

St Marys Garden Club Newsletter

February 2019

Dates and Events (events are free unless noted)

Nassau Extension Plant Clinics (10am-2pm): Feb. 11, Feb. 25 (Monday), Yulee County Bldg. (86026 Pages Dairy Rd.) Bring your sick plants in a plastic bag for diagnosis.

Weds., Feb. 6, 10am-11:30 – “*Roses*”, Yulee County Bldg. (86026 Pages Dairy Rd.)

Tues. Feb. 12, 7 pm, Wild Amelia Wild Nite — “*St. Marys Riverkeeper*”, Peck Center, 516 S. 10th St., Fernandina Beach.

Sat. Feb. 9, Feb. 16, 23 – 8 am - 12 – “*Crash Course in Florida Gardening*”, Yulee County Bldg. (86026 Pages Dairy Rd., Yulee). **Registration deadline Feb. 1.** \$50/person (costs more after that). Phone 904-530-6350 (or 6351).

Weds. Feb. 20, 10am-11am– “*Pruning Trees and Shrubs*”, Demonstration Garden, **96135 Nassau Place**, Yulee.

Sat. Feb. 23, 9:30am-2:45pm – *A Day of Gardening*, Duval County Extension, 1010 McDuff Ave., Jacksonville. \$20. Call 904-255-7450 for information or go to Duval County Extension website.

Certificate in Native Plants – offered by the State Botanical garden in Tifton. 80 hours classwork. Courses are \$50-105 each. Contact Sean Cameron, 706-542-6156 for more information or www.botgarden.uga.edu.

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 like cannas or ginger lilies that have died completely back to the ground and can be removed without cutting anything green. 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. 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. Keep those sheets handy for covering plants when temperatures below 35 degrees are forecast.

The Garden Maven’s Advice to the “Floralorn”

Dear Garden maven,

I would like to plant some azaleas in my yard. What things should I consider?

Hankering for some color

Dear Hank,

Most azaleas prefer filtered sunlight beneath tall trees or partial shade and a pH of 4.5 or 5.5. They have shallow root systems and need good drainage. Fall planting is best, but here we can plant any time of year. Plant the root ball slightly above soil level and don’t hoe around the plant because of the shallow roots. They absorb water through the leaves so you can water with overhead sprinklers (in the morning to prevent fungus). Prune after flowering, no later than the 4th of July or next year’s bloom will suffer. Fertilize four times a year with acid loving plant fertilizer.

The most important consideration is mature size. Plant them where they can be themselves.

Southern Indica azaleas (like Formosa or George Tabor) want to be 8 feet tall and wide, so don’t plant under windows. They will need constant trimming. Some people (gasp!) shear them. **SHEARING IS EVIL** – better to rip the plant out and throw it on the compost heap than to force your azalea into a box or ball form. Look at the ugly victims of shearing and you will see why – the flowers are blooming under the leaves, they are not covered with flowers like an azalea should be, and eventually (since they are sheared again and again in the same area) the plant dies of frustration.

Satsuki are mid sized azaleas which get 5-6 feet tall at their largest. They can be kept at 3-4 feet. Gumpos are satsukis.

Kurume Azaleas (like Coral Bells and Snow) have smaller leaves and flowers than the indicas. They get 2-5 feet tall .

True dwarfs like Red Ruffles or Fashion get only 2-3 feet tall. Fashion will bloom several times a year. Little John is a dwarf grown for its burgundy leaves.

Robin Hill Azaleas combine a compact neat form (18 inches tall and wide) with big southern flowers. They are only supposed to bloom in the spring, but my Hilda Niblett has been blooming continuously since the beginning of October.

Encore Azaleas stay 2-3 feet tall and 3-4 feet wide, need little pruning and no deadheading, and bloom for 3 seasons of the year. They need more sun (4-6 hours are suggested) than other azaleas to get more bloom.

So choose your azalea for the spot you are planting it and give the big boys plenty of room, and you all should be happy!

Plant Hero of the Month: No real frost yet, lots of fall and winter flowers still blooming.