Happy New Year! It is the start of a new year with the promise of a beautiful spring just around the corner. But first we have winter, with its own beauty. In this month’s issue, Ed Rhinehart gives us hints on how we can remember and improve our garden year by year. Also this month, Joe Mahoney is starting a series on Landscape Turf. Entitled “Turf Wars”. Joe will lead you through the whole beautiful lawn process. I have a few tips on one of my favorites - Camellias. As always, keep up with what we have planned for you, with our monthly calendar. We welcome your feedback and comments at: SumterCoMGJournal@gmail.com

WINTER GARDENING
Ed Rhinehart

At this time of year, just having some color in my yard sounds like a great idea! Coming from the North, the season of winter puts an end to flowering plants outside. Here in Florida we have plants that bloom with flowers during January, but what worked for me last January? I cannot remember. This year I am going to make a plan for each season. This will be a simple process.
First, I will take some pictures: Examples are:
- My gardens at the end of February
- Village medians
- Sumter Landing and Spanish Springs Town Squares
- Commercial properties in adjoining cities (banks, restaurants etc.)

These pictures will help me to remember what plants survived, what plants still look good, whether they are in the landscape or in containers. So far, so good!

Secondly, I am going to make a list of the plants that are now in my gardens and clip it to a month on the calendar, so I can cross-reference next winters season.

There have been some pretty cold evenings already in December. One of the plants in my yard that survived very well is the Dianthus. I know that the pansies, snapdragons and violas have been successful, but Dianthus is a new plant in my garden. The best part of this plant is that it adds color, shape, hardiness and with some varieties, even fragrance. The Dianthus can be either tall (24”) or short (6”) depending on the variety. We usually see it in pinks, purples, magentas, reds or whites. Many Dianthus plants have combinations of these colors.

It is not necessary to give your Dianthus plants a lot of water. Once established they, do very well on their own and will continue to flower for years. If they sit in water, they will rot.

Isn’t it great, here we are in January talking about plants with flowers and colors!

Okay it’s time for you to go out and take some pictures.

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**Camellias** - **Dani Camp**

In January when most of our shrubs are taking a rest, camellias take the front and center stage. Camellias bloom anytime from late fall to early spring. When in bloom, groupings of the same type of camellia, planted in mass, is a spectacular sight and a welcome colorful addition to a sometimes dreary winter landscape.

Camellias were introduced to the United State through the port city of Charleston, SC. A native of Asia, the Camellia does well in the Southeast. Camellias do well in North Florida but do require some attention here in Central Florida.
Most camellias are evergreen and work well as foundation plants, accent plants or as background groupings. No matter where you put them, keep in mind that camellias need to be protected from the hot afternoon sun in the summer and cold winds in the winter. Plants that are planted in dense shade will not bloom as well as plants that get at least four hours of morning sun.

Camellias prefer a slightly acidic soil (a pH between 5.0 and 6.0) that is high in organic matter. Make sure that they have good drainage, as they do not like wet feet. Two to three inches of mulch surrounding your plant will ensure that your camellia’s root system is protected from extreme temperature changes that can occur here in Central Florida.

From fall to early spring, Camellias’ gorgeous flowers will provide color to your yard and home, as they also make beautiful cut flowers. I like to cut them without stems and let them float in a bowl of water in my home. With just a little bit of love and care your camellias will bring you beauty for weeks in the gray of winter.

For more information on camellias, go to solutionsforyourlife.com

Dani Camp

TURF WARS ……………..(First of a series of articles on Turf)

Joe Mahoney

Some of the toughest questions a Master Gardener faces are the questions that a homeowner asks that involve turf. Maintaining a beautiful lawn is one of the most difficult challenges that a homeowner may deal with in regards to maintaining a landscape. A consistent carpet of green adds a certain type of appeal that draws the eye of the beholder into the overall impact that prized trees and shrubs make with their statements.

Looking through landscape magazines and books, you will see many photos of beautiful lawns. Brochures that are printed by large landscape companies show perfect lawns. These images are presented to the homeowner as an ideal and a goal to strive for. It is amazing what airbrushing and color correction can do to make an impression.

The truth is, you can have a lawn that looks as beautiful as these photos show, if you can afford it. The requirements are constant care. Time must be spent, at least 4 hours a week dedicated to checking for pests, water analysis, soil samples for acidity, micronutrients, fertilizing with specific fertilizers, raking, aeration, de-thatching, mirroring light into shady areas and a lot of fretting over what tomorrow will bring.
Then there is the monetary cost of buying all the materials needed and paying the gardener who is doing all the work. A lot of money goes into maintaining a golf course. Everyone marvels when they pass by a golf course. The turf makes you want to jump right into the scene and become a part of it.

But think for a minute. How do the greens look when you are right up close? Are there weeds? Are there brown spots where a fungus has had an effect? Was a colorant sprayed onto the turf to give it a good cosmetic look? What other imperfections are there?

The natural environment in Florida allows for many diverse types of grass to be planted and cultivated into turf lawns. There are different varieties of St. Augustine, Zoysia, Bahia and Bermuda grass as well as annual varieties of rye grass that are planted routinely as turf. Each type has its own unique set of qualities that may make it appealing to the homeowner.

Each type of grass also has its own unique set of problems. Insects such as Chinch bugs and Mole Crickets will attack St. Augustine while Zoysia will not get Chinch bugs. However, Zoysia will suffer from Billbugs and Mole Crickets while Bahiagrass will just get Mole Crickets. Sod webworms, grubs and some other nuisance pests will invade any turf area regardless of the type of grass that is planted.

So how do we get that great looking lawn? First, get rid of any pre-conceived idea about what perfection is when it comes to turf lawns. There is no perfection in the real world, only real beauty and it is that real beauty that this series of articles is going to produce in your turf areas.

Q & A

Question: What bulbs can be planted in January?
Answer: Crinum, agapanthus, and gloriosa lily can be planted in January. Provide a layer of mulch for protection from cold temperatures. Go to the University of Florida's website for more information on "Bulbs for Central Florida" http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/mg029

Question: What is the most important thing I can do in my landscape when freezing temperatures are predicted?
Answer: Make sure your sprinkler system is turned off the night of the predicted freeze. Water the day before and then turn the system off. Water after a freeze if the soil looks dry.
Question: My plants look awful after the last freeze. Can I cut them back now?
Answer: It is not a good idea to cut back now. There could be many more cold and freezing days ahead. Damaged leaves on plants protect the base of the plant and roots, giving the plants a good chance to come back when the weather warms. Time to prune is around March 15th.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS – Info: 352-793-2728

JANUARY 2011

Mon. 3 12p-2p Florida Gardens Questions and Answers
Truman Rec. Ctr., 2705 Canal St

Tues. 18 9-11 am New Residents’ Workshop
Colony Cottage Rec. Ctr, 510 Colony Blvd.
Registration Required: 352-793-2728

Tues. 25 Twice on Tuesdays - Ticket Required
Winter Gardens & Yards
9-10 am Savannah Center, 1545 Buena Vista Blvd
1-2 pm Sea Breeze, Buena Vista Blvd. & Bailey Trail

Free tickets available,
Tues, Jan. 11 at Savannah or Sea Breeze
9 am to 4 pm, Tues to Fri. until sold out.

Plant Clinics are available at The Villages Annex Sumter County Extension Office every Monday from 9am to 3pm and at the Bushnell Sumter County Extension Office every Wednesday from 9 am to 3 pm.

All Extension Offices and Programs will be closed January 17th for Martin Luther King Day.

Coming in March – Sumter County Fair & Master Gardener Horticulture Show
Enter your favorite plant - More information in next issue

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