

March Gardening Guide (2008)

By Patricia Porchey

Are your shrubs looking scraggly and woody instead of robust with foliage? This is common after ten years of severe pruning on shrubs to keep them at three feet when nature meant them to grow 10 feet tall. Are you ready to select new plants for your landscape? Before replacing them, do your research and find those shrubs that are meant to be 3 feet tall and won't require lots of maintenance.

The Florida-friendly plant database at the University of Florida, <http://FloridaYards.org/> has what you need. It allows you to pre-select the categories you are interested in: trees, shrubs, groundcovers, etc.; then it allows you to specify light conditions, moisture conditions, soil type, and salt tolerance. The result is an extensive list of plant choices with all the pertinent cultural information to grow them successfully. Color photos are included to aid you in your selections.

Here are some common mistakes in plant choices that result in plant decline or death:

- Installing a sun-loving plant in the shade
- Installing a shade-loving plant in the full sun
- Installing a plant that needs lots of moisture where there's no irrigation
- Installing a drought-tolerant plant in a wet area (except for plants that tolerate both, such as Bald cypress)
- Installing an acid-loving plant in alkaline soil

Gardening activities:

- Prune cold-damaged branches from shrubs and trees
- Prune spring-blooming plants after they have bloomed
- Fertilize all your plants if you did not do it in February. If you have palms or fruit trees, remember to use only products marked for those particular plants.
- Slow-release fertilizer is preferred for all plants. Do not apply any fertilizer within 10 feet of a water body.
- Spring is normally dry so be prepared to water your fruit trees every two to three weeks if you are not on irrigation and there is no rain.
- As warm temperatures increase, monitor for plant pests, but don't spray until they are correctly identified. Use the least toxic control.

Blooming & planting guide

- Vegetables & Herbs: Anise, basil, beans, beets, borage, cantaloupe, chervil, comfrey, corn, cucumber, cumin, kohlrabi, lemon balm, lettuce, marjoram, mustard, okra, oregano, peas, summer savory, sweet peppers, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, radish, summer squash, tarragon, thyme, tomatoes, and watermelon.
- Annuals: Ageratum, alyssum, Begonia, Browallia, Celosia, coleus, Cosmos, Dahlberg daisy, dusty miller, Gazania, geranium, Impatiens, Lobelia, marigold, Nicotiana, Petunia, Phlox, Portulaca, Salvia, Torenia, Verbena, and Zinnia.

- Perennials: African iris, Amazon lily, blood lily, blue daze, Caladium, Canna, Coreopsis, Crinum lily, daylily, Gaillardia, Gerbera daisy, Gaura, gloriosa lily, Mexican heather, milkweed, Pentas, Salvia, Shasta daisy, and society garlic.
- Fruits in Season: Banana, carambola, citrus (calamondin, grapefruit, key lime, lemon, lime, orange, and tangerine), jaborcaba, kumquat, loquat, strawberry, and papaya.
- Blooming plants: Angel's trumpet, azalea, blue flag iris, blue sage, bottlebrush, Bougainvillea, Buddleia, cape honeysuckle, Carolina Jessamine, citrus, dwarf Indian hawthorn, flame vine, fuchsia skullcap, geranium, lantana, Mexican flame vine, Nemesia, orchid tree, silk floss tree, society garlic, Surinam cherry, Walter's Viburnum, and white bird of paradise.

Upcoming classes

If you want to know more about the environmentally-friendly landscaping known as Florida Yards & Neighborhoods, there are three programs being offered this month. You can now register for classes online at <http://sarasota.extension.ufl.edu/EdSched.htm> or call 861-9900.

- "Florida Yards & Neighborhoods: Nine Landscape Principles" at North Port Library, March 4 at 12:30 p.m.
- "Fertilize Appropriately" at Shamrock Park, March 6 at 2:00 p.m.
- "Florida Yards & Neighborhoods: Nine Landscape Principles" at Venice Library, March 13 at 10:00 a.m.
- "Florida Yards & Neighborhoods: Nine Landscape Principles" at Fruitville Library, March 17 at 2:00 p.m.
- "Pests In & Around the Florida House" at Shamrock Park, March 19 at 10:00 a.m.
- "Beneficial Insects-Learning to Identify Good Bugs" at Shamrock Park, March 20 at 2:00 p.m.

For information

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 a.m.-Noon and 1:00-4:00 p.m. (941-861-9807). We have weekly satellite help desks at the four south county libraries and every third Saturday of the month at the **Downtown Farmer's Market**.

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