OFFICE CHANGES
Many of you have asked about what will happen next with personnel in our office. As most of you know, long time Ag agent Larry Halsey has retired, and Family and Consumer Sciences agent Heidi Copeland has accepted a similar position in Leon County. John Lily, our veteran 4-H agent, was named county director in November. We are currently seeking a new Family and Consumer Services Agent and we hope to add a 4-H/Horticulture agent this year.

No matter the personnel or the job titles, we are still here to help you find answers and solve problems. Do not hesitate to contact us. We are your local connection to the vast resources of UF and IFAS.

NEWSLETTER HARDCOPIES
Budget realities are driving us to minimize hard copy mail delivery of newsletters. We need your help to make sure we can still get information to you.

1- If you have an e-mail account, please send us that address.
2- If there is a convenient location in the county (besides your mailbox) where you could pick up your hard copy, please let us know.
3- If you are able to post a link to our site or the newsletter, let us know.
4- Please call or e-mail to confirm you would like to continue to receive the newsletter by mail. We expect to stop mailing to out of county addresses this year.

We will post the newsletter on our website as well, and you’ll be able to pick it up here at the office.

Yes, it was COLD! Now what do I do?

Data from the Florida Automated Weather Network’s Monticello station show thirteen consecutive nights of lows below freezing. (Current and archived data is available at http://fawn.ifas.ufl.edu/). I’ve been here since 1977, and I don’t remember having experienced that many cold nights in a row.

FAWN collects weather data every fifteen minutes at the NFCC Green Industries Institute (the old “Experiment Station” on US 90) as well as thirty-four other states across Florida. This information can be invaluable for planning purposes as well as documenting freeze, flood or drought damages.

According to our FDACS plant inspector, Michael Bentley, most nurseries escaped serious damage. Winter grazing damage is estimated to have suffered a 30% loss. Even fields which were not damaged did not grow for the duration of the cold spell. Fields grazed short before the freezes suffered the most damage and will take the longest to recover.
What to Do After the Freeze for Ornamentals and Woody Plants

Severe pruning should be delayed until new growth appears to ensure that live wood is not removed. Dead, unsightly leaves may be removed as soon as they turn brown after a freeze if a high level of maintenance is desired. Cold injury may appear as a lack of spring bud break on a portion or all of the plant, or as an overall weak appearance. Branch tips may be damaged while older wood is free of injury. Cold injured wood can be identified by examining the cambium layer (food conducting tissue) under the bark for black or brown coloration. Prune these branches behind the point of discoloration.

Florida homeowners enjoy a vast array of plant materials and often desire a tropical or semitropical appearance to their landscapes. Plants are often planted past their northern limit in Florida, although microclimates differ dramatically. Tropical and subtropical plants can be used effectively in the landscape, but they must be protected or replaced when necessary. A combination of tender and hardy plants should be planted in order to prevent total devastation of the landscape by extremely cold weather.

From: Cold Protection of Ornamental Plants (ENH1) by Dewayne L. Ingram and Thomas H. Yeager. UF/IFAS Environmental Horticulture Department

What to do before the next freeze

Whether you are growing commercial crops or home ornamentals, many of the steps for freeze preparation are similar.

Forage producers need to prepare for the possibility of bad weather. Have a plan!
- Have a reserve of stored forage, or at least know where and how to get it when needed.
- Plant adapted varieties of winter grazing. We have annual updates on recommended varieties. Check with us before you plant.
- Establish cross fencing to allow rotational or limit grazing. Temporary electric fencing is relatively low cost and lets you take control of your stock’s grazing patterns.

Homeowners’ preparation also begins with planning.
- Florida Friendly Landscaping guidelines start with “Right plant, Right place”. Choosing adapted plants and varieties and locating them correctly will minimize cold weather damage.
- Make sure plants are properly fertilized. Undernourished plants are more susceptible to damage and plants recently fertilized may produce a flush of tender, cold sensitive growth.
- Water appropriately. Plants stressed by lack of water are more susceptible to cold damage, and properly watered soils retain more heat. However, overwatering combined with low soil temperatures will harm most plants’ root systems.

Additional information is available online at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/mg025, or come by the office to pick up a copy of this and other publications on managing the home landscape.
What is Cogon grass and why should I care?

According to the University of Florida, “Cogon grass first appeared in the area around Grand Bay, Alabama as an escape from Satsuma orange crate packing in 1912. It was intentionally introduced from the Philippines into Mississippi as possible forage in 1921. Cogon grass was introduced into Florida in the 1930s and 1940s as potential forage and for soil stabilization purposes.”

Yep! It came in the same place fire ants did and was encouraged for the same reasons kudzu was! At least livestock will graze kudzu. Cogon grass spreads by aggressive rhizomes and by seed that can be blown on the wind. It is particularly invasive in uncultivated areas such as pastures, planted pines, power line rights of way, road shoulders and conservation lands. It dies back after frost, and the frosted forage creates a serious fire hazard, especially for young pines.

THIS STUFF WILL TAKE OVER YOUR LAND! Nothing grazes it, and it won’t let anything else grow. There are some known patches of it in the county. It is a HUGE problem in the eastern part of Leon County along Tram, Capitola and Baum Roads. It spreads by windborne seeds and very vigorous rhizomes.

Identification

Cogon grass plants are from two to five feet tall with very stiff leaves. Leaves are lighter green than Johnson grass and have rough “teeth” on the edges of the leaf. The main vein of the leaf is distinctively off center. Rhizomes have sharp pointed tips.

If you see it or think you see it, let us know where it is. I'll be glad to come out to verify whether it’s Cogon Grass. We will have training sessions on this and other invasive species later this year. As always, the first step in controlling undesirable plant is identification and location of ALL the pests.
Cattle Market News from the Southeast Cattle Advisor  
(Economists Curt Lacey, UGA and Walt Prevatt, Auburn University)  
http://hosting.caes.uga.edu/secattle/  

“Cattle prices for all classes of cattle are expected to average higher in 2010 compared with a year-ago. Some demand weakness may be incurred during the first quarter of 2010 that could depress prices temporarily, but supply decreases and potential improvement in beef demand during the remaining quarters should result in higher cattle prices. Additionally, the declining inventory of cattle and calves should also help bolster cattle prices in the near future.”

Sounds like good news! However the authors pass on this caution:

“Cattle farmers should not count on “higher prices” to save them or keep them going. Input costs will likely also begin to rise in the near future due to competition and inflation. Continued efforts to adopt improved management practices (breeding season, genetics, health, forage utilization, value added, etc.) will be needed to remain or become profitable.”

As always, it’s critical to cut costs without cutting corners. For example, if you save two dollars per calf on vaccine costs and lose a four or five hundred dollar calf, you’ve made a mistake. Identify your critical major expenses (usually grazing and stored feed) and focus on managing those costs while maintaining or increasing production.

Pesticide Applicator Training Available Here

Licensed pesticide applicators can renew their licenses by completing four CORE CEU’s and four or more subject CEU’s depending on the license. (Private applicator requires four; ag row crop requires eight; right of way requires eight). Applicators have four years after licensing to obtain these credits.

Our office will be hosting three sessions via web broadcast as follows:  
Tuesday, March 30- IFAS CEU Day 8:30 AM  
Up to 6 CEU’s may be earned, but there will be NO core credits available.  
Tuesday, May 11- Northwest District CORE training 9:00 AM Up to 7 CEU’s  
Wednesday May 12- Northwest District Applicator Training 9 AM Up to 5 CEU’s.

Contact us for more information on your requirements, license status or registration.

Home Garden Series Starts in April

We’re back in the home gardening class business! The Extension service and the Green Industries Institute will begin a series of weekly classes for the home vegetable gardener on Wednesday, April 7 at 3pm. Our first session will cover soils and site selection. If you’d like to get a head start on the program, come in to pick up information on soil testing. That way you’ll be able to relate the first session to your situation.

Details are still being finalized; contact us if you have questions or would like to register.
The Series will have its final session on Friday, April 2 (8:30AM) at Aucilla Plantation in Thomas county. We’ll evaluate the cool season food plots we saw in the fall and discuss planning and planting warm season food plots. If you attended any session of the series in 2009, registration for the event is five dollars. If this is your first session, registration cost is twenty-five dollars. Lunch and on-site transportation are included. Contact our office for details.

**4-H Livestock Exhibitors Shine at North Florida Livestock Show, In AND Out of the Show Ring**

You may have seen in the paper that our 4-H livestock exhibitors did well. Allison Cone, Amanda Cone, Josh Rodriguez and Lauren Demott brought home multiple awards for their beef projects, but there were two things that should make us even more proud.

Amanda Cone received the Marvin Reeves Award. This award recognizes the senior exhibitors who have continually demonstrated outstanding leadership, character, and livestock skills during their participation in the North Florida Livestock Show.

Josh Rodriguez and Dillon Moore (a Madison County FFA member who was previously in our 4-H Livestock club) stepped in to share their fitting skills with our youngest exhibitor, Lauren Demott. As the commercial says, they “just did it”. Not only did they do it well, they set an example of passing on their skills and supporting club members.

Last year’s winner of the Marvin Reeves Award? Josh Rodriguez! Florida 4-H has been developing young leaders for a hundred years, and we’re proud to see our young people giving back to those following in their footsteps.

**COMING EVENTS**

**March 25, 2009** - NFREC Beef/Forage Field Day, NFREC Beef Unit, Marianna, FL. Registration fee is $10. For further information call 850-482-9904


Contact us for more info on these.

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