

August Gardening Guide

By Patricia Porchey

This has been an unusually dry and hot summer which has made our enthusiasm to grow more plants wane. Despite the heat, there is increase interest in growing our own vegetables and growing them organically. This is the time to plan that fall garden. A garden is only as good as the preparatory work that precedes the planting. This is more than browsing through seed catalogs and seed racks.

The first thing to do is look at the site and soil. Is the location in the sun and near a water supply? If it's sandy soil and has never been amended, it's especially important to add some organic matter to improve its water-holding capacity. If it's clay-like soil, improving the drainage is important. Organic amendments such as peat humus, composted manure and compost will support the soil's microbiological activity and contribute nutrients to the soil. The county has free compost available to homeowners. Call 861-5000 for the pick-up site nearest you.

This is the perfect time to solarize the soil. First, remove all the vegetation, till the soil with added amendments, and rake it smooth so there's a slight mound in the middle. Wet the soil and cover it with a 4-6 mil clear plastic. The thicker gauge will not break down from the sun's UV rays as quickly. Pull it snug and anchor the sides so the wind cannot get under it. Leave it undisturbed for 4-6 weeks. The soil will warm to a hot temperature and literally "bake" the nematodes that are normally in the uppermost part of the soil as well as eliminate weed seeds and soil-borne diseases. Once you remove the plastic, the area is ready to be planted without further preparation.

As you're making your seed selections, be aware of the varieties that are recommended for Florida. When selecting tomatoes, look for the label with the letters VFNT, the N means it is a nematode-resistant variety and it also has resistance to the VFT diseases. For more information on gardening, visit our office or the University of Florida website <http://search.ifas.ufl.edu>.

Gardening activities:

- Continue monitoring for chinch bugs in St. Augustine and mole crickets in Bahia grass. Pick up some larraflower seeds at our office or the satellite locations to attract the beneficial larra wasp that kills mole crickets.
- Monitor for sod webworms eating your grass blades. Apply Bt which only target worms and caterpillars and will not harm any beneficial insects that are present.
- Monitor lawns for possible disease problems with increased moisture from the summer rains. Dollar spot is common on Bahia grass and brown patch and gray leaf spot, on St. Augustine.
- Turn off the weekly irrigation on your timer.
- Let moles continue feasting on the insects in your lawn until they are gone. You can avoid applying an insecticide and you'll get your exercise by stomping their mounds down.

- Green up your lawn in the summer with chelated iron.
- Monitor for lacebugs on avocado and azalea and treat with horticultural soap or oil.
- Remove seeds from crape myrtles to encourage a second bloom.

Planting guide:

Vegetables (seeds at end of month) & **Herbs** (plants): Basil, broccoli, celery, collards, corn, eggplant, lemon balm, marjoram, Mexican tarragon, mint, okra, onions, oregano, pole beans, pumpkin, rosemary, southern peas, summer squash, thyme, and watermelon.

Annuals: Begonia, Celosia, Coleus, Cosmos, Dahlia, dusty miller, marigold, Portulaca, periwinkle, Salvia, and Zinnia.

Perennials: African iris, beach buttercup, blackberry lily, Caladium, Coreopsis, firespike, Gaillardia, Gaura, Iris, Jacobinia, Kalanchoe, milkweed, Pentas, Salvia, society garlic, and Verbena..

Blooming plants: Cordia, crape myrtle, golden raintree, goldenrod, Ixora, Lantana, Magnolia, Oleander, orange jasmine, yellow Poinciana, red and yellow shrimp plants, rouge plant, Plumbago, Thryallis, Tibouchina and Thunbergia.

Fruits in Season: Avocado, banana, Barbados cherry, blueberry, carambola, citrus (calamondin, lemon, and lime), cocoplum, fig, guava, kumquat, longan, mango, Monstera, muscadine grape, papaya, passionfruit pineapple, sea grape, and sugar apple.

Upcoming educational classes:

You may now register for classes on-line at our website:

<http://sarasota.extension.ufl.edu/EdSched.htm> or call 861-5000.

- “Colorful Landscapes” at Twin Lakes Park, August 8, 10:00 a.m.
- “Hurricanes & Trees” at Twin Lakes Park, August 8, 2:00 p.m.
- “Coastal Native Plants” at Twin Lakes Park, August 15, 10:00 a.m.
- “Insect Biodiversity of a Garden Plant” at Twin Lakes Park, August 15, 2:00 p.m.
- “Fire-wise Landscaping” at Shamrock Park, August 16, 2:00 p.m.
- “Is that Spider Dangerous?” at Twin Lakes Park, August 22, 2:00 p.m.
- “Termites: A Guide for Homeowners” at Twin Lakes Park, August 29, 2:00 p.m.

Florida House is temporarily closed. The house is being moved to its new location on Beneva Road. The gardens and the house will reopen in the spring. 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 desks at five county libraries are open throughout the summer.

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