

## April Gardening Guide (2009)

By Patricia Porchey

Are you a good “steward” of the land? This is becoming a more familiar term as more emphasis is placed on being green and lowering our carbon footprints.

Water conservation is at the top of the list for being an environmental steward after three years of drought and a new year where we are already five inches below the normal rainfall. Some counties and municipalities are already imposing what some would consider drastic measures to combat the water shortages.

If you have already established the practice of watering your plants only when they “tell” you they are thirsty, you’ve already started them down the road to being more drought tolerant. They will develop longer roots as they search for water during the intervals between watering and be better able to sustain themselves. This is true of all plants, not just turf.

Here are other practices you can adopt to be a good steward and still have a healthy landscape:

- Test your irrigation system routinely to make sure the heads are functioning properly and water is hitting the intended target and not running onto the street.
- Test the amount of water being generated by the heads and cut it back to 3/4 inch each application.
- Allow turf to grow longer before mowing, as well as, adhering to the rule to only remove 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the blades at a time.
- Water in the morning so more moisture is taken in by the roots and not lost to evaporation. Avoid watering in the evening as this could lead to disease problems.
- Convert flower and shrub beds to micro-irrigation to more effectively get water to the roots where it is needed.
- Incorporate the use of mulch into your landscape maintenance to help hold the moisture in the soil longer as well as prevent weeds. As mulch breaks down, it will improve the soil texture so moisture and nutrients remain in the soil longer.
- Use fertilizers containing at least 50% slow-release nutrients so nutrients don’t leach through the soil quickly.
- When pests are a problem, use the least toxic treatment, such as soaps and oils.
- Treat plants only when the number of pests poses a threat and no beneficial insects are present.
- Eliminate those plants from your landscape that attract pests and require more treatment with pesticides.
- Always read the labels on pesticides and herbicides before using them. Some herbicides may cause injury to plants when the temperatures go over 85 degrees.
- Reward yourself financially and nutritionally by growing some of your own food.
- Teach your children and grandchildren what you have learned and encourage them to garden with you.

## **Blooming & 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, 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, blood lily, Caladium, Canna, Coreopsis, Crossandra, Dianthus, Gaillardia, Gaura, Gerbera daisy, Gloriosa lily, milkweed, Mexican heather, Philippine violet, rain lily, 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, Surinam cherry, and strawberry.
- **Blooming Plants:** Amaryllis, avocado, azalea, bottlebrush, Bougainvillea, confederate jasmine, dwarf Indian hawthorn, Jacaranda, Cordia, Lantana, Macadamia, Magnolia, Nasturtium, orchid tree, rose, society garlic, Simpson's stopper, trumpet trees, Turk's cap, and Viburnum.

## **Upcoming classes**

Call 861-9900 to register for the following classes.

- First Saturdays Class on Organic Vegetables, Orange Blossom Community Garden, Orange Avenue Park, 18<sup>th</sup> & Orange, 1:00 p.m. April 4
- Backyard Landscapes for Native Pollinators, Twin Lakes Park, 4:00 p.m. April 8
- Container Gardening, Selby Library, 2:00 p.m. April 13
- Container Gardening, North Sarasota Library, 2:00 p.m. April 13
- Butterfly Gardening, Twin Lakes Park, 10:00 a.m. April 15
- Butterfly Predators, Twin Lakes Park, 1:00 p.m. April 15
- Are You Fire Wise?, Twin Lakes Park, 4:00 p.m. April 15
- Chinch Bugs & White Grubs, Shamrock Park, 2:00 p.m. April 16
- Urban Trees: Growing the Future, Gulf Gate Library, 2:00 p.m. April 17
- Third Saturdays Class on Organic Vegetables, Laurel Community Garden, Laurel Community Garden, Forest & Collins, Laurel, 10:30 a.m. April 18
- Florida Yards & Neighborhoods: Creating Your Florida Yard, Fruitville Library, 2:00 p.m. April 20
- Insect Biodiversity in the Garden, Twin Lakes Park, 1:00 p.m. April 22
- Termites: What to Know & Do About Them, Twin Lakes Park, 1:00 p.m. April 29
- First Saturdays Class on Organic Vegetables, Orange Blossom Community Garden, Orange Avenue Park, 18<sup>th</sup> & Orange, 1:00 p.m. April 4
- First Saturdays Class on Organic Vegetables, Orange Blossom Community Garden, Orange Avenue Park, 18<sup>th</sup> & Orange, 1:00 p.m. May 2

**For information**

The **Master Gardener Help Desk** now has an email address: [mghelpdesk@scgov.net](mailto:mghelpdesk@scgov.net) to answer questions. It is open Monday-Friday from 9:00 a.m.-Noon and 1:00-4:00 p.m. You can call (941-861-9807) or visit our office at Twin Lakes Park on Clark Road east of I-75 with landscape questions. We also have weekly satellite help desks at the four south county libraries and every third Saturday of the month at the **Downtown Farmer's Market**.

(Patricia Porchey is an Urban Horticulture Agent with University of Florida/IFAS Sarasota County Extension. Website: <http://sarasota.extension.ufl.edu>)

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