbor Day Program, Hear speakers on pruning trees, planting trees, invasive species and the recommended trees to plant under powerlines. Cost \$5.
- ◆ **January 30 - 10-11:30 AM** - Urban Gardening Field Office, Superior St. (Call for directions) Learn how to start your own vegetable seedlings. Cost is \$5.
- ◆ **January 31-1-3PM**- Argyle Branch Library, 7973 Old Middleburg Rd.—Good and Bad Guys in the Landscape. Learn how to use Native plants in the landscape and how to identify and control invasives.
- ◆ **February 15 - 5:30 to 7:30PM** at Highlands Branch Library, 1826 Dunn Ave.— Good and Bad Guys in the Landscape. Learn how to use Native plants and identify and control invasive plants.
- ◆ **February 23 - 10AM to 1PM** at 1010 N. McDuff Ave. Make your own Rainbarrel Workshop. Cost is \$30. Class is limited, must pre-pay to register.
- ◆ **February 27 - 10AM-12PM** at Extension Office, 1010 N. McDuff Ave.—Starting your own Spring Vegetable garden. Cost is \$3.
- ◆ **March 10— 10-11AM** at Tree Hill, 7152 Lone Star Road—Master Gardener, Becky Wern will speak on butterflies.
- ◆ **March 13—10-1PM** at Extension office, 1010 N. McDuff Ave.—Irrigation Workshop. Learn to utilize drip irrigation in your landscape. Cost is \$5.
- ◆ **March 27—5:30—7:30 PM**, Mandarin Branch Library, 3330 Kori Road — Laying Ground for the Spring Garden.

Please call 387-8850 to register for all the above classes.

Things to do in January/February— by Terry DeValle,

- ◆ Irrigate plants to help with cold protection 24 to 48 hours before a freeze. If rain precedes the freeze, don't irrigate. Bank sand around citrus to protect the graft union and pull leaf or pine straw mulch up over low-growing sensitive plants. Harvest citrus if it is ripe if temperatures will fall below 28°F for 4 or more consecutive hours.
- ◆ Now is a good time to scout the landscape for plants that have scale insects. They vary in color and often look like a wart or bump on the plant leaf or stem. When you try to remove it, the scale comes off and is not a part of the plant. Treat with a dormant or horticultural oil and spray both upper and lower leaf surfaces. Check for tea scale on hollies, camellias and other ornamental plants.
- ◆ Take a break from mowing lawns and service your lawnmower. Clean the mower, sharpen the blades, drain and replace the oil, drain or use up the gasoline and grease all fittings.
- ◆ Remove leaves from lawns as they drop and use as mulch or make them into compost.
- ◆ It's time to prune deciduous plants, if needed. Remove rubbing branches, diseased or dead branches, and suckers from the base. Don't prune spring flowering shrubs or trees until after bloom.
- ◆ Prune grapes in January or February. For muscadines, prune all branches that are less than 3/16" in diameter, leaving 2 to 3 buds per spur. Remove most of the spurs located at the top of the trunk to prevent crowding and bushiness. See diagram at left from Alabama Coop. Extension.
- ◆ Even though plant growth is slowing down, plants still need water in the absence of rainfall. We are moving into some of our driest months. The average rainfall for November is 2", December 2.5" and January at 3.3". But, if El Nino weather predic-



tions are correct, we will be in for a wet winter so irrigation systems can take a rest. However, if there is no rain, water lawns every 10-14 days and woody plants every 3 to 4 weeks at the 1/2 to 3/4 inch rate.

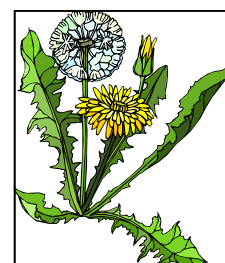
- ◆ If a freeze is predicted, water plants 24 to 48 hours before the freeze. Cold sensitive bedding plants can be covered with pine straw for protection. Citrus fruit will be damaged when temperatures drop below 28°F for at least 4 hours. If a freeze is predicted for this duration, harvest fruit that is ripe before the freeze. If fruit is not ripe, take a chance and leave fruit on the tree because citrus will not ripen once picked. Prior to a severe freeze, protect graft unions of young citrus by banking clean sand around the trunk just above the graft union.
- ◆ Wait until deciduous plants are dormant to prune. Prune now only to remove diseased or dead wood. Do not prune spring flowering trees and shrubs now as flower buds will be removed. Examples include:

azalea, redbud, Japanese magnolia, and spirea.

- ◆ Mole crickets are obvious now because of their size, but now is not the time to treat. Wait until spring to treat as young are more easily controlled with pesticides.

- ◆ Mild weather causes soil temperatures to heat up and leads to weeds popping up in area landscapes. Herbicide applications to prevent the germination of weed seedlings is linked to soil temperatures and treatment time can vary from mid February to March 1. Before shopping for an herbicide, identify the weed and determine why the

weed has become a problem. A healthy lawn can keep weeds from becoming established, but this involves following good cultural practices. Examine mowing, water and fertilization practices to combat weed problems. Remember, the first line of defense is to hand pull instead of chemicals.



What to Plant in January/February by Terry DeValle

We've had our normal roller coaster weather with some cool weather followed by spring-like temperatures. That's enough to confuse any plants into blooming early once they've met their chilling requirement. Cold weather has not been too severe so many warm-season flowering plants are still blooming away. Many cool season vegetables like lettuce are going to seed. Choices of things to plant are limited, so take some time to look through 2007 catalogues and "think spring"! Order seeds now while they are still available.

Annuals recommended for planting now are carnation (China doll), dianthus, flowering cabbage and kale, pansy,

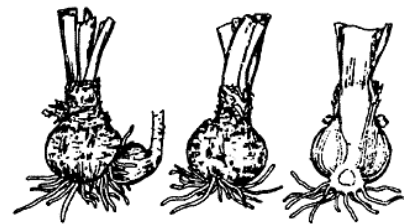
larkspur



petunia, ranunculus, stock, viola, and snapdragon. For March flowers, plant delphinium, digitalis (foxglove), and larkspur in January or February. In February, add to the list

baby's breath, calendula, marguerite daisy, and statice.

Bulbs that can be planted are Achiemenes, African lily (Agapanthus), amaryllis, Aztec lily, calla, crinum, daylily, Dutch iris, gloriosa lily, gloxinia, Hurricane lily, Ixia, kaffir lily, marica (walking iris), moraea (African lily), spider lily, Tritonia, tuberosa, tulip (prechilled only), voodoo lily, watsonia, and Zephyr lily. In February it's too late to plant amaryllis, calla, daylily, Hurricane lily, and tulips but add to the list Amazon lily, caladium, canna, and dahlia.



Vegetables to plant now include beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, Chinese cabbage, collards, kale, kohlrabi, leek, mustard, onions, parsley, English peas, potatoes, radish and turnips. Add to the list endive and lettuce in February, although if temperatures remain mild, go for it.

Meyer and Ponderosa Lemons by Terry DeValle

Lemons are tough to grow in Northeast Florida because they are not cold hardy nor do they like Florida's hot wet climate. But, there are other options which include the meyer and ponderosa lemons, neither of which are true lemons.

The Meyer lemon was introduced from China in 1908 where it was growing as an ornamental pot plant. It is a hybrid with lemon being one of the parents and the other unknown, but based on the peel it was probably an orange or mandarin. Meyer lemons grow well in northeast Florida and are more cold tolerant than true lemons or the Ponderosa lemon. Trees are small and spreading and have a few thorns. Fruit resemble an orange but the inside definitely taste like a lemon, they have around 10 seeds and are less acidic than a true lemon. Meyer lemon carry the tristeza virus and should not be grown on sour orange root stock.



Meyer lemon showing rat damage

The Ponderosa lemon resembles a lemon, but is much larger with a thick bumpy, skin. It originated as a chance seedling in 1886 and the parentage is unknown. The fruit are seedy and the juice is of good quality but not as good as the Meyer lemon. The tree is dwarf and thorny and has been a favorite for back yard gardeners. Ponderosa lemons are less cold hardy than true lemons, but more hardy than limes.

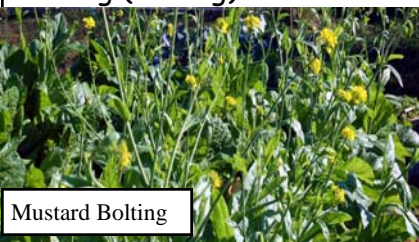


Urban Gardening Update

By Mary Puckett, Urban Gardening Program Assistant

Looking around the garden, don't be surprised if our cool season vegetables are reacting to our unseasonably warm temperatures.

Cool season vegetables are not only those that tolerate low temperatures but, require it for best growth and development. Because of temperatures being warm, you may find that root enlargement, like radishes, may not occur properly, heads of cabbage and lettuce may be loose, or premature seeding (bolting) occurs. The broccoli, lettuce and



Mustard Bolting

mustard plants are going to seed. Once a vegetable starts to bolt, its season has come to an end.

As we finish harvesting our cool season crops, we need to start thinking about preparing for our spring garden. By the way, if you have tomatoes in the ground, the Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Div. of Plant Industry recommends the destruction of tomato plants within 5 days of final harvest since they serve as reservoirs of tomato pests and diseases (Rule No.: 5B-59.003, Rule Title: Tomato Plant Destructions).

If this is your first time to start a garden, pick a site that gets at least 5 to 6 hours of full sun. Consider one that is convenient and near a water source. Make sure it is away from tree roots, which will only compete with vegetable plants for nutrition and moisture. Avoid septic lines as unsanitary seepage could contaminate your vegetables. If a ground plot is not realistic, consider a raised bed. A raised bed consists of wood and other materials that confine soil. A manageable size would be a frame height of 6 to 12 inches, 50 square feet for a small garden or 100 square feet for a large garden.

Once you have picked a site have your soil tested for pH. Most vegetables prefer a pH of 5.8 to 6.5. If required, make any pH adjustments now

so the reaction has time to take place in the soil. Add amendments such as, compost, animal manure, and rotted leaves to your soil. Mix these organics in the soil in advance of planting, if at all possible, a month before seeding. These are the months to start your own seedlings to transplant in the spring garden.



What to grow in the Spring? The Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide provides information on which vegetables and varieties grow best in the warm season. Tomatoes, Peppers, Squash and Cucumbers are just a few possibilities. It will also provide row and plant spacing, along with seeding depth. Find the Guide at: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/VH021>. If your looking for something new to grow, look through seed catalogs for any unusual varieties.

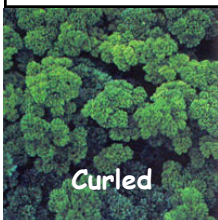
Before planting, make a plan on paper, showing the location of each crop. It will not only help you keep track of what varieties did best for you, but help with crop rotation. "Crop rotation" simply means, do not plant the same members of the same family repeatedly in the same spot. Table 3 of the Vegetable Gardening Guide provides you with the plant family name. This practice not only prevents diseases from living over from season to season, but reduces the nematode population.

A little planning and preparation can go a long way to help insure a successful gardening experience.



Broccoli Bolting

Parsley, A Great Cool Season Herb By Mary Puckett



Curled



Flat leaf

Parsley, *Petroselinum crispum* (pe-tro-SEL-i-num) native to Europe and Western Asia, belongs to the carrot family. There are three kinds of parsley: Curly, which is the most common and makes an attractive garnish; Flat-leaved Italian, which is not as attractive, but has a superior taste and survives the summer better; and Hamburg, a parsnip-like root that is most commonly used as a cooked vegetable to flavor soups and stews.

Parsley is a biennial. It has two growing seasons, which means it typically flowers or goes to seed the second season. Parsley is best started by seed, but is slow to germinate. It is recommended that you soak your seed overnight in warm water before planting. Plant seeds 1/4" deep in well-drained, moist soil. Because of its long tap-root, if you need to transplant, do so when parsley is young.

Not only does parsley have a culinary use, it also is used as a butterfly attractant. The swallowtail caterpillars will happily devour it for you.



Root

Growing Potatoes By Mary Puckett

The Irish potato, *Solanum tuberosum*, is a good choice for the home garden. Tubers can be planted as early as mid January. Plant certified seed potatoes when possible. Certified seed can be found at a reputable garden supply center or seed company. If you cannot find certified, its ok to use the potatoes sold in grocery stores.

A few varieties recommended for Florida gardens are Sebago, Atlantic, Superior (white skinned), LaSoda, LaRouge and Red Pontiac (red skinned).

Prepare the tubers for planting by cutting them into 2-ounce size seed pieces with two or more "eyes". It is recommended that you leave the tubers in a cool (60° -65°F), dark, well-ventilated, humid place for one or two days. This is referred to as healing over. It reduces the risk of rot before sprouting.

Plant seed pieces 2"-4" below the soil surface (so sunlight will not get to them), 8"-12" apart with rows 36"-42" apart. Plant the seed pieces with the cut side down and the eyes facing up.

Potatoes are heavy feeders. Per 100 foot row, 7.5 lbs of 10-10-10 fertilizer should be applied at each application. One application at planting time,

followed by additional "side dressing" applications in 3-4 week intervals after planting. When side dressing, apply fertilizer 4"-6" to either side of the plant and about 2" deep.

Since potatoes do not form on the "roots", it is important to continue to pull the soil up around them as they grow. This is referred to as "hilling". Hilling means to add soil (2-3") to the top of the potato row. Each time you side dress, I would make a practice of "hilling". This prevents tubers from being exposed to sunlight, which causes them to turn green and are then inedible. Hilling also gives the stem lots of room to produce more tubers. Moderate moisture should be maintained. However, too much water will promote root and tuber decay.

Most potatoes are ready for harvest between 80-115 days after planting. Harvest the tubers by carefully digging below the potatoes with a shovel and lift them from ground. Once harvested, the washed and dried crop can be stored for 3-6 months.



Propagate Tender Plants for Spring by Terry DeValle

Cold weather may cause many warm season annuals and tropical plants to die to the ground. In mild winters, these plants bounce back but if the cold is severe, some tropical plants will not survive. Collect seeds or take cuttings of these plants now so that they will grace the garden again next spring. Some plants are best started from seed while others are easier to start from cuttings. Do a little homework first to determine the favored technique.

Plants grown from cuttings are identical to the parent plant and are referred to as clones. Clones from the same parent plant have similar traits and grow at the same rate which makes it easier to create a uniform landscape.

Cuttings can be made from several areas of the plant, but the most common are stem cuttings. Stem cuttings can be taken at different stages of plant maturity. Some plants root better from softwood cuttings, whereas others root better from semi-hardwood or hardwood cuttings.

Most landscape plants are now in the semi-hardwood to hardwood stage but many tropical plants are in the softwood stage. Cuttings in the softwood stage are very soft and will not break when you bend it. Semi-hardwood cuttings will snap like a green bean when bent. Hardwood cuttings are firm, do not bend easily and are fully dormant with no signs of new growth.

Plants easily rooted from softwood cuttings include allamanda, anise, buddleia, confederate jasmine, croton, golden dewdrop, hydrangea, jasmine, plumbago, princess flower (*Tibouchina*), roses, spiraea, and wisteria. Most annuals and perennials can be propagated from cuttings. Try semi-hardwood cuttings for success with glossy abelia, Japanese aucuba, azaleas, bougainvillea, bottlebrush, boxwood, camellia, crape myrtle, gardenia, hibiscus, holly, juniper, pittosporum, podocarpus, redbud, and wax myrtle. Woody plants take longer than softwood cuttings to root so patience may be needed with plants like junipers.

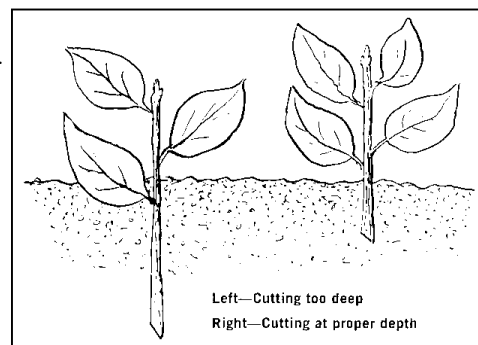
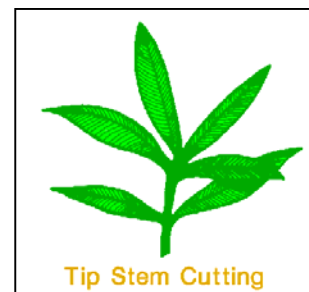
Basic supplies needed to get started are a container, rooting media, rooting hormone, and clear saran wrap plastic. Many plants will root without adding rooting hormones but, this speeds up the process. Garden centers carry this talc in small packages and some include a fungicide to prevent root disease.

Any container (flat, jar, nursery pot, or aquarium) that holds soil will work. Sterilize the container by soaking it for thirty minutes in a mix of one part bleach to four parts water. Rinse well with clean water since chlorine is toxic to plants.

Add a sterile rooting media to the container. Examples of rooting media are a 50/50 mix of peat moss and coarse perlite, 100 percent sand, 100 percent vermiculite, or combinations of the above. If using a flat or nursery pot, fill within one inch of the top. If using a large jar or aquarium, add at least four inches of rooting media and leave a six to eight inch space from the surface of the media to the top of the container. Add water to make sure the media is evenly moist.

Choose parent plants (stock plants) carefully to make sure they're vigorous and free of insect/disease problems. Water parent plants the day before and take cuttings early the following morning. Take four to six inch long cuttings with a sharp knife or pruning shears from higher light areas of the plant. Place in a plastic bag with wet paper towels to keep the cuttings moist. Strip leaves from the bottom one to two inches of cuttings to avoid leaf contact with the soil. Remove any flowers, flower buds, or seeds so all the energy will go into producing roots. Large leaves can be trimmed to one-half their size to maximize the number of cuttings in a container.

Pour a small amount of rooting hormone in a small container. Wet the end of the cutting, shake off excess water, and dip the bottom one-half inch into the rooting hormone. Keep rooting hormones out of the sunlight because they are light sensitive and discard any unused talc due to potential contamination.



A Day for Trees By Larry Figart, Urban Forester

The first Arbor Day took place on April 10, 1872 in Nebraska. It was championed by J. Sterling Morton. He was a newspaper editor that moved to Nebraska from Detroit, Michigan in 1854. He believed that the treeless plains of Nebraska would benefit from the planting of trees. He set the example by planting orchards, shade trees and windbreaks on his family farm.

Morton used his skill as a journalist to promote sound agricultural information, as well as, the benefits of trees. He soon became the editor of Nebraska's first newspaper, and developed an enthusiastic clientele. He recommended the newest agricultural techniques to farmers that included planting trees. He advised farmers to plant trees as windbreaks reducing soil erosion, to be used for fuel wood and to produce shade. He not only wrote about the benefits of planting trees for farmers but encouraged citizen groups and civic organizations to plant trees as well. You could say he was a role model for the modern day extension service.

Morton first proposed a holiday for the planting of trees as a member of Nebraska's State Board of

Agriculture at a meeting on January 4, 1872. The holiday was set for April 10, 1872. The first Arbor Day included prizes for counties and individuals that planted the most trees on that day. It was a huge success. An estimated one million trees were planted on that day.



In 1874, the Governor of Nebraska officially proclaimed Arbor Day as April 10th. In 1885 Arbor Day became a legal holiday in Nebraska and was celebrated annually on April 22, which is Morton's birthday.

The Arbor Day concept soon spread to Kansas, Tennessee, Minnesota, and Ohio all proclaiming their own holidays to plant trees. Today, Arbor Day is celebrated in all fifty states. The dates coincide with the optimal tree planting season. In Florida, Arbor Day is the third Friday in January. For more information on Arbor Day visit the National Arbor Day Foundation at <http://www.arborday.org/>.

Tree(s) of the Month By Larry Figart, Urban Forester

This month I am going to be writing about two trees. They are ashe magnolia and redbud. The reason for this is that these two tree species are going to be given out at the Duval County Extension office **Arbor Day Program on January 19, 2007**. The program will run from

10-12:30 and will feature speakers on pruning trees, planting trees, invasive species, and the recommended trees for planting under power lines. The cost of the program will be \$5.00.



Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*)

is a common flowering tree in our area. The tree is best known for the reddish purple flowers that seem to erupt out of the branches in the early spring before the leaves start to appear. After flowering, the seeds will be produced in 2-3 inch pods. The redbud is a legume plant that can add some nitrogen back to the soil.

The redbud will reach a mature height of only 25-35 feet. They will flower better in full sun but, they can withstand partial shade. They prefer moist well-

drained soil. They may need some supplemental irrigation during droughty periods in very well drained soil.

Ashe Magnolia is a tree native to the Florida panhandle. Ashe Magnolia (*Magnolia ashei*) can be considered a smaller form of Bigleaf Magnolia, *Magnolia macrophylla*. Ashe Magnolia is a large shrub or small tree (to about 25 feet) with large, light green deciduous leaves with whitish undersides. The leaves up to 2 feet long and 1 foot wide. The 6 to 8-inch diameter flowers occur in late spring and are white with rose-purple blotches on the inner petals. The reddish, cylindrical fruits are about 3 inches long. Ashe Magnolia flowers early with trees as small as 1 foot tall commonly blooming.



Ashe magnolia has very particular landscape requirements. Partial shade and well-drained soil are required. It will not tolerate wet soil or drought. The large leaves are slow to decompose. However, if the right site can be found the gardener will be rewarded.

CITY OF JACKSONVILLE AGRICULTURE DEPT.

1010 N. McDuff Avenue
Jacksonville, FL 32254
(904) 387-8850
Fax: (904)387-8902
Website: <http://duval.ifas.ufl.edu>

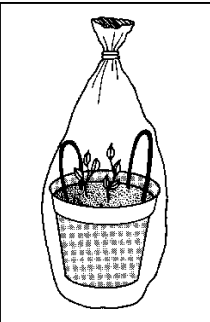
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To be successful, leaves should be kept moist until they generate their own roots. Installing a mist system with a timer or construct a mini-greenhouse environment.

Propagation (continued from page 6)

tree, or under fluorescent lights for twelve to sixteen hours a

day. Try and keep temperatures between 65 and 80 degrees F. To prevent cuttings from drying out, maintain relative humidity at 100%. Add water if no water condenses on the inside of these units overnight.



For a homeowner with limited space, it's easier to create a greenhouse environment. To do this, cover the tops of large jars or aquariums with plastic. If using a flat or pot, use coat hangers to create a frame that will support a plastic cover or bag.

Keep cuttings out of full sun. Place the cuttings near a window, under a shady

The rooting period will vary from two to sixteen weeks, depending on the plant and environment. Add a weak solution of fertilizer after cuttings develop roots. Once cuttings are rooted, they must be hardened-off. Gradually, decrease the moisture level and increase the light intensity. Once this is completed, cuttings can be transplanted into larger containers or the landscape.

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Once you have read this newsletter, turn "A New Leaf" and pass this information on to a friend.

Terry B. DelValle
Extension Agent-Environmental Horticulture

This newsletter is jointly sponsored by the Florida Cooperative Extension Service, IFAS, Larry Arrington, Dean; City of Jacksonville, John Peyton, Mayor; and the Duval County Cooperative Extension Service, Rick Godke, Director.