Valentine's Day: February 14

By CHUCK SCAFFIDI, MG

Despite occasional grumblings that it was invented by the greeting card industry, Valentine's Day actually has a long, rich history. Its earliest origins derive from a pagan festival called Lupercalia, in which Romans called upon the god Lupercus to keep the wolves away. As part of the festivities, Roman girls wrote their names on a slip of paper and placed them in a jar for the boys to draw from. The matches were supposed to be sweethearts until the next Lupercalia.

Lupercalia evolved into Valentine's Day after Emperor Claudius II, believing married men would prefer staying with their families to fighting his wars, decreed that Roman soldiers were forbidden to wed. According to legend, a priest named Valentine conducted secret marriage ceremonies in defiance of the edict. On February 14, the eve of Lupercalia, he was beheaded for his crime.

After Valentine was sanctified, Christian priests adapted the pagan holiday, moving it back a day to honor him.

In the spirit of this venerable pagan tradition the Botanical Bounty Gift Shop is offering a 10% discount to MGs during the week prior to Valentine's Day. So keep those wolves away, hang on to your head and get a great gift all with one fell swoop!

Editor’s Note: With February’s advanced MG training session on bamboo, this article, which was originally published in The St. Petersburg Times, is a timely addition to The Green Leaf. The Garden section of The St. Petersburg Times appears on Saturdays, and Yvonne writes a weekly column on a variety of gardening topics. Look for gardening briefs from her column beginning in next month’s Green Leaf. I look forward to future articles from Yvonne Swanson

“Right plant, right place” is essential when growing bamboo

By Yvonne Swanson, MG

Fearless Florida gardeners brave the occasional garden snakes and red ants, invasive weeds and plants rife with sharp edges and thorns. But when it comes to bamboo – the fastest growing plant on the planet -- many gardeners run the other way.

They’ve heard the rumors about rampant bamboo overturning mobile homes, popping up through neighbor’s outdoor decks and devouring entire subdivisions in a single gulp.

The misunderstood bamboo has been stuck with a reputation it doesn’t deserve. It’s one of the most beautiful and hardy plants around. With more than 1,000 varieties available – from foot-high dwarf bamboo to timber varieties growing over 100 feet tall – it is harmless: if you plant the right variety in the right location.

The single most important factor to know about is the plant’s root system. The roots of clumping Bamboos are not invasive and spread
slowly from the original plant, making them the best choice for most homeowners. At the other extreme are the running bamboos, which spread rapidly through far-reaching underground rhizomes (stems). Steer clear of runners, unless you’re prepared to install heavy-duty concrete root barriers to prevent spread.

Bamboo is a woody-stemmed perennial grass that’s grown worldwide in a variety of climates and locales, from deeply shaded forests to high, sunny mountaintops. Its stalks, called culms, are used to make a wide variety of products, from flooring, to furniture to dinnerware.

In the landscape, clumping bamboo is an ideal choice for adding almost-instant privacy to your property. While some varieties can grow nearly 50 inches in a day, many reach mature height within just a few years. That’s good news for gardeners who don’t have the patience for slow-growing trees and shrubs to fill the landscape.

“People have pools and spas, and they want privacy. But the six-foot fence doesn’t give privacy anymore. Bamboo achieves something that trees take years and years to do,” says Michael Lenas, owner of Exotica, a St. Petersburg nursery and landscape design firm specializing in bamboo. That’s especially true in many of the high-density areas of Tampa Bay where multi-story condominiums overlook single-family homes and new mega houses are built next to more modest one-level ranches.

Bamboo can be planted year-round, but winter is an especially good time because new plants get a head start on developing robust spring shoots, says Lenas. He recommends several varieties, all of which are compact, clumping growers that thrive in full sun to part shade and are cold hardy – in some cases down to 15 degrees F:

Emperor’s Blue Bamboo (*Bambusa chungii*) reaches its full 30 feet in two to five years and develops beautiful, powder-like pale blue culms about two inches in diameter. Timor Black Bamboo (*Bambusa lako*) develops exotic dark chocolate culms that grow 35 to 60 feet. Japanese Timber Bamboo (*Bambusa oldhamii*) has three to four-inch wide culms that shoot up to 45 to 60 feet within just five years. If you have a small yard, the 30-foot-tall Graceful Bamboo (*Bambusa textilis gracilis*) has a more compact base, with foliage extending out almost in a triangular form. To create a hedge, there are about a half-dozen varieties of Hedge Bamboo (*Bambusa multiplex*) that grow from just a few to 25 feet.

Be careful when shopping for bamboo because plants can be mislabeled, warns Mary Ann Smith, co-owner of Bamboo Gardens in Palm Harbor, the largest bamboo grower in the Tampa Bay area. “What you thought was a Chihuahua could end up being a St. Bernard,” she quips. But it’s no joke. Do your homework before you buy. A good source for detailed plant information is the American Bamboo Society (ABS) website (www.americanbamboo.org), she recommends.

If you plant bamboo during the cooler, dryer winter months, be sure to water several times each week using a garden hose or irrigation system. Bamboo “loves to drink” whether it’s tap, well or reclaimed water, says Lenas. But don’t overdo it. “They don’t like wet feet. If you plant in or near a water area, have it on some high ground,” he advises. During warmer months, water more frequently, especially during dry periods.

ABS recommends using any type of grass fertilizer (except weed and feed types), compost or fish emulsion. When leaves drop, use them as mulch around the base of the plant as a nutrient and to prevent weeds. “It’s sounds crazy, but they are eating themselves,” observes Lenas.

Don’t expect to find bamboo at the local garden center. Specialty growers and nurseries are a better source for guidance and plants. Exotica (2134 44th Street South, St. Petersburg) is open Thurs.-Sat. from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and by appointment, (727) 328-8841. Bamboo Gardens in Palm Harbor is by appointment only (727) 784-0517. Other Florida suppliers can be found on the ABS website (www.americanbamboo.org). And don’t forget the Internet: mail-order suppliers are plentiful; although you’ll need to do your own homework to make sure you purchase the right varieties.
Two free workshops on bamboo will be held Feb. 27 and Mar. 6 at Bamboo Gardens. Space is limited; reservations required, (727) 784-0517.

Take precautions to prevent cold-weather damage to plants

By YVONNE SWANSON, MG

The Tampa Bay area is an unusual zone for gardening because inland and northern counties experience much colder temperatures than those areas close to the coast. The proximity to water is a natural protection for areas west of Tampa because temperatures are generally warmer. That’s good news for Pinellas County, where we typically are spared the freezing temperatures.

But don’t bet on spring weather yet. Most of the Tampa Bay area is still at risk for freezing temperatures until early March. You should advise gardeners to be prepared to take precautions in the garden. Sensitive tropicals and potted plants are at greatest risk of cold damage.

The day before freezing temperatures, make sure all plants are well hydrated. Bring potted plants indoors. If that’s not possible, place them close to the house. Cover potted plants and cold-sensitive plants in the landscape with sheets or blankets. Plastic drop cloths can be used, but be careful that they don’t touch the plant, warns Pam Brown. Plastic conducts cold onto the plant’s surface.

Plant covers should touch the ground to trap heat. If feasible, place an indoor/outdoor light – or strand of large outdoor Christmas lights – under the covering to warm the space (but only by about 3 degrees F). Use caution so that the light does not touch the cover or plant, which could become a fire hazard. Some gardeners use specially built wooden structures over valuable plants. Or you can use large trash cans or buckets for protection, adds Brown.

Turn off your automatic irrigation system so that plants are not watered during the freeze. Empty birdbaths or other standing water features in the garden.

Some plants will show damage immediately after a freeze, while others may take a few days. It’s fine to prune damaged branches by cutting back to where the branch is green, says Hillsborough County Extension Agent Sydney Park-Brown. Some perennials may die back to the ground, but will emerge again in warm temperatures.

If plants are covered with frost, water them with a hose to gently melt the frost before the sun scorches tender foliage, recommends Brown. If it’s been windy, plants will lose moisture fast, so water as needed.

The bottom line for Tampa Bay area gardeners: We’re lucky that we can grow many exotic tropics in our area, but be prepared to protect them in the winter. Advise gardeners to learn about the cold sensitivity of plants before purchasing them.

Garden Tips

By Mary Ellen Warner

▶ Root cuttings in a bag of cow manure. Saves money when you root your own and give as gifts for special occasions. After potting them…..just wrap in burlap or metallic paper and a bow. Makes a welcome gift.
▶ Kill ants with talcum powder.
▶ Clean flower pots with denture tablets, soap and water.
▶ Seeing toadstools? That’s a sign of good soil.
Hibiscus dropping buds? Over watering, under watering, over fertilizing, aphids, or bud midges could be the cause.

Recycle A/C Water. Use to water potted plants.

Epsom Salts will green up plants for less money—rather than using expensive magnesium.

Inexpensive laundry soap powder – (non phosphorus) – distributed on soil will relieve soil tension and absorb water easily.

Sidewalk weeds a problem? Sprinkle table salt to eradicate them.

Chase slugs and snails out of your garden – plant onions and marigolds.

Slugs and snails don’t like rough surfaces – Crumble eggshells and distribute them around the base of the plants. Sawdust and mulch also works well.

Citrus trees should not be mulched to prevent root rot. To control slugs use slug traps…Grapefruit or orange rinds cut in half and placed in area under trees. Check for “caught slugs” in the morning and dispose.

Citrus: Excessive Fruit Drop or Splitting: Occurs when too much or too little water is used. Correct amount, is 1/2 to ¼ inch of water. You can also dig down 3-4 inches to check for dampness.

Trap White Flies: Smear Vaseline on yellow construction paper and hang on plants. This method will also snag thrips and other small insects. Red construction paper works best on citrus trees.

Green Veins on yellow leaves - Use sulphur and iron (with high nitrogen 10-5-5) Fertilize in early summer, late summer and late winter.

Southampton where you will embark on the Queen Mary 2.

Six days of feasting and learning about gardening will relax us all the way to New York. Then its home and weeding our own gardens!

To have a thrilling vacation and transportation back on the Queen Mary 2, call VanGuard's Judy Skaggs at (800) 624-7718 or visit the FLBG Web site.

Safety Nets

By PAM BROWN, Horticulture Agent

Bamboo canes in the garden are responsible for most injuries to the face and eyes. Save you plastic bottle tops, put some clay in them and then place them on top of your canes as a safety measure.

Source: http://www.doctorgreenfingers.co.uk/

Step into Florida’s freshwater wetland ecosystems in the Florida Master Naturalist Program beginning March 4 and ending April 1. The 40 contact hour program includes regional field trips to Myakka State Park, a canoe and snorkeling trip in the Rainbow River, and an interpretative walk at Sawgrass Lake Park for a maximum student enrollment of 20.

Classes are during the day Mondays and Fridays at the University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences/Pinellas County Extension, 12175 125th St. N., Largo. Registration is $200, which includes course materials, canoe rentals, naturalist patch and pin. Deadline for registration is February 21.

The class includes marsh, swamp, lake, river and stream systems, their plants and wildlife inhabitants. This classroom experience is for
anyone, novice to knowledgeable, who enjoys learning and experiencing nature.

To register go to [www.masternaturalist.org](http://www.masternaturalist.org) and for class information call Jeanne Murphy at 727-582-2100.

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**Important Announcement!**

Beginning soon you will have the ability to send your volunteer hours by e-mail.

The e-mail address is: MGEDU@co.pinellas.fl.us. Please be specific when doing this – include individual dates and hours worked just like you would in the logbook. MG Jan Curtin will be recording these hours that are sent in by this method.

**OOPS!** We have been advising you that MG hours could now be reported using e-mail. HOWEVER, as Murphy's Law would dictate there has been a glitch. If anyone reported his or her hours, please resend to: csuggs@co.pinellas.fl.us

We are sorry for this inconvenience. As soon as the Mgedu e-mail address is working properly, we will advise you.

Thank you

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It has been several years since we did a mass ordering of Felco pruners.

When we last ordered them we were able to get the pruners at a significant discount. Other garden tools can be ordered. Carol has the catalog in her office for you to browse. We need to order at least 15 of a tool to get the wholesale pricing. Please let Carol know (582-2124) of your interest so that we can assess whether to make a purchase.

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**Extension Connection**

Did you know that some of our MGs are teaching classes at Sunken Gardens? It’s a great cooperative effort and is another opportunity to learn, as well as teach.

Cindy Adamchek and the Rock “N” Pots team, Ruth Davies, Brenda Payne, Marcel Pincince and Patrick Mann have participated in the Saturday Series.

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**Volunteer Opportunities:**

Please see or call Carol Suggs to volunteer for events (582-2124) or the contact person in the help wanted ad.

**MG Participation in Events**

MGs participating in special events should get prior approval and a check voucher from the Advisory committee if they are going to expend money for any event and expect reimbursement. Please follow this procedure.

See Chuck Scaffidi if you have questions about this procedure. The Advisory account is now maintained by MG membership.

**Pinellas County Extension & Florida Botanical Gardens**

We need help in collecting all publicity related to the Extension and FBG Gardens. Please clip any articles you see that mentions us in any way, including weddings and outside
events. Please place the clippings in the basket that is in the break room.

Please include the name of the publication and date published.

Tour Guides Needed

Tour guide season got underway in September and will continue until May.

Please make your interest known to Tom Roberts or Sue Richardson; visit them or call 582-2242 to make an appointment. They will brief you on what is required of a tour guide and sign you up to shadow tours. Also, you may assist during a tour to get experience-sign up!!

Feb 7 Monday. Perkiomen Tour & Travel bringing 44 travelers.

Short-Term Help Wanted:

Native Area Bench Refurbishing

Are you handy? Would you like a short-term wood project?

Jean Field is looking for a short-term crew to disassemble, sand, and polyurethane three benches formerly of the herb garden. These rehabbed benches will grace our native area.

Please contact Jean by email or by phone with your interest.

jfield@co.pinellas.fl.us or 582-2504

Hand-Watering Needed in Native Area

Need flexibility in your volunteer time? Are you available either Monday or Thursday a couple of hours either day? Our native area needs hose-happy master gardeners to water any time during those days. Interested helpers should be in reasonably good condition to drag 100 feet of garden hose. Help needed immediately. Please call Jean Field at 582-2504 or Email jfield@co.pinellas.fl.us.

IFAS Award of Excellence for Master Gardener Projects

By CHUCK SCAFFIDI, MG

Sue Ann Corrigan responded to our need for help and has joined our plant sale award team. Welcome aboard!

The advisory committee will continue to assist MG startup projects and identify projects that have state award potential.

We are in dire need of the following MG skills: creative writers, editors, reviewers, graphic artists and others willing to help meet the 2005 project deadline. Please see me or call 582-2117 if you are interested or you feel you are working on a project we should consider.

Volunteer Opportunities and Events for February

MG Advanced Training

February MG Advanced Training and Pot Luck Lunch

By YVONNE EDMONDS, MG

Tuesday February 8 between 10 am and 12 noon, local artist Allen Loyd will lecture and show slides about working with bamboo.

From 1-3 pm Allen will hold a special workshop working with bamboo. 9 people are enrolled in the class. I (Chuck Scaffidi) e-mailed the 9 workshop attendees to advise them on what to bring.

MG Advanced Training “Bonus Sheet”

By BOB ABBEN, MG

Did you miss an issue, do you need extra copies? We all know attending the “Up-Date” on the 8th of each month is sometimes not convenient. MG may request any or as many copies (within reason) as needed for your use, family, friends, schools etc. The primary idea is to inform as many people about our world of horticulture and environment as possible. Here’s how to get your back issues. There is a clipboard in plain sight in the MG volunteer office, just PRINT your name and issue or issues desired. We do not require driver ID or proof of age. All previous issues are listed on the clipboard. Your request will be filled ASAP and clipped to your timesheet

Copies of the minutes of the previous advanced training meetings are available in the Volunteer office near your time sheet notebooks.
Tampa Bay Flower Show
January 20-22 Tropicana Field

By Sue Ann Corrigan
A Well Deserved First Place!!!

The Florida Botanical Gardens/Pinellas County Extension display garden stole the First Place Best in Show award at the Tampa Bay Flower Show this past weekend. No surprise given the oh so impressive display, “A Garden for Children - How a Garden Grows.” So many hard working people deserve credit for that success. The Horticulture Staff designers, the maintenance crew, and the Master Gardeners who manned the display gardens during the three day event all deserve a special thank you. Amid the scores of impressive garden displays the Florida Botanical Gardens/Pinellas County Extension display certainly stood out as a winner. Visitors to the display were awed by the complexity of the display. Many were surprised to find out that The Florida Botanical Gardens/Pinellas County Extension is “in their back yard”, which I am sure will prompt future visitors. The exposure at The Tampa Flower Show will most assuredly help to reveal one of Pinellas’s “best kept secrets”.

Attention Mentors: I would like to have a meeting with all mentors on February 14 at 10 a.m. to talk about the next MG training class. A couple of the things that I would like you to think about prior to the meeting are: having class two days per week, having work days on different days of the week so that students interact with active MG workgroups, having some of the classes on Saturday. Please come ready to discuss these topics – I really need your in-put!

A huge Thank You is in order – the numbers are now in and last year Master Gardeners volunteered a total of 27,814.50 hours, which equals a value of $478,131.26 to the county. What a great group you are. This is another record-breaking year!

I would like to thank all of the volunteers who helped build the FBG display garden for the Tampa Bay Flower Show and those of you who helped man the display garden and the MG answer booth during the show. I really appreciate your willingness to help out even on the weekend. You helped make our participation in this event so successful. For those of you who did not visit the flower show – the Florida Botanical Gardens/Pinellas County Extension display garden won the “Best of Show” award!

Spring is swiftly coming upon us and that brings many activities here at the gardens and out in the community. We will need volunteers to help us with these and I encourage you to look at the list of opportunities in this newsletter. Let Carol know if you will be able to help.

Remember on February 8th we have a speaker coming to talk about constructing with bamboo. Note that the start time is 10 a.m. instead of our regular time. We are also having a potluck, so bring you favorite dish to share.

I will be out of town the last two weeks of this month for a trip to Seattle to see our...
youngest daughter. I am looking forward to the break, but not the weather. Think about me in the cold and drizzle while you are out in the sun.

Take care when you are working – each of you is so valuable to us. We appreciate everything that you do for us.

♥ Pam

We are especially appreciative of staff, MGs, and others who contribute articles, events, and other items of interest to the Green Leaf each month.

Please submit your input by the 20th of each month. This will help us assemble and publish the newsletter in a timely manner. Also, to save mailing costs, please limit your articles to about 700-800 words or less.

Limited newsletter space does not allow for full photograph viewing. If you would like a copy of any photograph presented in the newsletters, please contact me @ 727-582-2117.

Chuck Scaffidi, Editor

The Green Leaf is published by Pinellas County Extension Service for the County Master Gardeners and depends on submission of articles from Master Gardeners, Extension Staff and other authors.

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Please send articles to Pam Brown or e-mail directly to Chuck cascaffidi@juno.com or Pam at pwbrown@co.pinellas.fl.us

The newsletter is available on the Internet at http://www.flbg.org/
Click on “Master Gardener Program”, click on “MG Newsletter”

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