



the Hedgelines

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Preparing Your Landscape for Spring Growth

Gardening isn't usually the first thing that springs to mind when the calendar page turns to January. But with the holidays behind us, there's no better time to start planning and preparing our 2024 gardens.

Having a well-maintained lawn is crucial for leaving a positive impression on your property's visitors. However, for commercial properties, the condition of the lawn could directly impact profitability. That's why we're offering you some valuable tips to keep your commercial lawn in top shape.

Irrigation

Don't underestimate the importance of the basics. Your irrigation system is the life force of your lawn. Without proper watering, especially in our Florida heat and sunshine, grass can die quickly. And now, with stricter state and local water restrictions in place, it is more important than ever to have a well-designed and functioning system.

Prune Ornamentals & Trees

Harder pruning should take place right before the spring to promote new growth. The benefits include 1) reduced risk of disease or pest invasion since it's so cold out and 2) the fact that wounds heal faster and there's less sap in trees during the winter.

General Clean-Up

A clean slate is the best place to start when preparing for spring. Grab your rake or blower to clean up the debris from fall and winter. Dead leaves and twigs make your lawn look less appealing and can hinder growth and get in the way when it is time to mow.

Improving Soil

Nutritious soil is the basis for any plant's success. Unfortunately, Florida soils are mostly sandy and have a low organic matter and cation exchange capacity.

The roots of most plants only grow down about six inches, so this layer of earth should be the focus. When organic matter is added, it slowly decomposes, boosting its nutrient content. This enables the soil to retain more water and keeps a landscape thriving.

Additionally, if your St Augustine grass has brown blades, it could be telling you it is lacking in macro nutrients and needs nitrogen and potassium to keep growing and supporting its needs.

A thorough soil assessment is essential for a healthy start come Spring. A good soil assessment will include checking your soil moisture, testing the soil pH, evaluating soil texture, checking for compaction, and assessing nutrient levels.

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Changes in Weather Make Hibiscus Leaves Yellow

Gardeners much favor Hibiscus for planting in tropical and subtropical landscapes. They grow and bloom best in locations with acidic soil, a bit of afternoon shade, regular irrigation, fertilization, and plenty of space to grow. Weather changes often cause leaves to turn yellow.

Hibiscus plants are favorites in warm landscapes worldwide. Across Central and South Florida, there are plants not well adapted to local soils. They prefer soils with an acidic pH. However, soils with an alkaline pH are found throughout South Florida. High-pH soils tie up the iron and other trace elements Hibiscus needs to grow healthy green leaves. Iron deficiencies, which are characterized by yellow leaves, are common in Hibiscus.



Hibiscus requires regular fertilization to maintain healthy and vigorous growth. Hibiscus blooms and grows best when fertilized three or four times per year. Use a balanced fertilizer with trace elements for the best growth. The trace elements can help reduce some yellow leaves caused by nutritional problems.

Also, this temperamental shrub prefers partial shade or some shade from the hot afternoon sun. Bright light is a good thing; too much heat is not. Deep shade is not appropriate; it leads to poor growth and blooming. Either condition produces yellow leaves.

However, Hibiscus can produce yellow leaves with little provocation. Some causes include over-irrigation, under-irrigation, too much rain, alkaline soils, planted too deep, changes in the amount of water, changes in the temperature, such as when a weather front sweeps through the area, windy conditions, old age, and pest problems. Hibiscus that have been in the ground for 7+ years have high root nematode populations that reduce plant vigor and result in the frequent production of yellow leaves.

Yellow leaves are common with Hibiscus. An abundance of rain, cold temperatures, and shortening days are all causes of the recent spate of yellow leaves on Hibiscus. If soil issues, problems with planting location, and maintenance of the plants have been eliminated as the cause, then the yellow leaves on Hibiscus are due to the weather conditions. If it is just a few, pick the leaves off and go on about your business. Do not prune or fertilize the plants. If more than a few leaves occur, look for other problems, such as one of the common causes listed above, correct any associated problem, and watch for growth as the weather warms.

Preparing Your Landscape for Spring Growth (*continued*)

Pre-Emergent Treatment Plans - Preventing Lawn Predators

Maintaining your landscape isn't just about regular maintenance. There are threats lurking in the form of diseases, pests, and weeds that can damage your lawn. To stay ahead of these issues, consider pre-emergent treatment plans. These specialized treatments prevent potential damage, allowing your turf to remain in excellent condition for your customers.

Repairing Damaged Patches of Lawn

Lawn damage can occur in various ways, including decay, lack of nutrients, or insufficient watering. These issues can result in unsightly patches on your lawn, which can negatively affect your property's curb appeal and value. Winter is the ideal time to do this, as it allows you to address the problem before heavy foot traffic begins.

By following these tips, you'll ensure that your commercial lawn remains healthy, impressive, and profitable. Contact us for any further assistance or questions about our services.



Understanding Florida's Native Weed: The Spanish Needle

Firstly, what is the Spanish Needle? Spanish Needle (*Bidens alba*) is a native plant in Florida that is part of the Aster family. It can grow over 5 feet tall and produces small, white flowers. The plant has a green, hairy stem and serrated leaves. Spanish Needles have a reputation for being a weed because they are abundant and grow very quickly, especially in moist conditions. These plants are perennials, and their seeds are easily spread from place to place.

Spanish Needles can establish themselves in many different areas, such as garden beds, lawns, and even along the side of the road. As they have a shallow root system, they are also known to grow in pots or containers. While the Spanish Needle is a native plant to Florida, it's still considered a weed because of its invasive nature. If left unchecked, it has the potential to take over other plants and choke them out.

Secondly, preventing Spanish Needle growth is important, and there are several ways to do so. The best way to prevent Spanish Needle growth is to keep your yard and garden area free of debris and dead plant material. Another method is to apply mulch to your garden beds, which helps prevent weed growth by limiting the amount of light that gets to the soil. Another option is to use an herbicide spray. Before using any chemicals, make sure to read and follow the instructions properly. Additionally, you can consider companion planting other plants around the Spanish Needle to prevent it from spreading.



Thirdly, it's important to note that Spanish Needles is a true powerhouse of a weed and has good to know benefits. As a native plant, they provide essential habitats and food for different types of animals, including birds and butterflies. The Florida Wildflower Foundation says “*Bidens alba* is likely the most under-appreciated of all Florida’s native wildflowers.” That’s because this plant is the third most common source of nectar for honey production. They are also used in some countries as medicinal herbs which can help treat various ailments like cough, fever and other respiratory diseases. The young leaves can also be enjoyed raw in salads, or dried and used as tea. You can even smoke them for a unique experience. Rich in fiber and proteins, *B. alba* shares nutritional benefits akin to kale and can even be fermented into wine.



Spanish needle knows no boundaries, thriving relentlessly in a multitude of habitats all year round. Donning delightful white daisy-like flowers with vibrant yellow centers, *Bidens alba* is often overlooked despite being an unsung hero among Florida's native wildflowers. While Spanish Needle is considered a native plant to Florida, it's still essential to manage its growth to prevent the choking off of other plants, gardens, and yards. Regular yard maintenance and the proper use of herbicides can help control its spread and ensure that your yard remains healthy and beautiful all year long. So next time you see a Spanish Needle in your yard, don't worry too much, but take the necessary steps to keep it under control. And remember, it might just be helping some of our beautiful Florida wildlife!

Embracing Nature's Canvas in 2024

As we eagerly await the blossoming of spring, let's bring forth a myriad of possibilities.

The current trend leans towards embracing local, organically grown plants – a reflection of the growing global consciousness towards eco-friendly practices.

Sustainability is Always Key

But this isn't just about being sustainable; it's an invitation to get creative. Because in the diverse tapestry of commercial landscaping, being distinctive is not just encouraged; it's a celebration of individuality. Choosing a theme becomes an essential element in this narrative and committing to a theme adds depth and personality to your outdoor sanctuary.

We can embark on this journey together – not as consumers but as appreciators of the artistry that is commercial landscaping. Because in 2024, it's not just about trends; it's about the harmonious dance between nature's wonders and our creative interpretations.

Gardens of Abundance

Pollinator gardens have been popular for several years, but now gardeners are embracing the idea of spaces that are productive on all levels. This trend focuses on more than just pollinators. We are seeing an increased interest in soil health, doing good for the environment, and creating a space that is our very own Garden of Eden.

Health & Wellness Will Be Prioritized

With research demonstrating the many benefits of spending time in nature, it's no surprise that businesses will be investing more in creating landscapes that promote health and wellness. This could mean incorporating walking paths, meditation areas, or even outdoor yoga spaces. Businesses may also opt for plants and materials that have been proven to improve air quality and reduce stress and anxiety.

Personalization and Branding Will Be Key

As businesses continue to compete for customers and talent, creating a unique and memorable outdoor space will become increasingly important. Expect to see more businesses incorporating branding and personalization into their landscapes, with custom sculptures, signage, and other features that reflect the organization's identity. In some cases, businesses may even opt for wholly unique landscapes that serve as a kind of outdoor advertisement for their brand.

Whether you're a business owner looking to create a standout outdoor space, a homeowner looking to stay ahead of the curve, or simply a fan of beautiful landscapes, there's no doubt that there are exciting times ahead for the commercial gardening industry. So buckle up, get creative, and enjoy the ride!



The Raccoon: Florida's Masked Bandits

Raccoons are the most common nuisance wildlife species in Florida. These furry bandits live along riverbanks, close to water. They live in hidden burrows and forage for food at night. Like thieves in the night, they break into people's homes, porches, attics, lanais, and garages and create a mess, especially if there is any garbage left behind. They are also carriers of rabies, which can be transferred to you or your pets and attack humans with little provocation.

They are omnivores, eating just about anything. Dumpster diving raccoons are quite common today, having adapted to living close to our homes and businesses, but these creatures are surprisingly clean and picky regarding their food. Aside from their characteristic masks, the unique raccoon behavior of washing food is one of this animal's best-known qualities. This trait is what helped this mammal earn its scientific name: the "Lotor" in *Procyon lotor* translates to "washer" in English.

Raccoons in the wild can live up to 16 years, and records report a captive raccoon living for 21 years. However, many don't make it past the age of three. Some deaths are attributed to predators like cougars, bobcats, wolves, foxes, and owls. Disease, hunting, trapping, and cars account for the majority of deaths. Raccoons range in weight from 12-30 pounds, and up to 50% of their weight can be made up of fat. They are known for their masked face and the distinguishing ring markings on their tail. Anywhere from 5-7, dark-colored rings appear on the tail in an alternating pattern in brownish grey colors. Their tails often make up over half of their body length, which can often be over two feet. Raccoons are very agile tree climbers and do not mind climbing or falling from elevations as high as 40 feet. They are considered to be quite intelligent and skilled animals. They use their paws to open trash cans and doors, pick up their food, and eat it like a human does. Raccoons have bad eyesight and are color-blind but have great hearing and a great sense of smell.

Raccoon Disease's

Raccoons have a reputation for carrying diseases that are dangerous to humans. Because they are not picky eaters and will ravage garbage cans and even dead and rotting animals, they are carriers of harmful bacteria and parasites. Raccoon roundworm is a microscopic parasite that is extremely dangerous to other animals and humans. If humans contract the disease from raccoon droppings, it can cause nervous system distress, blindness, and sometimes death. Raccoon rabies makes up almost half of all wildlife rabies cases that are reported in the United States.

Raccoon Facts

A group of raccoons is known as a gaze. Communal dens of raccoons can contain as many as 23 members, but most have just four to five.

Raccoons have a large array of vocalizations. Scientists have determined that they can make over 50 different sounds.

They purr, whistle, growl, hiss, scream, and even whiny.

Raccoon's hands are so nimble they can unlatch a shoe, unlatch a cage, and retrieve coins from your shirt pocket.

On the mammal IQ scale, raccoons rank higher than cats and just below monkeys.

Raccoons have the ability to rotate their hind feet a full 180 degrees to allow for their ability to climb down from trees headfirst.

A raccoon can run up to 15 miles per hour.

The heaviest weight recorded for a raccoon was 99 pounds.

They can live in storm drains and sewers.

Population densities in urban areas can be 20 times higher than for raccoons in rural environments.

Raccoons have 40 sharp teeth, including four long canine teeth at the front of the mouth.

Christopher Columbus is the first person we know of to have written about the species.



All About Pansies

Since ancient times people from all corners of the world have been attaching different emotions and meanings to the pansy. According to an ancient Roman story, Cupid accidentally hit a wild pansy with one of his powerful arrows, giving the flower the power to make someone fall in love. Even Shakespeare included heartsease in his play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: "The juice of it, on sleeping eyelids laid, will make a man or woman madly dote upon the next live creature that it sees."

Pansies were also a fashionable Victorian flower and were supposed to be the flower of lovers. Legend has it that pansies could transfer thoughts of sweethearts without spoken words. The word 'pansy' is reported to be derived from the French word, 'pensee' which translates as 'remembrance' or 'thoughts.'

Pansies and violas are charming cold-tolerant annuals that you can plant in winter and enjoy through spring. Viola flowers are small—typically less than an inch across—while pansy flowers can be two to three inches wide. The Pansy and Viola are some of the most common cold-tolerant plants found in Florida gardens, and they are more than just hardy. Coming in a range of colors from purple to white, with a dark center and bright flowers, they look gorgeous. They make great plants for containers as well, should you want to accent your landscape. Who can resist the charming faces of pansies? These happy-go-lucky annual flowers almost seem to smile as you walk by. Pansies excel in beds and borders or packed into window boxes, hanging baskets, and containers. This foolproof little sun-lover grows 6 to 9 inches tall and will bloom its head off until hot summer weather brings the flower show to a close. Colors include yellow, red, mahogany, blue, purple, mauve, pink, orange, white, and even black. Pansies also bear either clear or blotched flowers.

Symbolism of Pansy Colors

Purple Pansy

Due to how difficult it was to obtain purple dye, purple has traditionally been linked to royalty and power across various cultures.

On the other hand, however, there is a bit more to the purple pansy than meets the eye. Black or dark purple pansies represent a broken heart.

Red Pansy

Red pansies in particular are the epitome of love and affection.

Blue Pansy

They symbolize loyalty, honesty, devotion, and trust. Blue pansies can make great gifts for friends or trusted colleagues.

Orange Pansy

You won't see orange pansies nearly as often as the color is not as common, but that just makes them even more striking. Vivid and energetic, orange pansies represent hope and optimism, embodying the essence of positivity. Orange pansies can also be used to celebrate achievements.

Yellow Pansy

You can keep yellow pansies close to your heart as a reminder to stay positive and joyful or give them to someone who needs a little pick me up. If you know someone is going through a tough time, yellow pansies can be the perfect gift.

White Pansy

With their pristine white petals, white pansies symbolize things like virtue, purity, and innocence. White pansies also have a strong spiritual association as well. The spiritual connotation of white pansies also adds to their significance, as they are believed to bring positive energy and blessings into the lives of those who possess them.



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