

April Gardening Guide

By: Patricia Porchey

This is proving to be one of our driest spring seasons. It naturally poses the question, how does one train plants to tolerate drought? There are several cultural practices to sustain our landscape plants until rains become more plentiful. Even though one is tempted to apply a little water several times per week during a drought, only one deep watering per week is recommended. Irrigate deeply; deep watering improves drought resistance by promoting a deeper and more extensive root system. Moisture needs to reach a depth of 6-12 inches for annuals and turf, which is achieved by applying $\frac{3}{4}$ inch of water. For shrubs and young trees, moisture needs to reach a depth of at least 12 inches or applying one inch of water. Watering in the morning is the most efficient time because less water will be lost to evaporation and wind drift. Following are other tips for water management during a drought.

Drought management Tips:

- Check your irrigation system to see it's operating properly.
- Convert overhead irrigation heads to micro-irrigation in beds to minimize water loss yet get it to the plant roots.
- Remove weeds that are taking moisture from your landscape plants.
- Fertilize sparingly with low nitrogen levels in a slow-release fertilizer. Fertilizer encourages growth thereby increasing the need for water.
- Let plants tell you when they need to be watered. Turf blades will fold together and turn dull bluish grey when they need water and footprints in grass will remain long after steps are taken. Leaves on shrubs and trees similarly will droop and lose their luster.
- Raise cutting height of mower; taller turf encourages deeper roots.
- Mow less frequently to reduce the moisture loss to respiration when leaves are cut and keep mower blades sharp.
- Add soil amendments to beds before doing any new planting; this will help our sandy soil retain moisture.
- Select drought-tolerant plants for new plantings. Drought-tolerant annuals are globe amaranth, periwinkle, marigold, melampodium, Portulaca, Salvia, and Verbena.
- Mulch to maintain moisture in the soil around bedding plants, shrubs and trees. There is free compost and mulch provided by the county at the old Bee Ridge landfill and at the following parks:
Butler Park, 6205 West Price Blvd., North Port
Longwood Park, 6050 Longwood Blvd., Sarasota
Nokomis Community Park, 234 Nippino Trail, Nokomis
Shamrock Park, 3900 West Shamrock Drive, Venice

Upcoming educational classes:

- "Poisonous Plants" at Shamrock Park, April 4 at 2:00 pm. Call 486-2706 or 861-9900 to register.

- “Palms in the Landscape” at Twin Lakes Park, April 12 at 10:00 am. Call 861-9900.
- “Stinging Insects” at Shamrock Park, April 18 at 2:00 pm. Call 486-2706 or 861-9900 to register.
- “Landscaping for Wildlife” at Florida House Learning Center, April 25 at 2:00 pm. Call 316-1200.
- “Growing Tropical Fruits” at Shamrock Park, May 2 at 2:00 pm. Call 486-2706 or 861-9900 to register.
- “Citrus in the Urban Landscape” at Florida House Learning Center, May 9 at 2:00 pm. Call 316-1200.

Planting guide:

Vegetables & Herbs: Anise, basil, beans, borage, cantaloupe, chervil, comfrey, corn, cucumber, cumin, horehound, lemon balm, marjoram, mint, okra, oregano, peas, summer savory, sweet potatoes, tarragon and thyme.

Annuals: Amaranthus, aster, Celosia, Cleome, Coleus, Cosmos, dusty miller, four o'clock, Gazania, geranium, Impatiens, Lobelia, morning glory, Nicotiana, ornamental pepper, Pentas, periwinkle, Phlox, Portulaca, Salvia, Torenia, Verbena and Zinnia.

Perennials: African iris, Amazon lily, Aztec lily, blue daze, blue-eyed grass, blood lily, Caladium, Canna, Coreopsis, Crossandra, Dianthus, Gaillardia, Gaura, Gerbera daisy, gloriosa lily, milkweed, Mexican heather, Philippine violet, rain lily, Rudbeckia, Salvia, Scabiosa, shell ginger, shrimp plants, Tithonia and Verbena.

Fruits in Season: Banana, blueberry, Carambola, citrus, (calamondin, grapefruit, key lime, lemon, lime, and orange), kumquat, loquat, Mysore raspberry and strawberry.

Blooming Plants: Amaryllis, avocado, azalea, bottlebrush, bougainvillea, buddleia, confederate jasmine, dwarf Indian hawthorn, Jacaranda tree, Cordia tree, Lantana, Macadamia, Magnolia, Nasturtium, orchid tree, rose, silk oak tree, society garlic, Simpson's stopper, trumpet tree, Turk's cap, Viburnum and wildflowers.

If you have questions concerning your landscape, please call or visit our office at Twin Lakes Park on Clark Road east of I-75. The **Master Gardener Help Desk** is open Monday-Friday from 9:00 am-Noon and 1:00-4:00 pm (941-861-9807). Our satellite help desk at Selby Library is open Wednesdays from 9:30 am-Noon.

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