

January Gardening Guide

By Patricia Porchey

Is your backyard somber and still in the winter? Would you like it to be bustling with wildlife - abuzz with their chatter and playground-like with their comings and goings? Up north, bird feeders often provided that congregational site. Here where the ground doesn't freeze, birds aren't forced to resort to feeders for food unless their native habitat has been altered.

Homeowners can protect displaced wildlife by using plants, especially natives, to simulate their natural habitat that has been destroyed by development. Sometimes this is as easy as doing less maintenance. Instead of using that electric hedge trimmer, use hand pruners to achieve a more natural looking hedge that's three to eight feet in height. If you want a three-foot hedge, remember to select plants that only grow to that height at maturity and the need to prune will be eliminated except for an occasional errant branch. Birds prefer unpruned informal hedges and dense evergreen hedges. Actually, birds prefer thorny hedges for nesting as it provides some protection from predators. Left unpruned, these hedges are also allowed to flower and set fruit to provide necessary food for wildlife.

Layering of plants – more than one row of plants and each row attaining a different height from ground level to the lower branches of a tree canopy - creates cover for wildlife. Even a brush pile hidden behind hedges can be beneficial as both cover and as a food source. Snags, dead wood on trees, left unpruned provide insects for woodpeckers and other birds and cavities for nesting.

Sometimes less time spent manicuring your plants is better – you can have endless hours of enjoyment watching nature do its thing and have the personal satisfaction of being a steward of the land in your own backyard. For more information, download the University publication, “Landscaping Backyards for Wildlife: Top Ten Tips for Success” <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/UW/UW17500.pdf>.

Gardening activities:

- Plant a tree for Arbor Day, January 20, 2006 to reduce heating and cooling costs, remove air pollutants, reduce pollutant runoff from irrigation, produce life-giving oxygen, and provide wildlife habitat for birds, etc.
- Remove non-native invasive plants that destroy wildlife habitat.
- Convert expansive lawn areas into areas inviting to wildlife.
- Prepare beds for spring gardens.
- Fertilize vegetables and annuals monthly.
- Irrigate less often as the temperatures go down. Water turf every 10-14 days if there is no rain, but water annuals, perennials and vegetables more frequently.
- Watch the weather forecasts and be prepared to protect cold-sensitive plants on cold nights. Cover plants with commercial frost blankets, burlap, grocery bags, cardboard boxes, sheets, or lightweight blankets.

- Water the soil, but not the leaves, the day before the cold front arrives.
- Remember to remove protective coverings during sunny days.

Upcoming educational classes:

- “Tree Structure and Pruning” at Florida House, January 10 at 2:00 pm. Call 316-1200 to register.
- “Sustainable Agriculture – An Introduction” at Twin Lakes Park, January 18 at 2:00 pm. Call 861-9900.
- “Why Landscapes Fail” at Florida House, January 24 at 2:00 pm. Call 316-1200.
- “Citrus Galore” at Shamrock Park, January 17 at 2:00 pm. Call 486-2706
- “Citrus Galore” at Twin Lakes Park, January 25 at 10:00 am. Call 861-9900.

Planting guide:

Vegetables & Herbs: Beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, Chinese cabbage, chives, collards, coriander, dill, eggplant, endive, fennel, garlic, kale, kohlrabi, lettuce, mustard, onion, parsley, peas, pepper, potatoes, radish, rosemary, sage, tomatoes, turnips, and watermelon.

Annuals: Alyssum, ageratum, Calendula, dusty miller, geranium, Lobelia, nasturtium, pansy, ornamental cabbage and kale, petunia, phlox, snapdragon, Statice and Verbena.

Perennials: Agapanthus, Amaryllis, calla lily, Clivia, Crinum lily, daylily, Dianthus, gloriosa lily, blue sage, Shasta daisy, society garlic, Tithonia, Viola, and walking iris.

Fruits in Season: Avocado, banana, carambola, cherimoya, citrus (calamondin, grapefruit, key lime, lemon, lime, orange, and tangerine), hog plum, Indian jujube, kumquat, and papaya.

Blooming plants: Bougainvillea, Chinese hat plant, crown of thorns, desert rose, Jatropha, Kalanchoe, lion’s ear, mango, Mexican flame vine, orchid tree, poinsettia, porterweed, purple Tabebuia, red and yellow shrimp plants, silver trumpet Tabebuia, thryallis, Thunbergia, and Turk’s cap.

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)

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