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**Memorial DAY**  
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**We Care**  
**407-737-1889**



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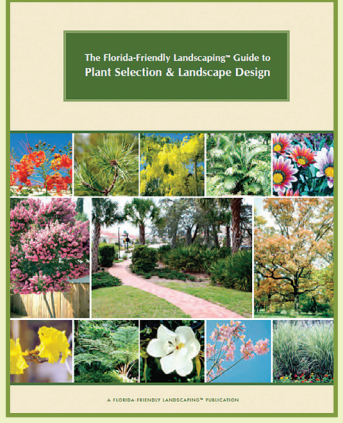
# SCHOOL'S OUT... WATCH OUT FOR CHILDREN!



## PICKING THE RIGHT PLANTS

We often get asked for planting recommendations. This is something we are always willing to do. But generally a customer has a style or look in mind. The following information will take you to a web site that list 100's of plants considered good for our Florida environment. From trees to ground cover. This gives you an opportunity to look at a wide selection and get some ideas. Then you can go to a garden center to meet the plant in person and decide if it is the one for you. This sounds like internet dating doesn't it? Anyway it does cost \$1.99 for a year's subscription but it includes everything you need to know. Sun, shade, wet, dry, tall, small, and so on.

Google search "FFL Plant Guide". (Florida Friendly Landscape Plant Guide) If this does not take you directly to the site you can search "[IFAS](#)" This will bring up the University of Florida web site. Open the IFAS site and in the site search bar type "[Florida Friendly Landscaping](#)" Click on the page link and look on the right side of the page and you will see a block "[Find the right plant](#)" click on "[go to app](#)". That should get you to the link where you can see a preview of what you will get. Happy plant hunting!



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EMAIL THE EDITOR ~ Do you have a question or comment you would like addressed in an upcoming newsletter?  
Send them to [qualityfirst@qfls.com](mailto:qualityfirst@qfls.com)



Owned & Operated by  
Jeff & Debra Melmer

## 10 plants that are natural mosquito repellents:

Citronella

Citronella Grass

Lemon Balm

Marigolds

Catnip

Lavender

Lemon Verbena

Creeping Lemon Thyme

Basil

Rosemary

Most Herbs are natural Mosquito repellents

## A MESSAGE FROM JEFF MELMER

It is hard to believe that it is May and by the time you read this it will be close to June. Hopefully the start of the rainy season has begun or is almost upon us. As I write this message, I reviewed last year's edition, and as hard as it is to believe some of the issues mirror the start of last year. Fortunately this year we have had some rainfall all be it sporadic at best. The cooler temperatures allowed the lack of rain to have less of an impact as well.

We will start back in February as it was a warm month, the warmest average temperature on record. These temperatures gave all our turf, shrubs and trees the idea it was spring. Grass started to grow and green up, shrubs and trees began to flush out new growth and even bloom. Then March showed up and temperatures fell back to below normal. This did not affect trees and shrubs much but it had a big impact on our turf, especially Zoysia. The cool temperatures basically shut Zoysia growth down for the month.

Zoysia can be temperamental when it comes to temperature. It sort of does what it wants and trying to push growth is a futile effort and can cause even worse problems. Our St. Augustine prefers a little cooler temperature in the spring and as our spring feeding was applied our St. Augustine began to grow and color up nicely.

In April we finally received some measurable precipitation, but again it was relatively localized. The rest of April was very moderate and it was very comfortable to be outside.

As May began we started looking forward to our summer rains. These are generally a blessing, but can also be a curse. We all become complacent when the

rains begin, as we feel that with all that rain I do not have to water. The unfortunate part is that it does not always rain everywhere. Monitoring rain fall in your area is important so you know how much rain YOU received. This allows you to make the decision to shut off your irrigation or skip a cycle. This is the only true way to save money on watering and reduce usage to benefit the environment. Our turf needs 1.5 to 2 inches of water per week, by monitoring a rain gauge you can better manage your watering practice. On May 5th in the Orlando Sentinel there was a good irrigation article. It is in Home & Style page D2 if you have access and interest. "What is smart lawn irrigation?"



Water, rain, and irrigation are a common denominator to the success of our landscapes and quite honestly one of the most frustrating to overcome, or to understand how and why moisture saturates the ground the way it does. As I work in my yard (garden) I find on a regular basis dry areas and wonder how could that be, there is an irrigation head right there! We work diligently to learn, grow and understand water / irrigation so that we may better explain its processes and achieve the levels expected in our landscape.

I always believe that our newsletters are informative and educational. We look for seasonal and topical issues to bring to your attention. Again, in this newsletter we have compiled a lot of interesting articles for your review.

## IRRIGATION CONTROLLER CLOCKS

Some very intuitive and extremely technical irrigation controller clocks are coming to market. New technology always has a period when controlled testing is completed and the product goes to market and then often adjustments for real world challenges are made to make the product even better.

Have you ever seen it rain hard on the other side of the street and not your side? Many including myself have seen this happen in person. Our main source of rainfall comes from thunderstorms that can be very fast moving since the state is so flat and close to sea level. Coming from the mid-west we would have

a rain come in and stay for days. We had very few of the short cloud burst we have here in Florida. This is very important to think about when irrigation is the subject.

"Rachio" and some other brands are producing a clock that monitors the weather and adjust based on what it learns from the nearby weather receivers used by meteorologist. The problem we are finding is that these data collection sites are generally spread around the city and there are not many of them. Commonly these are found at airports and city complexes like water treatment facilities. You likely have heard the radio weather report that says the

current temperatures at OIA is 72 degrees.

As we work with these Smart irrigation system controllers we are seeing cases where the system has shut off the water when the property is in desperate need, because the collection site gave the system a reading that did not match what was happening a few miles away at the actual property. We also have difficulty testing these systems unless the owner is home to allow us access to their Wi-Fi. Even then we have had additional issues making the connection so we can control the system.

# IRRIGATION CONTROLLER CLOCKS

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Our suggestion is that should you decide to use a system like Rachio be sure to install the soil moisture sensors. Make sure you have enough sensors to match the different conditions on your property. (full sun, half day sun, all day filtered

sun, and so on) Do not allow the weather tracking to override the moisture sensors. Plan to be available to help us gain access to your Wi-Fi and your selected controller program on our first visit. You may even think about holding off on the

switch to these type systems until they become more reliable, especially if you travel or are away from home frequently.

## ZOYSIA

This was a very challenging spring. Cooler temperatures through March really slowed us down. As May temperatures heat up our Zoysia lawns are starting to grow again and by the end of May we should be looking as good as expected.

The spring Zoysia cut down is always a difficult subject. This is very dirty and laborious task, but an extremely necessary one. This is more than anything a dethatching process. This is a process that will always be a necessity, but does not have to be an annual event if the turf is cared for properly throughout the year. Zoysia performs its best at less than 1.5 inches high. Our landscapers do not always understand the importance of mowing height. Please review this with your landscaper or whoever mows your grass so that we can avoid the cut down issue if at all possible.

Our belief is that every 3 to 4 years you will need to dethatch your Zoysia, but if you only had to do it once every 3 to 4 years I would feel good as we have done a better job educating our customers and landscapers resulting in the proper mowing of our Zoysia grass.

After you have done a cut down or a buzz cut the next question we get asked is "how long should we keep cutting this short"? Our recommendation is to keep cutting it at the cut down height for as much time as possible. The first increase in the height likely will come in June to July. This is when the rainy season really starts to push growth. The rule we prefer to follow is; if you cut your grass and it is still green after the mowing (no signs of scalping) then maintain that height. It is when you cut the grass and have a whitish or brownish look (mild scalping) then it is

time to raise the mower 1 notch. Late July to August is approximately when the same discoloring will show after mowing (mild scalping)

and it will be time to raise the mower 1 more notch. We hope at this time you are not over 1.5 inch and continue the season at that height. This will make the spring Buzz Cut much easier to complete as there will be way less material that must be removed. For the best health and look of your Zoysia lawn it should never be mowed higher than 2 inches.

There always seems to be questions concerning Zoysia and mowing. Please consult with your technician or call the office for additional information.



## SERVICE

May has now become the beginning of Sod Web Worm season, although we have been finding Sod Web Worm during April as well they really take off in May. Your next turf application includes our Sod Web Worm prevention treatment.

This will be our fourth year using this product. The supplier of the product we use for Sod Web Worm control and prevention said last year we were only 1 of 2 companies in the state that used this

product. The other company was in Tampa. We are doing our best to protect your property and take advantage of technology which can be very costly. This is why the other companies do not use this product.

It is also the beginning of Chinch Bug season. From now until late October our technicians are extremely conscientious to ensure Chinch Bugs are managed or controlled so turf damage will not be evident. If Chinch Bugs are found on your

property, treatment is made and followed up on to ensure control.

The rainy season typically makes our turf look great, but is also fuel for weed growth. We work diligently to control weeds in your turf, on occasion weeds do get ahead of us, especially during rainy periods. Our technicians note these problems and follow ups are set to ensure weed control is achieved and monitored throughout the rainy season.

## SHRUBS & TREES

This past winter was much colder than we have had for several years and of course we had significant cold injury to much of our landscape plants. As of this date many of these plants have been very slow to recover. Some of these plants may need to be replaced. Some will seem to recover nicely only to succumb to the cold damage later in the year. Large plants tend not to show the extent of damage done until the sap hardens. This can take months or an extreme event before the true health of the plant is revealed. Trim back damaged wood until you get to green wood. The further the cutback the longer it will take for the plant to grow back.

The time issue is what is hard to deal with, especially with our more tropical palms. These plants will recover but it will be at their own pace. Foxtail, Royal, Areca, Fishtail, Bottle, and

Adonedia (Christmas Palm) palms are common in our landscape but are risky business at best. A costly variety of plant to install only to watch it struggle or die due to cold weather. Recovery may not even be complete by the time cold weather returns. Two extreme winters in a row will likely finish off these more tropical plants in our area.

A lot of shrubs that were damaged are recovering, some have completely recovered. In no particular order these are the shrubs we are still dealing with. Crotons, Coonte Ferns, Pinwheel Jasmine, Australian Fire Bush, Hibiscus, Crinum Lilies, and Duranta. A good replacement plant for Duranta is a new plant called Sunshine Ligustrum. More of a dwarf plant (growing to 3.5 ft.) it has the same yellow color of Duranta, but needs full sun for this color to show, if planted in

shade it will maintain a more lime green color.

Many of our fruit trees in our landscapes also incurred cold injury and should recover but the severity of the cold weather in your area will have a lot of influence on that recovery.

### MAGNOLIA TREES

During March and April we get inundated with calls saying "my Magnolia is dying". This is a seasonal issue and as with all plants, blooming requires a lot of extra energy and the Magnolia seems to show this the most. Leaf drop and droop are the most common signs noticeable. We believe the hurricane winds last year also reduced the foliage on the trees making the normal leaf drop this year seem much worse. By now all of our Magnolias should look normal again.

# MAKING DRY SOIL WET AGAIN!

When Florida soil gets dry it becomes very hydrophobic. This means it will repel water not allowing it to penetrate. The water will simply flow to the lowest point in that area or it will flow to an area that has not dried out and soak in. If a spot in your lawn or shrubs has dried out it will take extra water to get it wet again. Just running the irrigation more for small spots can create issues with the rest of the property and can result in a very costly water bill.

The garden sprinkler that does a side to side arch seems to work the best, another option is the water ring. Both can be purchased at your local garden center or hardware store. These sprinklers water very slowly. It can take 4 to 6 hours to get  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch on the ground when arch type sprinkler is doing 180 degree coverage. Just keep in mind when doing this, no matter how long the water runs the objective is to run it long enough so the soil gets wet again. (You get a lot more water out of a fire hose compared to a garden hose when ran the same amount of time, is the analogy I often use.) When you run your irrigation system you have many heads each putting out 2 to 5 gallons per minute. Even at that rate they generally run for nearly an hour. The garden sprinkler is only one sprinkler that is putting out about 0.5 gallon per minute. Do not compare how long your whole property irrigation system runs to the time needed for a slow flowing garden sprinkler. You can even use a rain gauge and let the system run for an hour and see how much water is on the ground and then calculate the time needed for  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch. Lastly, before turning off the water, check the soil in the problem area to make sure it got wet. You should find the first 6 inches of soil moist. If not, you will need to continue watering until you get there. A large part of your initial water will run off the hydrophobic soil. This is why slow watering is so critical. Sometimes I will run the sprinkler for an hour and then wait an hour before turning it back on to help pre-wet the soil.

Once the soil is wet again your irrigation should handle the situation as long as the original cause for lack of water has been addressed. If not, you might want to watch the area and add extra water at the first sign of wilt so the soil does not get hydrophobic again. Continue this practice until the rains start again. Hydrophobic soil takes a lot of work and time to get it wet. If you have problem areas it is best to drag out the garden sprinkler at the first signs of wilt.

**WARNING!** When turf is damaged by drought and the stress from just 1 day to long without moisture it can take 6 months to recover, if the event does not occur again while it recovers. With St. Augustine, all the roots will die and it has to grow a completely new root system making recovery extremely slow.



# INSTALLING NEW SHRUBS???

The potting material nurseries are using now is extremely porous. This allows the nursery to have greater control over nutrients and moisture resulting in a faster growth to market. This is something we just have to be aware of. It has always been the rule to bust up the root ball when installing a potted plant into soil. With this more porous potting material it is critical that this is done and done well to make sure the plants survive. (The exception would be annuals grown in potting soil) If that root ball is not broken up it will dry out faster than the soil around it causing great stress on the new plant.

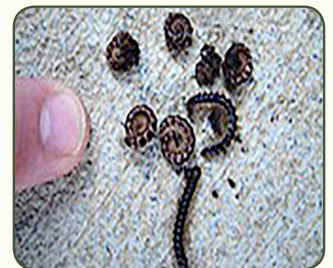
If you have wilt on some but not all of a new install, hand watering with a garden hose directly into the root ball once or twice a week will save you from replacing plants that dry out. This might only be needed for a month or 2 while the plant grows new roots.

Always remember; never install a plant so the root flares are below grade level. You can plant them to shallow with no ill effect but even a little too deep can be devastating months or years down the road.

# IT IS THAT TIME OF YEAR AGAIN

## MILLIPEDES

Soon the rains will come and along with that will be our annual Millipede invasion. These insects all lay their eggs at about the same time of the year. The egg clutch can consist of hundreds of eggs. They all hatch at about the same time. They grow rapidly and when these pests are about 1 inch long they show up by the 1000's. It is a mass migration as they leave the area they were born and go off looking for new habitat. During these migrations you might find them all over your walks, the street, the house, and even some will get inside the home. Spraying for this pest helps but because it has a very hard exoskeleton and it does not clean itself it can take several hours for them to die after contacting a pesticide. To make matters worse there is a seemingly endless supply of them. After the invasion begins they finally disappear after 4 to 6 weeks. Treating the exterior of the home and doing some exclusion will greatly reduce the ones that get inside. Treating the lawn and shrubs does no good at all. The chemicals are designed to break down quickly and while a spray will kill the ones on your property at that very moment the next day they are replaced by 1000's more as the march continues. Millipedes are extremely frustrating and messy but they do not cause any damage and are not large enough at this point to bite or sting. Once inside, even without chemicals, they will die on their own because their bodies require high levels of moisture that they cannot find inside a structure.



Always  
Break Up  
The Root Ball

