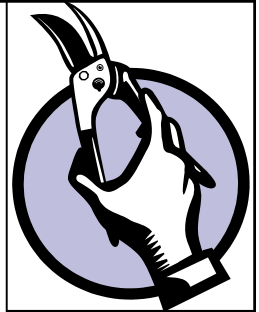


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## Gear Up for Spring by Terry DeValle

It's been a crazy winter with up and down temperatures and sporadic rainfall. We've had very little cold weather but the last cold snap finally knocked the leaves off the shumard oak at the office. Two weeks later, new leaves were already flushing out. It's too early to tell the extent of damage to fruit trees that were in bloom during the freeze but if they survived, young fruit should be visible by the end of March. There is still a chance we may get another freeze, so don't be too hasty with spring planting. There's much to be done to get ready for the spring gardening season.



Plants to fertilize, weeds to pull, leaves to rake, plants to prune, gardens to plant, etc. So get growing and take time to attend one of the upcoming classes listed below. If you want to get your soil pH sampled, drop them off at one of the plant clinics listed on the back page of this newsletter or bring them to the extension office.

### Upcoming Classes

- ◆ **March 10— 10-11AM** at Tree Hill, 7152 Lone Star Road—Master Gardener, Becky Wern will speak on **butterflies**.
- ◆ **March 13—10AM-1PM** at Extension office, 1010 N. McDuff Ave.—**Irrigation Workshop**. Learn to utilize drip irrigation in your landscape. Cost is \$5.
- ◆ **March 19-1-3PM**, Highlands Branch Library, 1826 Dunn Ave., - **Good Guys & Bad Guys in the Landscape - Native & Invasive Plants**. Learn which plants are keepers and how to get rid of the bad guys.
- ◆ **March 27—5:30—7:30 PM**, Mandarin Branch Library, 3330 Kori Road — **Laying Ground for the Spring Garden**.
- ◆ **March 31-9am-Noon**, @ Tillie K. Fowler Regional Park, "aka" Westside Regional Park @ 7000 Roosevelt Blvd., **Native Plant Fair**. Attend educational seminars and learn about native and invasive plants.
- ◆ **April 18-10AM-1PM**, Mandarin Garden Club, 2892 Loretto Road, **Spring Happens!** Get spring gardening tips to beautify your landscape and tour the demonstration gardens to gather ideas. \$5.00 fee to attend.
- ◆ **April 21-10AM-4PM**, The Landing, **Celebrate Earth Day** and pick up tips to protect the environment.
- ◆ **April 28- Noon-5PM**, Tree Hill, 7152 Lone Star Road, **6th Annual Butterfly Festival**
- ◆ **April 28-8AM-2PM**, Mandarin Garden Club, 2892 Loretto Road, **Plant Sale**, Educational Booths

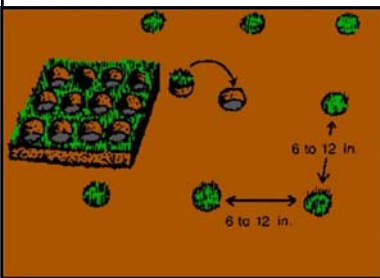


*Illicium floridatum*  
'good guy'

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

## Things to do in March/April— by Terry DeValle, Horticulturist

- Test soil for pH if it hasn't been tested in 3 to 4 years. Most plants like a slightly acidic soil, so don't add lime unless a soil test shows that it's needed. See next page on how to adjust soil pH.
- Plant poinsettias in the landscape once the threat of cold weather is over. Place in a sunny but, protected area and where they will receive no light at night. A south or east exposure would be ideal. Cut back to about 6 to 8" above ground level when planting.
- Rake leaves and use as mulch or add to the compost pile. An organic mulch like pine straw will add nutrients and help acidify the soil. Replenish mulches in plant beds to help cut down on moisture loss and reduce weed problems.



- As lawns are coming out of the winter, some damage from the cold may be obvious. Rake lightly to remove dead grass so the new grass will fill in that area.

Plugging may be necessary to repair large spots. Match with the same variety of grass to make maintenance easier. The easiest thing is to take plugs from your own lawn for repairs.

- Stay on top of weeds and pull them before they go to seed. This is the most effective method of weed control. Spot treat with herbicides as a last resort. It's too late to treat weeds like chickweed that are now going to seed. Again, hand pull and mow to prevent them from seeding. Wait until spring green up occurs before using post emergent herbicides.
- ◆ Prune roses back to a few strong canes if this wasn't done in February. Remove old leaves and debris. Prune climbing roses back lightly as they bloom.
- Cut back cold damaged plants as new growth emerges. Ornamental grasses should also be cut back just before new growth emerges so do this ASAP. For deciduous grasses (those that are straw

brown), prune back within a few inches of the soil. If the leaves are not firmly attached, gently pull to remove the dead foliage. For evergreen grasses, like muhly grass, spruce up the plant by removing brown leaves, leaf tips and old flower stalks.

- Inspect sago palms for Asian cycad scale. Look at the underside of leaves for white specks and along the upper mid-rib of the frond. Under a microscope, females have a teardrop or oyster shape whereas the males are long and fluted. This scale is extremely difficult to control because it infects the roots at depths of up to two feet. Left untreated, a medium size sago can be killed within a year. To control, apply foliar sprays of horticultural oil products (Ultrafine, summer oil, volck oil, etc.), organo-cide (sesame and fish oil) or malathion-in-oil combination. Use a fine and high pressure sprayer to coat the entire plant including the underside of leaves and every tiny crevice. Also spray the soil or mulch under the plant. Treat multiple times every 2 weeks. It is spread by wind so get neighbors to treat affected plants also. If infestations are heavy, remove fronds and bury or place in trash for landfill before treating. If you have palms on your property, this insect will not affect them. For more info go to <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/IN474>.

- ◆ Now is a good time to locate certain invasive plants and attempt to control them before new growth emerges. The air potato (*Dioscorea bulbifera*) is a very ag-



gressive vine. It is bare of leaves now but has potato-looking tubers hanging from the vines. To attempt to get rid of these, the above and below ground tubers must be removed. Do not put these in with standard yard trash or it will become someone else's problem. As the vines begin to grow this spring and summer, apply Brush-B-Gon or Brush Killer onto the foliage. Repeated applications will be necessary for eradication.

## What to Plant in March/April by Terry DeValle

Consistent warm weather is almost here and some annuals have again survived a relatively mild winter. In March, annuals to plant include ageratum, alyssum, amaranthus, asters, baby's breath, balsam, begonia (nonstop, tuberous, wax), browalia, calendula, celosia, calliopsis, cosmos, dusty miller, exacum, gaillardia, gazania, geranium, hollyhock, impatiens, lobelia, marguerite daisy, marigold, nicotiana, ornamental pepper, pentas, phlox, rudbeckia, salvia, strawflower, thunbergia, torenia, verbena, vinca (periwinkle) and zinnia. In April, add to the list coleus, portulaca, and sweet William. Remove from the list ageratum, alyssum, amaranthus, baby's breath, balsam, begonia, browalia, calendula, cosmos and strawflower.

Bulbs to plant in March include achimenes, allium, alstroemeria, Amazon lily, Aztec lily, begonia, blood lily, caladium, canna, crinum, dahlia, gladiolus, gloriosa lily, gloxinia, kaffir lily, tiger lily, tritonia. Tuberoses, voodoo lily, watsonia and zephyr lily. From the list for April add blood lily, buttercup (*ranunculus*), lily, marica (walking iris), moraea (African lily) and spider lily; remove crinum lily.

Prune back perennial plants once the cold weather is behind us. Also prune back to control plant size. When making pruning cuts, prune just above where the new growth is emerging. Some great perennials to try are Bulbine, coneflower (*Echinacea*), Stoke's aster, Firebush (*Hamelia patens*), firespike (*Odontonema strictum*), firecracker plant (*Russelia*), plumbago, salvias and gingers.

This is a busy time for vegetable gardening and a transition time between cool and warm season crops. Cool season veggies that can be planted in March include beets, carrots, celery, collards\*, endive, kohlrabi, leek, lettuce, mustard\*, bunching onions, parsley, English peas, potatoes, radish and turnips\*. Those with an \* can also be planted in April. Warm season crops to plant include beans, sweet corn, cucumbers, eggplant, okra, southern peas, peppers, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, squash, tomatoes and watermelon. For a list of recommended varieties, go to <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/VH021>.

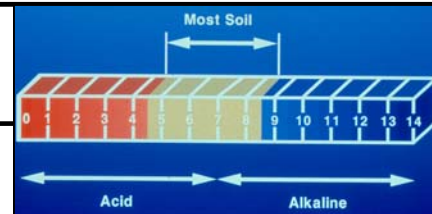


## Adjusting Soil pH by Terry DeValle

Soil pH sometimes gets out of whack due to irrigation water, soil amendments, or soil residue from shells or concrete. Should it make a difference if the pH is too high or too low? If soil pH is very acidic, some nutrients (calcium, phosphorous, magnesium) are tied up and not available to plants. If the pH is too alkaline (above 7), other nutrients (iron, zinc, copper, manganese) are also unavailable to plants.

It's easy to raise the soil pH with the use of lime but it's not so easy to lower. If the soil has naturally occurring lime in the soil, it will be a constant battle to keep the pH in an acceptable range. In that case, it's easier to install plants that will tolerate a high soil pH. If the pH is high due to adding compost, the soil pH will become more acidic with time as the compost decomposes.

Elemental sulfur will lower soil pH but it is a temporary fix. Soil bacteria turn sulfur into sulfuric acid which neutralizes the alkalinity. Once the sulfur is used up, the pH goes right back up. Be careful when using elemental sulfur. Never use more than 5 to 10 pounds per 1,000 square feet at one time. Sulfate sulfur has no effect on soil pH, however, the use of ammonium sulfate, aluminum sulfate, and iron sulfate will help lower soil pH. Other options for lowering soil pH is to add lots of organic matter like peat moss, manure, or compost. Pine straw as a mulch will also help acidify the soil.





## Urban Gardening Tips

By Urban Gardening Program Assistant

Spring time is here and garden enthusiasts can't wait to plant their spring veggies. March and April are the best months to plant warm season crops and you can still sneak in a few cool season ones.

Check all sprinklers and hoses for leaks and apply 1" of water per week while plants are small. Consider installing a drip system or use soaker hoses to keep water off the leaves. This will help reduce disease problems.

Be sure to scout for pests and disease as populations will increase as the temperature warms up. Always identify the pest or disease prior to treating the problem. Use products that are easy on beneficial insects like Insecticidal Soaps and Oils, and BT. Avoid using Sevin because it is very toxic to bees and we need these in the garden to pollinate our vegetables. If you must use Sevin, wait until early evening to apply when there is no bee activity.

To obtain maximum fruit size and decrease fruit rot

be sure to trellis plants such as cucumbers. Provide support for plants with overbearing amounts of fruit such as tomatoes. If

using wire cages, make sure the tomatoes will fit through the holes when you're ready to harvest.

Make sure to follow the recommendations for spacing in the vegetable gardening guide or those on the seed packets. Look for varieties that perform well in Florida as we have a unique climate.

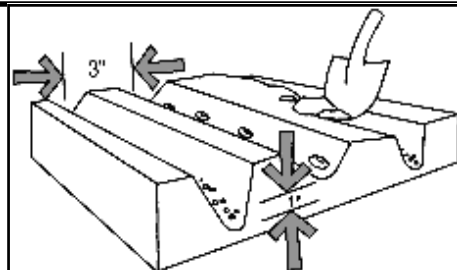
Last—plant early to beat the pests; especially corn due to earworm. Once silks form, use BT frequently.



## To Do List for Spring

By Urban Gardening Program Assistant

- Take soil samples and have them tested for pH.
- Prepare soil by broadcasting 2-4 pounds/100 sq. feet of 8-8-8 fertilizer and incorporate into the ground 2-3 weeks before planting the garden.
- Plan your garden on paper. Choose crops your family likes and make sure to group them by plant family. This helps control pest and disease cycles. Remember to rotate those crops. Don't plant tomatoes in the same spot year after year.
- Plant into the ground on a cloudy overcast day to prevent the plants from being "shocked". To aid in this process, set the plants out in their containers a few days prior to planting and let them harden off.
- Once planted, band in 2-3 inches from the side of each plant 4oz/10ft row of 8-8-8 fertilizer. (See figure 2)
- Water the plants immediately after planting. When the plants are small they will need 1" of water per week. If extremely hot or windy, more may be needed. Try to hand water to avoid wasting water plus this will cut down on weed problems by not watering the entire garden. Once established they will need 2" per week.
- Mulch the plants with grass clippings, leaves, pine straw, newspaper, or black plastic. This will keep weeds down, conserve moisture, prevent erosion, and protect roots from damage due to cultivation.
- Side dress the plants with fertilizer every 7-14 days depending on the plants needs.
- Scout for pests twice a week. Hand picking works well for home gardens.
- Keep weeds to a minimum. They rob plants of space, water, and nutrients plus harbor pests and diseases .
- Have a bountiful harvest!



**Figure 2. Fertilizer applied by the banding method is placed in furrows 3 inches from the sides of the row and slightly below the depth of the seed.**

## Basil, A Great Summer Herb



Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*) is an annual plant with a somewhat spicy taste. It has a very pleasant smell that comes in a wide range of leaf color and shape. Fragrance in the plant ranges from lemon to cinnamon to licorice. Sweet basil has a nice green oval shaped leaf while the Purple Ruffle variety has a deep red-purple color with a ruffled glossy leaf. Basil will grow up to 3 feet tall. Blooms are tiny and white or purplish on a long spike. Basil can be propagated from seed or by cuttings. Basil likes enriched soil and mulch. Try not to let the plant go to seed by keeping it trimmed. Basil has been used for vinegars, salads, meat flavoring, pastas, and is the main ingredient in pesto.

### Italian Pomodoro Sauce with Basil

Makes about one quart of delicious tomato sauce and cooks in 30 minutes

Ingredients: 1/4 cup cold pressed extra virgin olive oil

1 medium onion, finely chopped

1/4 cup minced or thinly sliced fresh garlic (yes, that's a lot of garlic)

28 oz can crushed tomatoes in puree (if using diced tomatoes add 2 T tomato paste to thicken the sauce)

1/2 tsp salt

1/4 tsp freshly ground pepper

10 large, fresh basil leaves, whole or torn into pieces

Sauté onion in olive oil until soft, 8 to 10 minutes. Add garlic and sauté 1 to 2 minutes until fragrant. Add tomatoes, salt and pepper and simmer 20 to 30 minutes until tomatoes are very soft and sauce is thick. Lay basil on top of the sauce. Turn off the heat and cover for 5 minutes. Uncover and stir. Use immediately, refrigerate or freeze.

## Growing Tomatoes

Tomatoes (*Lycopersicon esculentum*) are a favorite of almost all vegetable growers. The fresh garden taste is unbeatable! Even if you don't have a lot of room to grow in your yard, always consider container growing. Tomatoes come in two different types, determinate and indeterminate. Determinate varieties are a bushy type of plant. The blossoms and the fruit develop all at one time, which makes the harvest time fairly short. If you choose to grow tomatoes in a container, plant a determinate variety rather than an indeterminate type. Indeterminate varieties have the nature of growing very tall. They can grow 5 to 8 feet in height. These varieties require plant support by staking or caging them. They will produce a shoot or "sucker" at each leaf axil that should be removed when it is 2-4 inches in length.

This allows the plant to put its energy into fruit production rather than vegetative growth. Indeterminate varieties will grow until a frost kills them therefore, harvest will last a long time.

There are hundreds of varieties out there, but here are some that are recommended for our area:

- Large Fruit Indeterminate Varieties:  
Floradel, Tropic, Manalucie, Better Boy, Bonnie Best
- Small Fruit Indeterminate Varieties: Red Cherry, Sweet Chelsea, Sweet 100, Sweet Million
- Large Fruit Determinate Varieties: Walter, Suncoast, Floramerica, Floradade, Duke, Sunny, Solar Set, Celebrity
- Small Fruit Determinate Varieties: Floragold, Florida Basket, Florida Lanai, Patio, Cherry Grande, San Marzaon



## *Time to Fertilize for Spring by Terry DelValle*

March is the time to give our lawns a kick to fill in areas damaged by cold weather. Wait for lawns to begin greening up before throwing down the fertilizer. The best way to know what fertilizer to use and at what rate is to send a soil sample to the Soils Lab at the University of Florida. The cost is \$7.00 per sample. Forms may be obtained from the county extension office. For those of you without specific information, the best advice is to find a fertilizer for lawns that has the 1st and 3rd numbers almost equal and the middle number should be below 2 or zero, like 15-0-15. If you can't find this, go with the traditional 12-4-8 or 16-4-8. Look for one that has slow release nitrogen and minor elements, especially iron.

Woody plants can be fertilized at the same rate as recommended for lawns, but you might need a different analysis fertilizer. An azalea, palm or citrus type fertilizer will work for most woody ornamental plants. Fruit trees, especially citrus and pecans, should be fertilized to avoid nutrient deficiencies.

Determine the amount of fertilizer needed by calculating the square feet of bed area to be treated: multiply the length by the width of the lawn or bed area. The University of Florida has developed an easy conversion chart to help homeowners avoid math. Check the table below to determine the amount of fertilizer to apply for a given area. If using a fertilizer with 30% or more water insoluble nitrogen, the amount below can be doubled. To determine the % of water insoluble nitrogen, divide the amount of water insoluble nitrogen listed on the label by the 1st number of the fertilizer analysis and multiply by 100. St. Augustine lawns need a minimum of 2 applications per year, in March and again in September. Depending on the lawn type, more applications may be necessary to maintain plant vigor. For a moderate maintenance St. Augustine lawn, apply a slow release nitrogen in April and ferrous sulfate, iron sulfate (acid soil) or iron chelate (alkaline soil) in July.

Don't apply fertilizers within 10' of a water body or hard surface. Remove fertilizers from hard surfaces by blowing back onto the lawn. Don't apply fertilizers before a heavy rain. Apply 1/4" of water after application.

Lawn (sq. feet)	6%N*	10%N*	12%N*	15%N*	16%N*	23%N*	27%N*
<b>1000</b>	8.4 lbs. 17.4 cups	5 lbs. 9.5 cups	4.2 lbs. 8.7 cups	3.3 lbs. 7.25 cups	3.1 lbs. 6.5 cups	2.2 lbs. 5.5 cups	1.9 lbs. 4.75 cups
<b>2000</b>	16.8 lbs. 34.8 cups	10 lbs. 19 cups	8.4 lbs. 17.4 cups	6.6 lbs. 14.5 cups	6.2 lbs. 13 cups	4.4 lbs. 11.0 cups	3.8 lbs. 9.5 cups
<b>3000</b>	25.2 lbs. 52.2 cups	15 lbs. 28.5 cups	12.6 lbs. 26.1 cups	9.8 lbs. 21.8 cups	9.4 lbs. 19.5 cups	6.6 lbs. 16.6 cups	5.8 lbs. 14.5 cups
<b>4000</b>	33.6 lbs. 69.6 cups	20 lbs. 38 cups	16.8 lbs. 34.8 cups	13.2 lbs. 29 cups	12.6 lbs. 26 cups	8.8 lbs. 22.0 cups	7.8 lbs. 19.5 cups
<b>5000</b>	42 lbs. 87.2 cups	25 lbs. 47.5 cups	21 lbs. 43.6 cups	16.4 lbs. 36.4 cups	15.8 lbs. 32.5 cups	11.0 lbs. 27.6 cups	9.8 lbs. 24.5 cups

\*The percentage corresponds to the first of the three numbers found on the bag. For example, use the 15% calculations when using a 15-2-15 product. These figures assume that you are applying the recommended rate of 1/2 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. For more information on lawn fertilization, refer to the Residential Landscape section of <http://turf.ufl.edu> or consult your local County Extension Service office for lawn fertilization fact sheets.

This table was taken from ENH962, Figuring Out Fertilizer for the Home Lawn.

# Training Deciduous Fruit Trees By Larry Figart

Proper pruning and training of fruit trees is necessary to obtain maximum yields of high quality fruit throughout the life of the tree. Pruning is a general term which refers to selective removal of plant parts to obtain a desired growth or developmental response. Pruning fruit trees is necessary to maintain tree health, vigor and productivity throughout the life of the home orchard.

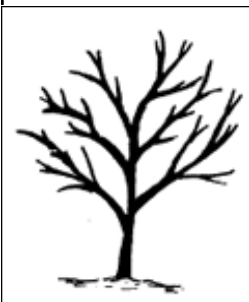
Training on the other hand should begin at planting and may consist of light pruning along with various other horticultural practices. The primary objective of training is to develop a strong tree framework of optimum size and shape.

Pruning and training a fruit tree benefits the tree by promoting a strong framework, enhances productivity, increases fruit quality, maintains tree vigor, and produces a framework for harvesting.

Pruning deciduous fruit trees should be performed during the late winter or early spring before the trees bloom. Some pruning may be necessary at other times due to storms or broken branches. Pruning removes the trees ability to capture sunlight so it should be carefully thought out and planned prior to initiation. The types of pruning cuts are very similar to those used in pruning shade trees. They are branch collar pruning cuts and reduction cuts.

Smooth, clean pruning cuts callous quickly and minimize the likelihood of invasion from pathogens. Before making any cuts, become familiar with the various types of pruning equipment, their uses and limitations, and the basics of equipment maintenance. Be sure your equipment is properly adjusted and in good working order.

Training deciduous fruit trees should start at the time of planting. Untrained fruit trees will not produce the quality or quantity of desirable fruit. The two types of training systems are called the modified central leader system and the open center system.



Modified Central Leader

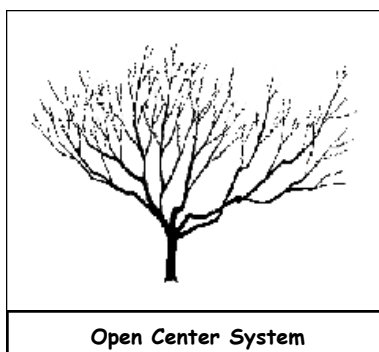
The modified central leader system is very similar to how we train shade trees. It develops a strong central leader with weight bearing scaffold limbs spaced 6-10 inches apart radiating from the tree in all directions. Apples, pears, and persimmons are trained to the modified central leader system.

When the trees are planted cut the central leader back to a height of 32-36 inches. This will stimulate the tree to produce two or three exceptionally vigorous lateral shoots just below the heading-back cut. When these shoots are 8" to 10" long, select one to continue developing the leader and remove the other one or two competing lateral shoots. As lateral limbs form on the tree select well spaced limbs with wide crotch angles to be the scaffold limbs.

After five to seven properly positioned scaffold limbs have been selected, continue to remove shoots which compete with the central leader during each dormant pruning. Always remove dead, diseased, or damaged wood.

The open center system is used for stone fruits such as peaches and plums. As the name implies, the open center system opens more of the interior of the tree to sunlight.

As in the central leader system, cut back the tree to a height of 30-36 inches at planting. This will stimulate the tree to produce vigorous sprouts below the cut. The following dormant season after planting, pick three or



Open Center System

four limbs to become the scaffold limbs. All other shoots coming from the trunk should be removed. These scaffold limbs should be cut back to about 24-36 inches in length. Pruning during future dormant seasons should

promote the original scaffold limbs while cutting back shoots that develop on the scaffold branches to stimulate additional branches. Any shoots growing upright should be pruned back to maintain a lateral growth. During subsequent growing seasons, selective removal of young succulent shoots may be required to keep the center of the tree open. As always, remove suckers and water sprouts as they develop.

For further information on pruning deciduous fruit trees refer to Fact Sheet HS 82 "Pruning and Training Deciduous Fruit Trees" at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/MG/MG34500.pdf>. You can find further information on fruit tree production at: <http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/>.

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## Master Gardener Spring Plant Clinics by Terry DelValle

### March 10 from 9-12 noon

- Proctor Ace Hardware, 5723 University Blvd.
- Proctor Ace Hardware, 580 Atlantic Blvd.
- Hagan Ace Hardware, 12501 San Jose Blvd.
- Halls Nursery, 5645 Blanding Blvd.
- Naval Air Station Exchange
- Turner Ace Hardware, 5827Arlington Road

### March 31 from 9-12 noon

- Turner Ace Hardware, 13164 Atlantic Blvd.
- Turner Ace Hardware, 784 Marsh Landing Parkway
- Plant Ranch, 14108 Beach Blvd.
- Halls Nursery, 111524 San Jose Blvd.
- ◆ Lowes of Mandarin, 4040 Oldefield Crossing
- ◆ Gore's Nursery, 10357 New Kings Road

### April 14 from 9-12 noon

- Philips Garden Center, 4234 Herschel St. (10-1PM)
- Home Depot, 855 South Lane Ave.
- Lowe's of West Jax, 5155 Lenox Ave.
- Lowe's of North Jax, 13125 City Square Dr.
- Earth Works, 1205 Beach Blvd.
- Spaulding Feed & Hardware, 2510 New Berlin Road

Visit local retail nurseries to get the latest info from the University of Florida. Bring soil samples for pH testing and plant problems for troubleshooting.

Extension information and services are available to all individuals regardless of race, color, sex or national origin. The information given herein is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names is made with the understanding that no endorsement by the Cooperative Extension Service is implied. This public document was promulgated at an annual cost of \$295.20 or .82 cents per copy to inform garden center personnel and homeowners of research results in ornamental horticulture. For persons with hearing or speech impairments, when contacting our office, please use the Florida Relay Service at 1-800-955-8771 (TDD).

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.