Winter is here, so keep those sheets and frost blankets handy. There are a few steps gardeners can take to help get their landscape through the end of Winter and ready for Spring. First, be sure to cover your plants correctly during a freeze. One mistake homeowners make is not going through the proper steps to cover their plants the right way. Make sure to use good material such as sheets or frost cloths. Be sure that the material goes all the way to the ground. Secure with stakes or stones. By placing the material all the way to the ground, you will be able to trap heat that is radiated back up into the plant from the ground. Material that comes in contact with foliage during a hard frost can still burn the leaves through the material. Placing a frame over the plants will help keep the material from touching the foliage of your plants. Placing a heat lamp is also effective, but be sure that the heat lamp is not touching any part of the material. Lightly watering the soil before a freeze will also help radiate heat back up into the plant, as well.

After a freeze event, uncover your plants and check their watering requirements. Hold off on pruning material until mid-March. Pruning too early may cause plants to flush out too soon. This new growth may be damaged if a following freeze occurs. Once Mid-March approaches, wait until you start to see new growth before pruning. Removing live wood prematurely can stress your plant. Apply a slow release fertilizer in March to help your plants get a jump on Spring. Your turf will also need to be fertilized in March. Apply a slow-release fertilizer such as 15-0-15 to green up your lawn.

By: Jim Davis

Temperatures Take a Dive in the Lagoon
By: Holly Tuxbury

The endangered green sea turtle is depending on the help of trained biologists as the temperatures plummet in the Mosquito Lagoon. Over 90 turtles have been rescued from the stunning cold waters, which normally keep a variety of species safe from predators and the elements. For more information please visit the Sea Turtle Preservation Society’s website at seaturtlespacecoast.org/.

Photo by Joseph Mackenzie
Calibrating Your Irrigation System

Do you know if your landscape is getting enough water? When asked this question, most people respond by giving the minutes their irrigation system runs; for example 45 minutes, 30 minutes etc. Homeowners need to determine how much water their irrigation system is applying. Not knowing how much water your landscape is receiving leads to over-watering or not applying enough water. Over-watering can lead to increased maintenance costs, higher water bills, increased chance of insect and disease damage, thatch and wastes water. Under-watering can lead to a stressed plant which can result in death.

Calibrating your irrigation is very simple:
1.) First, obtain 5 to 10 straight-sided containers. (Empty tuna cans work great).
2.) Place the containers in one zone at a time, spacing the containers evenly apart.
3.) Turn your irrigation system on for about 15 to 20 minutes.
4.) After the allotted time, use a ruler to measure how much water is in each can.
5.) Add up all the depths and divide by the number of cans used. This gives the average depth of water collected.
6.) The average depth of water collected should be between 1/2”-3/4”.

If your measurement is less than 3/4” increase your run time till you reach the target depth of 1/2”-3/4”.
If your measurement is more than ¾” decrease your run time till you reach the target depth of 1/2”-3/4”.

Knowing how much water you are actually applying in your landscape will result in healthier plants and a healthier turf grass.

By: Jim Davis

Florida Friendly Plant—Blanket Flower

Gaillardia pulchella
Blanket flower is one of Florida’s most beautiful and abundant wildflowers. This Florida native can be planted throughout the state. Blanket flower grows to about 12” to 24” tall and has single or double red orange, orange/yellow or all yellow flowers. Flowers are about 3” wide and bloom throughout the summer and fall months. This is a very drought-tolerant plant that hates wet feet. Blanket flower requires full sun. Once it gets established, water only as-needed. It is also very resistant to insects and diseases. Cultivars of blanket flower include ‘Yellow Sun’ and ‘Red Plume’. Companion plants for blanket flower include tropical sage, liatris, bulbine, purple coneflower, society garlic, mystic spires salvia, phlox and coreopsis.

By: Jim Davis