

THE WALTON COUNTY GARDENER NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER, 2023

Andrea M. Schnapp, Walton County Master Gardener and Editor
Evan H. Anderson, Walton County Extension Horticulture Agent and Editor

Greetings fellow gardeners; in this issue -

Correct watering techniques are important for a successful garden. In this issue Evan H. Anderson discusses this topic:

“Winter Watering Concerns”

Although not a new invasive, the Japanese Climbing Fern has broadened its area. Now is the best time to clean out this fern if you have spotted it in your landscape:

“Japanese Climbing Fern”

Late fall into winter is the best time to plant shrubs and trees. Our final article covers how to choose a perfectly-formed tree.

“Selecting Quality Trees from the Nursery”

Edward F. Gilman and Laura Sadowski,
University of Florida, IFAS Extension

LOCAL EVENTS

“Putting Your Garden to Bed for the Winter “ - Lisa Emmons, Walton County Master Gardener Volunteer - December 6, 2023, Extension Coastal Branch, 70 Logan Lane.

Walton County MGV Plant Sale - Deadline for orders is by end of the day, December 1, 2023. If you haven't gotten your order in, do so TODAY!

Camellia Festival, Eden Gardens State Park - February 10, 2024





THE WALTON COUNTY GARDENER

by Walton County Master Gardeners

December 2023

Winter Watering Concerns

by Evan H. Anderson, Walton County Extension Horticulture Agent

Plants need water. This isn't an outrageous insight, but the details behind this statement can be more complicated than it might seem. While it is true that plants, like all living things, need water to survive, they don't all need the same amount and they may need more or less at different times. For a healthy landscape, garden, container planting, or lawn, it's important to pay attention to the little quirks of watering that may not be immediately obvious.

During the wintertime, temperatures are lower and days are shorter. Less heat and sunlight means water will evaporate much more slowly and the soil will stay wetter. With less heat and sunlight, plants grow at a much slower rate (if at all). This means that irrigation systems set for summertime watering are probably going to keep conditions too damp for many plants during the winter. For example, a St. Augustine grass lawn might only be able to survive 1 to 5 days without irrigation or rain in the summer, but the same lawn can last 8 to 28 days between waterings in the winter. Consider adjusting your irrigation system or watering schedule to account for seasonal differences. Remember also that a practiced eye can tell when a lawn needs water – folding or curled blades of grass, a dulling of color from bright green to bluish-gray, and footprints that remain in turf rather than springing back are signs of drought stress. Before these signs show up, it may not be necessary or beneficial to water.

If plants are overwatered, they often show different signs of distress. Lawns may have more issues with fungal diseases or become patchy, which can let weeds begin to take over. Ornamental plants such as shrubs and trees might show signs of nutrient deficiency or begin to drop leaves, appearing sparse and unhealthy. You may notice an increase in moisture-loving pests as well, such as slugs or snails. Check for watering issues if you notice any of these symptoms.

Cooler weather can be a good time to get outside and do regular maintenance on irrigation systems and plantings. Replace or unclog malfunctioning nozzles, patch holes in water lines, and adjust irrigation heads that may no longer be pointed in the right direction. Prune back plants that have grown into irrigation sprinkler patterns and may disrupt even watering. Put in new or replacement plants and make any adjustments needed to their irrigation. Lastly, add mulch around plants. This can help retain soil moisture, even out changes in soil temperature, suppress weed growth, and add organic matter to the soil as mulch breaks down. Avoid piling mulch against the base of plants, however, or it will hold moisture against the plant and can promote the growth of molds and other fungi.

For more information on watering, there is a wealth of knowledge online. The Florida Friendly Landscaping program has a lot to read on the topic: <https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/about-ffl/9-principles/principle-2-guidance/>

The University of Florida EDIS publications cover many watering topics as well: https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topics/lawn_and_garden_care_irrigation

And, as always, contact your local extension office for help as well!



Japanese Climbing Fern (*Lygodium japonicum*)



It seems we have so many invasive plant species that grow in the panhandle; Boston Ivy, Cogon Grass, Torpedo Grass - to name a few, but one to be aware of now, since I have observed it growing at great speed along the gulf coast, is the Japanese Climbing Fern *Lygodium japonicum*. This non-native, invasive vine was introduced to our area around 1900 and has become established throughout the southeast Coastal Plain from the Carolinas to Texas and Arkansas. It is native to eastern Asia from Japan and west to the Himalayas.

This fern can be easily recognized since it is actually a fern that climbs on trees and shrubs, either over the foliage or up the trunk. Its habitat is sun or shade, damp, disturbed or undisturbed areas, including floodplain forests, wetlands and pine flatwoods; leveled pineland occupying most of the Florida



vine climbing a loquat

panhandle. The spores (fern seeds) are very small and cling onto clothing, equipment and vehicles. It can grow so dense that it forms living walls, which can eliminate seedlings and other vegetation from growing. It is a major problem in pine plantations and it is theorized that pine straw, coming from these plantations, has partially led to its spread.

Japanese climbing fern also disrupts natural and prescribed fires by acting as a ladder fuel facilitating fire reaching into the tree canopies. It is imperative that these fern once identified, be removed.

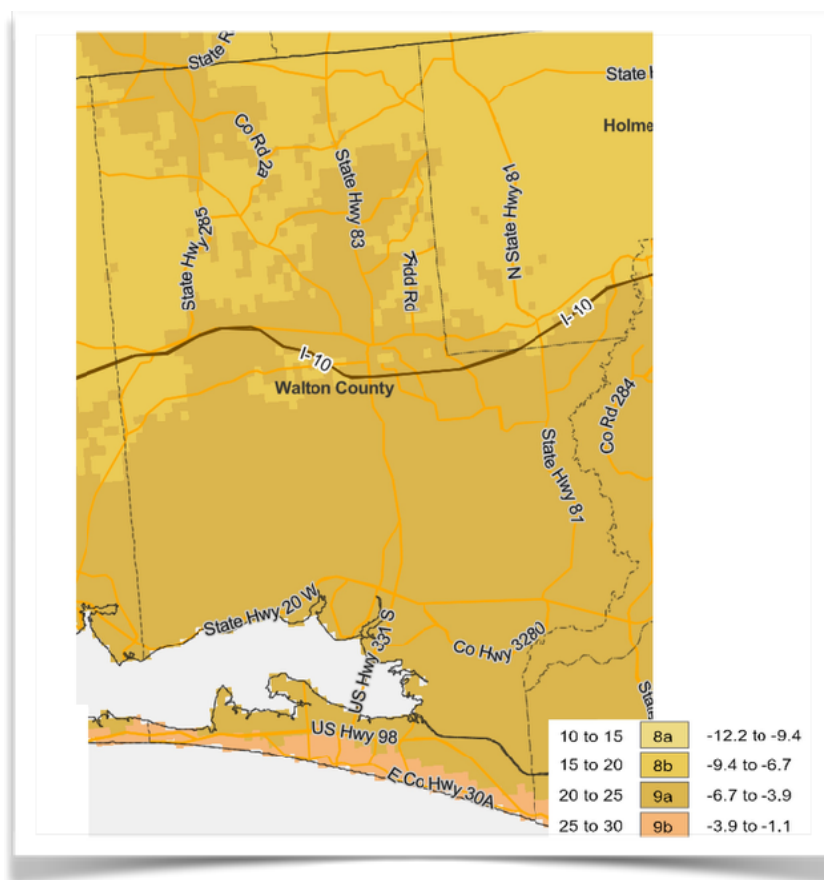


Control Methods

Since the microscopic spores are easily transported via clothing, wind and possibly water, contamination is a constant threat. Control measures should be employed when the fern is not producing spores, which occurs in the late summer/early fall. Digging out the fern is the best mechanical method for the home gardener. Other methods of removal are being researched now. This plant is very difficult to remove once it has established itself. Roundup, imazapyr and metsulfuron methyl, herbicides are effective as well.

Article adaptation from <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/FR280>.

NEW PLANT HARDINESS ZONES FROM THE USDA



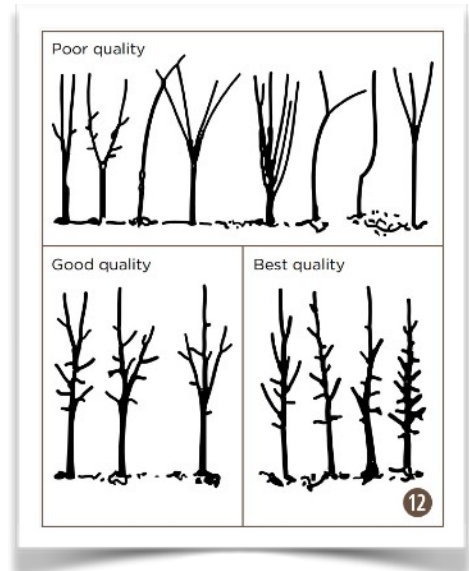
Walton County Plant Hardiness zones changes are above. Most of us have new plant choices now!

HOW TO CHOOSE THE PERFECT TREE

As important as selecting the right plant for the right spot in the landscape, choosing a correctly formed plant is just as important. Below are guidelines in selecting a properly pruned tree at the nursery.

Trunk form and branch structure

Choosing a nursery tree with good structure can postpone future pruning and maintenance. Trees with poor structure could require more pruning cuts, and a greater portion of the canopy will have to be removed to correct defects.

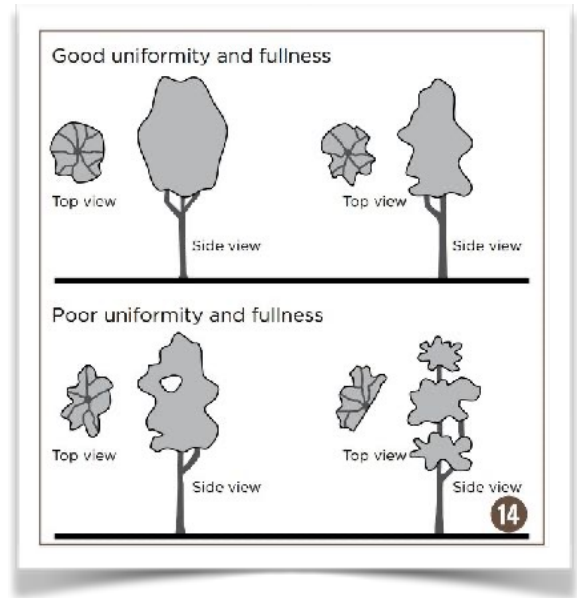


Shade trees of lesser quality have two or more trunks. Best quality shade trees have one dominant trunk (Figure 12). Multiple leaders represent weakness and can cause the tree to split apart as it grows. Some smaller ornamental trees such as crapemyrtle, ligustrum, wax myrtle, and others naturally have multiple trunks and this does not have to be corrected. Major branches and trunks should not touch, and branches should be less than $\frac{2}{3}$ trunk diameter (Figure 13).

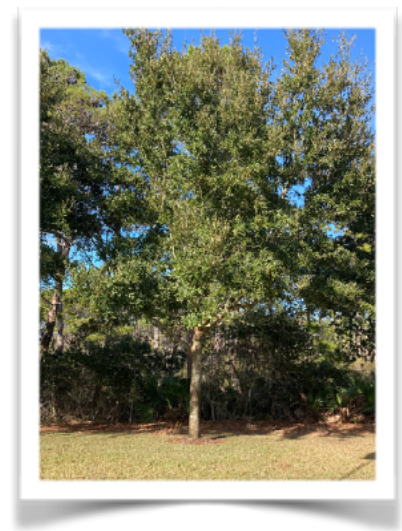


Other factors influencing tree quality

Though the qualities of the root ball and tree structure are the main considerations, there are some other important factors. Tree wrap should be removed so that the trunk can be inspected for hidden wounds. The trunk can be rewrapped after inspection to prevent wounding during shipping. Trees with large trunk injuries should be avoided.



Canopy uniformity is less important than trunk form and branch arrangement. However, a uniform canopy represents a detail accomplished by attentive growers. Trees with an irregular canopy, one dominant trunk, and good branch arrangement are far better than trees with a uniform canopy and a double trunk with included bark (Figure 14). The canopy on well-structured trees will fill in as the tree grows. Canopy fullness depends on the tree species or cultivar in question. Thin canopies do not necessarily mean that the trees are poor quality, diseased, or infested with insects, since species and cultivars vary greatly in this characteristic. Some trees, such as trumpet tree, Shumard oak and gumbo limbo, are naturally thin when they are young.



a well pruned nursery tree is worth the price!