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Living Screens

Barbara Holder SRCMGV trainee

Have you considered utilizing a living screen for privacy?

Slightly over a year ago, my husband and I moved into a lovely Pace, Florida community. We were told that the land behind us was a natural preserve. By last spring the land had been cleared for a new housing development.

Our backyard had a four-foot high steel wire fence comprised of 4x4 inch squares with Carolina Jasmine growing on it. (refer to the picture) Trying to think "outside of the box" I tried to find an inexpensive way to obtain some privacy. I came up with the idea of a living screen.



Prior to constructing a living screen, please research the county, city and applicable HOA restrictions. In Santa Rosa County, Florida there is no mention of guidelines for a living screen, nor did my HOA have restrictions. The county and HOA have restrictions on a fence being no higher than 4, 5 or 8 feet depending on the material and placement in your yard.



The living screen on my property is 12 feet tall. My HOA has approved of the height. In one growing season the existing Carolina Jasmine has made great strides in reaching the top in several areas of my screen. There are several varieties and colors of jasmine. Some also climb higher than others. Unfortunately, the Jasmine that existed on my property only blooms twice a year for about a week.



Following research on the [IFAS Gardening Solutions](#) and [ASKIFAS](#) websites and consultation with a wonderful Master Gardener I decided to add Trumpet Vine, Coral Honeysuckle, Wisteria and White Star Jasmine to aide in filling in gaps of coverage and to attract hummingbirds and pollinators to my yard. Keep in mind that vines may be considered invasive. Some may be best kept in pots if this is a concern for you.

Spring is the perfect time for designing and planting a living screen. To find plants that thrive in our area attend *local* flower festivals such as the Spring Festival of Flowers in Milton the first weekend in April. The Santa Rosa Master Gardeners Plant Sale is April 26 (from 9-1) at the Extension office in Milton on Dogwood Drive (Hwy 89).



A Simple, Yet Valuable Gardening Tool

Daniel E. Mullins

Extension Horticultural Agent, SRC, retired.

A soil thermometer can be one of the most useful and educational gardening aids found in the tool shed. Useful, because it helps to take the guess work out of deciding when to plant certain flower and vegetable seeds. It is also educational because if you haven't used one, you are in for some eye-opening experiences. Guesses concerning soil temperatures are usually wrong - often by as much as 20 degrees.

So, why the big concern about soil temperature? It can literally mean the difference between success and failure, especially in the early spring garden. Most warm season vegetables and flowers won't germinate and grow properly until the soil temperatures reach the high 60s to low 70s. Even transplants of vegetables, such as tomatoes and peppers, and flower plants will not grow normally until the soil warms up and maintains stable temperatures.

I promise that once you begin checking soil temperature, you will be amazed. Most surprising is the great fluctuation. Winter and early spring soil temperatures can rise into the seventies during the day, and drop back to the fifties at night. The lowest night temperatures should be observed closely because they will dictate the earliest that tender plants can be started during the spring.

When choosing a soil thermometer there are several considerations. First, it should be weather-proof. The instrument is most useful when the probe is placed in the ground and left there for several days or weeks. This allows you to check the soil temperature as often as desired by simply looking at the dial.

The probe should be pointed at the end to allow for easy penetration of the soil, and should be of sufficient length to be versatile. Readings at a four to six inch depth are acceptable for helping to determine seeding and transplanting times. Most soil thermometers have probes that are 4 to 8 inches in length, and are usually adequate. There are however, thermometers that have extra long probes - in the eighteen to twenty four inch range. These are valuable when composting. The long probe is inserted so that the tip is in the center of the pile. It will let you know when the compost is heating up, and when the center begins to cool down. With that information a composter knows exactly when to turn the pile, allowing it to go through repeated heating until all material is properly decomposed. The thermometer also lets you know when the pile no longer heats up after turning, which means that the composting process is finished.

The use of soil temperature and its application to planting and various other gardening activities must be tempered with a knowledge of local weather patterns. For example, it is often possible to obtain a 70 degree reading during warm periods in January. Such a reading in mid-winter is obviously a temporary condition that will change with the arrival of the next cold front.

Watch for a gradual rise in soil temperature which remains stable for several days and does not drop below the mid to high 60s at night. Don't trust a quick warming too early in the season, or you could find yourself replanting.

Photo : Unsplash

Question of the Month: I planted some cabbage in February and it was growing well until recently. It suddenly stopped making heads and began sending up seed stalks. What is causing this?

Answer: Cabbage, and other vegetables in the Crucifer group which includes broccoli, brussels sprouts, mustard, turnip and cauliflower, are cold hardy, but are sensitive to extremes in temperature. Your planting date for cabbage was correct, but we had some weather during March that probably triggered premature flowering, or "bolting." The temperatures suddenly dropped to the mid-twenties three or four weeks ago, followed by a warm period. To the cabbage, this signaled that winter was over and it was time to make seed. Some cabbage varieties are more resistant to bolting than others.

Photo: UF/IFAS communications



The article and Question of the Month were written in 1998 it is possible that some recommendations or practices may have changed since they were written

Prepping for Spring

Quick Guidelines

Weather

A great up to the minute source to check air temperature, wind chill and precipitation is FAWN (Florida Automated Weather Network) <https://fawn.ifas.ufl.edu/data/>



Roses

In North Florida, (hybrid tea, grandiflora, and floribunda) should be pruned in mid-February to March. Pruning during this time requires the shortening of main canes and lateral branches. Remove dead, diseased, spindly, or injured branches. The benefits of pruning are an improved form, a regulated height, improved air circulation, and more evenly distributed light. One to three year old cane's should be pruned to half their length. Prune just above a leaf node that is facing outward in order to encourage outward growth, away from other canes.



Azalea

Do *not* prune in winter, prune just after flowering in the spring. Pruning at the wrong time can diminish or prevent flowers blooming next spring. Azaleas are winter hardy, there is no need to cover them!



Ornamental Grasses

Some ornamental grasses (including sedges, rushes, horsetails and sweet flag) are evergreens but the ones that aren't, will have dead grass blades until the new growth in the spring. They do not die in the winter; they just go dormant. They do not need winter watering as long as they are established in their environment. Cut these grasses back to the ground in late winter and fertilize when they begin growing in the spring.

It is important to note that pampas grass, ribbon grass, and their related cultivars are currently classified as invasive species in Florida.

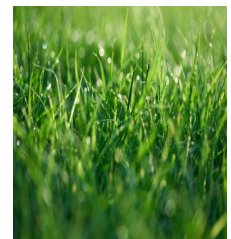


Turf Grass

Healthy turf grass is a major contributor in the *prevention* of soil erosion by filtering storm water runoff.

In the North Panhandle areas of Florida, the root systems "slough off" during the Winter months. Sufficient warming is required for root growth. Wait to fertilize your lawn until it is actively growing, generally mid-April.

To train turf grass to be more drought tolerant in the North Panhandle of Florida, turf grass lawns should be irrigated every two to three weeks during the dormant season. Watering through the winter enables the viable roots to encourage new root growth and greening of the turf grass in the spring. Watering in the early hours of morning allows the leaf blade to dry.



Fruit Trees

To help protect fruit trees from frost use breathable freeze cloth, lights, mulch and water the soil. Some examples of DIY covers are pictured below.



Landscape Plants

Choose the right location and plant cold sensitive plants in areas that are protected from cold winds and frost pockets. Water your plants well before freezing temperatures arrive. Wet soil radiates heat which will help protect plants. Move potted plants to indoors or shade plants under established tree and plant canopies. Mulch to trap radiating ground heat. Use frost cloth, blankets or sheets for coverings that extend to the ground, being careful not to touch the foliage. Group pots together and cover with sheets or mulch to reduce heat loss. After the freeze, watering may actually help defrost the frozen soil. Don't prune until spring. Cold injured plants will sprout below any frost damage. After sprouting, it will become evident where you should prune.

Written by Master Gardener Trainees: Trisha May, Jennifer Slycord, Pamela Hill, Juanita Reynolds, Mia Erickson Stevens, Jill Hickerson, Ben Hammond, Melanie Shomshor, Sharon Rhyne, Andrea Light, Jeff Nagatz

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Fruit tree covers - Juanita Reynolds

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Where can I find more information?

The UF/IFAS Extension Solutions for Your Life website and Gardening Solutions website offer online material, including pre-recorded webinars and videos, that can be accessed at your convenience.

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/lawn-and-garden/>

<https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/>

In addition, we have our Master Gardener webinar page and our Gardening in the Panhandle web archives full of educational content.

<https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/mastergardener/volunteers/education/webinars.html>

<http://nwdistrict.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/>

For a listing of local offices visit

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/find-your-local-office/>

Follow us on Facebook for updates

<https://www.facebook.com/SRCExtension/> Santa Rosa County Extension FB page:

<https://www.facebook.com/GardeningInThePanhandle/>

The Santa Rosa County residential horticulture agent, Josh Criss can be reached at 850-623-3868. joshua.criss@ufl.edu



Come see us at the
Milton Extension Office!
6263 Dogwood Drive
Milton, FL 32570

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