March Gardening Guide 2012
By Patricia Porchey

Q: When can I prune my plants?

A: For the majority of your plants, now is the perfect time to prune. There was relatively little cold damage this winter compared to the two previous years, but there is some dead wood on the periphery of many plants. This warmer than normal winter has triggered lots of new growth, bursts of new foliage as well as early spring blooms.

In order not to stress your plants, remember these guidelines for pruning before you start: remove no more than 1/4th of a tree canopy or 1/3rd of a shrub mass when pruning. Start by removing those branches that are dead; however, just because a branch is leafless doesn’t necessarily mean it is dead. To determine if it is live wood, bend it to see if it is brittle or flexible and lightly scratch the surface to see if it is green inside.

Now is also the time to remove broken, crisscrossing, errant or diseased branches. If a spring-flowering shrub or tree has become too large, why not enjoy its flowers first before you prune it? Summer bloomers such as crape myrtle can be pruned now without interfering with its bloom set on new wood. If you would like to keep your fruit trees shorter so you can reach the fruit better, these can be pruned, even if they are blooming.

Palm fronds need to be removed only if they are totally brown. Partially green leaves are still providing energy to the plant. As we learned last year, it may take 6 months to determine if a palm has died as a result of the cold. You’ll need to wait for a new spear to emerge and open to tell you it’s alive.

For more information on proper pruning methods, see UF publications http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/woody/pruning.shtml

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.


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), jamboticaba, kumquat, loquat, strawberry, and papaya.

Blooming plants: Angel’s trumpet, azalea, blue flag iris, blue sage, bottlebrush, Bougainvillea, cape honeysuckle, Carolina Jessamine, citrus, dwarf Indian hawthorn, flame vine, skullcap,
geranium, lantana, Mexican flame vine, Nemesia, orchid tree, purple Tabebuia, silk floss tree, society garlic, Surinam cherry, Walter’s Viburnum, and bird of paradise.

**Upcoming educational classes:**
Call 861-5000 or register on-line [http://sarasota.ifas.ufl.edu/](http://sarasota.ifas.ufl.edu/) for the following classes.
- FYN: Nine Landscape Principles, North Port Library, 6:30 p.m. March 6
- Non-native Invasive Plants, Phillippi Estates Park, Noon March 7
- Growing Citrus in the Home Landscape, Jacaranda Library, 10:30 a.m. March 8
- Rain Barrel Workshop, Gulf Gate Library, 10:30 a.m. March 9
- Caring for Mature Trees, North Port Library, 6:30 p.m. March 13
- Irrigation for Successful Organic Gardens, Phillippi Estates Park, Noon March 14
- Florida Snakes, Shamrock Park, 2:00 p.m. March 15
- Rain Barrel Workshop, Twin Lakes Park, 10:00 a.m. March 17
- FYN: Creating Your Florida Yard, Elsie Quirk Library, 10:00 a.m. March 20
- Propagation 101, Garden of the 5 Senses-North Port, Noon March 22
- How to Raise Beneficial Insects for Organic Gardening, Phillippi Estates Park, Noon March 28

**GETTING HELP**
The Master Gardener Help Desk is available to answer your questions, 861-9807, mghelpdesk@scgov.net. Walk-ins are welcome Monday-Friday from 9-Noon and 1-4 p.m., Twin Lakes Park, Clark Road east of I-75.
Satellite Help Desks: Weekly at four South County libraries, every 1st and 3rd Monday at Gulf Gate Library, every 4th Saturday at Fruitville Library, every Wednesday at Phillippi Farmhouse Market, 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. and every third Saturday at the Downtown Farmers’ Market, Sarasota.

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