

The Compost Pile

...for discerning weeders

Gardening

(According to Phyl)

DAFFODILS
(William Wordsworth)

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,-
A host of golden daffodils
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the Milky Way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I, at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced, but they
Outdid the sparkling waves in glee;
A poet could not but be gay
In such a jocund company;
I gazed-and gazed-but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought.

For oft, when on my couch I lie,
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon my inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

etc.



Phyl at the beach

- 7 Dec. meeting agenda will be reversed: business meeting, break, Ext. report, program, lunch
- Program - Florida Daffodil Society
- Pot luck lunch
- Board meeting after lunch
- 12, 13, 14 Dec. - New Class interviews
- New Class Mentor Program being developed - Sandie Olsen
- 16 MGs potted 300 trees in Nov. - Sandy Licht & gang

Living Christmas Trees

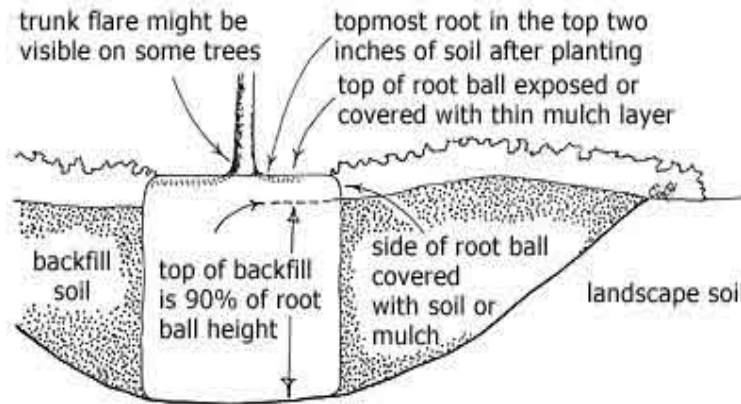
An email arrived that is so appropriate to the Season I want to share it with everyone. Jim L. from Baker writes:

"We want a Christmas tree this year that we can plant in the Spring. What kind does good here and how do I do it in this sand"?

Welcome to NW Florida, Jim and thank you for your question. You are not alone in thinking our native soil makes planting difficult, actually the opposite is true. Knowing when and how to do it correctly is the secret we're going to share today.

The two weeks after Christmas are best in our area to plant new trees and shrubs in the landscape for their best chance of survival throughout the rest of the year. The cooler temperatures and water availability give them a head start over the coming Summer heat.

There are a number of needle evergreens available for purchase, those that do well are Sand Pine, Brodie Juniper, Red Cedar and Arizona Cypress. Be sure not to choose a Norfolk Island Pine as they will not survive outdoor temperatures and are considered a houseplant to be kept in a pot. The best recommendation is to remove the tree from the container and inspect the roots before you purchase, don't invest your time and money in a root-bound plant. If this is discouraged by the store or nursery, find a new place to shop. There are several good garden centers and nurseries in North Okaloosa County, so you do have a



number of locations to find your tree.

After purchase introduce your tree gradually to warmer indoor temperatures by placing it in the garage or an enclosed porch for 3 or 4 days. Locating your tree in a cool area away from heating ducts once inside will go a long way in

preventing loss of moisture to the root ball. Getting it in the ground by New Year's Day will help insure it's survival in your yard. Reverse the procedure to reduce the shock the tree will experience going back outside.

Many gardeners believe you must amend the backfill when planting container grown plants. University of Florida research has shown this to be unnecessary and can do more harm than good if the native soil is replaced with artificial, by encouraging the roots to remain in the enriched soil. Choose the location for your tree keeping in mind the mature size, overhead wires and distance from a structure not to cause problems. Dig the planting hole one foot wider and only as deep as the container is tall. You'll want to loosen the soil in the bottom of the hole and then fill with water and let it percolate down, this will help the roots establish themselves a little quicker. After removing the container gently loosen the roots from the soil and look for the top most root, clear any top soil down to that point. Place the plant straight in the hole making sure the top of the root ball is slightly above the existing soil surface. If you can see the flare of the first root you've done it perfectly! Begin back filling around the root ball with the removed soil, about halfway through fill the hole with water to settle the soil and let it drain. Add the remaining soil and water again without packing it down. Allowing the soil to settle naturally will remove large air pockets without suffocating the roots. At this point you want to build a saucer-like catchment basin around the edge of the root ball with a soil ridge three to six inches high, do not mound the soil over the roots. Mulching to a depth of three or four inches and away from the trunk by three inches using an organic material will buffer the soil temperature, reduce weed competition and conserve moisture. Slow release fertilizer can be applied on top of the root ball and backfill soil or on top of the mulch at planting. Do not use a water soluble fertilizer on a newly installed plant as it could burn the roots if too much is applied.

Wait, you aren't finished yet. Trees and shrubs planted in our area require about six months of regular irrigation to fully establish roots in the landscape soil.

Research shows your family Christmas tree will establish more quickly with frequent irrigation during the first few months and weekly applications after that of

two to three gallons of water per inch of trunk diameter. Under-irrigating will slow the period of establishment and possibly cause the loss of your tree.

Merry Christmas and may you enjoy your new family tradition!

For a more detailed explanation on [Planting Trees and Shrubs in NW Florida](#), see University of Florida publication ENH-856.

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/EDISImagePage?imageID=292673099&dlNumber=EP112&tag=FIGURE%207&credits=>>

Christmas (or Thanksgiving) Cactus Blooms With Proper Treatment

Larry Williams

The Christmas cactus is one of my favorite holiday plants. It's relatively easy to grow but has some special needs in order to flower. Christmas cacti can be colorful plants around the holiday season with their red, pink or white blooms. But there are certain measures to perform in order to guarantee an abundance of blooms during the Christmas Season. In order to cause Christmas cactus to flower sufficiently, you must carefully manage the temperature and/or the amount of light it receives.

For it to develop buds and give the desired bloom, this plant requires cool temperatures in the fall. At 50 to 55°F night temperatures, the flower buds will form regardless of day length. At 60 to 65°F night temperatures, for buds to form the plant must be protected from any amount of artificial light at night from September to November. Flower buds seldom form at night temperatures above 70°F. After the flower buds are well developed, they will bloom at normal room temperature.

In order to insure lots of flowers, I have found the easiest thing to do is to place the plant outdoors during the fall so it will be exposed to cooler temperatures. Outdoors place the plant in a lightly shady area. You may need to provide protection from high winds or heavy rains while the plant is outdoors or temporarily bring the plant indoors during stormy weather. But most importantly, do not leave your plant outside when a frost or freeze is expected. I made that mistake once and lost a nice Christmas cactus as a result. They won't survive cold winter weather.

If you have to keep your Christmas cactus indoors exposed to normal room temperature, you can force flower buds by providing the correct amount of dark period. If the night temperature is between 55 to 70°F, your cactus will need 13 hours of uninterrupted darkness per day to set buds. But if you keep your house

toasty at night (temperatures between 70 to 85°F) then your cactus will require more darkness – about 15 hours in every 24.

To provide this extra long night treatment you can place your plant in a closet or underneath a box, large bag etc. But it's important to make sure the closet or covering is lightproof. Any interruptions in this dark treatment may result in poor flower bud initiation for the holidays. You would not want to place the plant in a closet that is opened frequently, allowing light to the plant. On the other hand, it is also important to not leave the plant covered or in the closet constantly. It will need some light during each 24-hour period. You're just trying to consistently provide a longer night period in order to force flower buds to form.

You'll probably agree that it's easier to leave the plant outside during the fall as compared to providing the extended dark treatment to encourage an abundance of flowers. Temperature control and short day treatment should be continued until buds are well developed – for six to nine weeks. Temperatures above 90°F may cause the flower buds to drop off the plant. With attention to temperature and/or day length, you can enjoy beautiful flowers on your Christmas cactus during the Holiday Season.

Scouting in the Garden

One of the purposes of IPM is to reduce our use of pesticides. One way is to scout your landscape to determine what is out there before you spray and to find out if it is really eating your plants. Trying to decide if you have found a predator or a pest might be as simple as searching some of our MG Insect ID sheets for a similar picture. Other times a little help from our friends is necessary.

I found these egg cases on a needle of a Japanese black pine. I could find no



pictures of a similar egg case. This is where the friends come in: I sent the picture to Beth Bolles, Horticulture Agent in Escambia County. Beth is one of the few people I know who really treasures a "bug". And this time she was stumped too. She sent the picture to the U of F and this is the reply that came back:

In an email from Dr. Lyle J. Buss, University of Florida

“They look very similar to eggs of a leaffooted bug, *Leptoglossus fulvicornis* (Hemiptera: Coreidae), that I've seen on magnolia. The southern pine seed bug (*L. corculus*) is found in Florida and feeds on pine conelets and seeds, and lays its eggs in that fashion. That would be my guess. Some pictures of the bug can be found at <http://www.forestpests.org/subject.html?SUB=458>”.



This is one of the pictures that ran as a Challenge during the past year. Unfortunately the critters had already hatched when I found the egg cases but I did not find a mass of little leaffooted bugs standing around sucking the juice from other plants. Maybe one our predators scarfed them up.

The pictures on the forestpests web site are pretty good...especially the one with the nymphs exiting the eggs.

Larry is always willing to share our garden discoveries with the group. Bring something in for show 'n tell. We all learn from sharing what we find.

—Lynn Fabian

Reinventing the Office Scene

Preparations are in motion to redefine the north office garden areas. For those who originally created the landscape design, it is time to become their own best critics. The time for improvisation is upon us.

The following objectives are being pursued:

- Select bulbs and/or corms and tubers for the prepared lawnside garden out in front of the office along the road
- Establish a rose garden in the prepared bed at the northeast corner

- Dig out the heavy grasses and other invasive species that have manifested themselves around the southwest roadside sump
- Uproot and discard all unwanted vegetation along the south chain-link fence
- Redefine lawn borders where needed

We will attempt to finish most of the above before the New Year. Sheila has been helpful and instructive regarding this project. Thanks to all of you who have pitched in on this project.

—Bill Skillman

Last Word

Well, I suppose this is the last word for 2005. It has been a good year for Master Gardeners. We now have a very fine presentation package available to help us give more professional presentations to the folks who request our help. Good as it may be, remember that YOU are the most important part of any presentation.

We can all be proud of our Extension Staff and the awards they brought home from their '05 conference. Sheila Dunning is now Okaloosa Extension totally and has already made an impact in one of our largest projects, the landscape. Please offer to help her and Bill Skillman's crew whenever you can. No landscape is static. In bonsai we say that the only finished tree is a dead one. The same is true of a landscape. It is a dynamic environment that needs to be nudged into better and better forms.

The web site has made the newsletter much easier to publish. We are working on better ways to get information to each of you. Trish Reynolds gave us lovely bones to hang our information on and, like the landscape, the web site is a dynamic form that will be changing over the next few months. I hope you will think of OCMGA.ORG when you need to know something about events we are involved in. The three calendars on the web site should always be up to date on MG events. I also would like suggestions from you about what you would like to see on the web site. One area I have heard you would like is a printable form of the newsletter. I hope to begin to include that soon. Andy Donatelli will be assuming most of the web master duties and I will be the backup while continuing to "publish" your newsletter. And YOUR newsletter always needs new ideas and articles. Send them along...send your ideas if not your articles.

Sadly we said goodbye to a number of our MG friends: Walt Boyle, Nita Brewer, Claudia Everage, Carolyn Leach, Pete Seda and Margaret Smith. We will miss each of them and wish them the best as they move on in their lives.

And finally, congratulations to Lockey Buhrow, the winner of the 6th Pink Flamingo Award. Based on the strangle hold she has on the bird, I'm not sure



the next winner will ever get the yard art. Randy Decker and Hal Kurz did a wonderful job of converting our broken tools into a very nice pink flamingo.

Our picnic was a great success. Thanks to Sally and her band of workers who made it such an occasion. Dr. Leon was a hit, but he'll never make it in show biz if he has to drag us along!

Thanks for a good year.

See you on the 7th.

—Lynn

The Compost Pile is a publication of the Okaloosa County Master Gardeners Association.

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