



Newsletter February 2023



Dates and Events (events are free unless noted)

Tues. Feb. 13, 7 pm, Wild Amelia Wild Nite — “*St. Marys Riverkeeper Report*”. Peck Auditorium, 516 S. 10th St, Fernandina.

Thurs. Feb. 1, 12-1pm. Jessica Warren zoom lunch and learn – “*Building Soil Health*”. Register online on Camden County Extension website/agriculture tab.

Nassau County Extension presentations. Register at [bitl.ly/NassauHorticulture](https://bit.ly/NassauHorticulture). (or Nassau Extension facebook page)

Weds. Feb. 14, 10-11 am, “Potatoes”. Online or at 85831 Miner Rd.

Sat. Feb 10, 9 am, “Lawn Workshop for new homeowners”. \$25. 85831 Miner Rd., Yulee. Register online.

For more information call 904-530-6353.

Fri., Feb. 16, 2pm. *St. Marys Arbor Day Celebration* at Sweetwater Park, 1250 Pt. Peter Rd. Sponsored by our club and the Tree Board. Wear your Garden Club shirt if you have one.

Dues are due this month, so bring to the February meeting.

Garden to-dos for February

Resist the temptation to cut back dead looking perennials until March 15. The dead foliage will help protect them from cold damage and if new growth is stimulated it can be killed by a late frost. The exception is dead foliage on hard to kill plants like cannas or gingers that have died completely back to the ground. Prune roses by Feb. 14. Fertilize after pruning. Apply organic fertilizer around each plant – 1 cup Black Kow, 1 cup fish meal (or use some fish emulsion instead) and ½ cup Epsom salts. Cut ornamental grass back to 6-12 inches and fertilize. Cut back liriopie before it starts to sprout new leaves. You don’t have to do this every year, but if it is looking ratty, now is the time. Clean out dead annuals. Prune out water sprouts, suckers, and rubbing branches from citrus. Plant calendula, dianthus, dusty miller, marguerites, pansies, petunias, and snapdragons. Plant vegetables like broccoli, cabbage, lettuce, parsley, turnips. Start your seeds inside for spring planting or the plant sale. Keep those sheets handy for covering plants when temperatures below 35 degrees are forecast. Late February is a great time to prune crape myrtles (But no Crape Murder!).

The Garden Maven’s Advice to the “Floralorn”

Dear Garden maven,

I keep seeing reports that we should get rid of our nandinas because they are deadly for the birds. Is this true?

Tenderhearted Bird Lover

Dear Bird Lover,

Yes and no. Nandina contains a small amount of cyanide. The amount can vary with the weather and time of year. Most birds will only eat nandina berries if there is nothing better tasting around. The problem is that cedar waxwings are not like most birds, who daintily eat a couple of berries and easily process the small amount of toxins in each. Cedar waxwings travel in flocks and stuff their faces until even their beaks cannot hold another berry. They totally clean out the bush in minutes. Don’t ever take them to Golden Corral! In 2009 in Decatur dozens of cedar waxwings were found dead. They examined 5 of them and they were found full of nandina berries. The only other documented nandina kill occurred in Chapel Hill NC. The university did a study and found that the leaves have a lot of cyanide, as do the green berries. Older berries lose toxicity over time, so very old berries can be nontoxic. But berries (nandina, pyracantha, crabapples, juniper, holly, and others) at the end of winter or in early spring provide another danger – fermentation. Toxicity increases after a freeze. Overripe fruit such as blueberries can also be a problem. In 2010 a group of cedar waxwings died on a Texas highway after eating overripe blueberries or fermented holly berries, depending on which account you read. Mockingbirds and robins will also eat berries in quantities to poison themselves. However, deaths from berries are miniscule next to mortality from cats, crashing into windows, and car accidents. Or flying under the influence.

So should we rip out our nandinas? If you are a native plant person, of course, get rid of the invasive invader. Replace them with plants that the birds like better, like eastern red cedar, beautyberry, spice bush, chokeberry, holly, or wax myrtle. But if, like me, you like the look of these old-fashioned bushes, you can take a more moderate approach. Simply cut off the flowers in the spring and you will not get berries (or volunteers springing up where you don’t want them). The birds will be happy and so will you. **The Maven**

Plant Hero of the Month: Even though the winter has been cold, for some wacky reason I still have impatiens blooming.