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## Extension Update by Larry Figart

*"The garden year has no beginning and no end."*

*Elizabeth Lawrence, from A Southern Garden 1942*

### A Day of Gardening!

**Saturday, February 24th, 2024**

**9:30 am - 2:30 pm**

**Duval County Extension Office**

**Cost \$25.00**

**Registration deadline: February 19th**

Register at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/a-day-of-gardening-tickets-796291488277>



We will have speakers presenting on the following gardening topics:

- Growing and Using Herbs and Spices
- A New Virus in St. Augustine Turf
- Bog Gardening and Carnivorous Plants
- Everything you Never Knew You Wanted to Know about Beans
- Citrus Woes; Living with Greening
- Invasive Plants - The Battle Begins at Home!
- What Grows Here (Really)
- Managing the Summer Gardens in the Face of Climate Change

## What's That (answers on page 9)



Credit: L. Figart UF/IFAS



Credit: T. Jones, UF/IFAS



Credit: L. Figart UF-IFAS

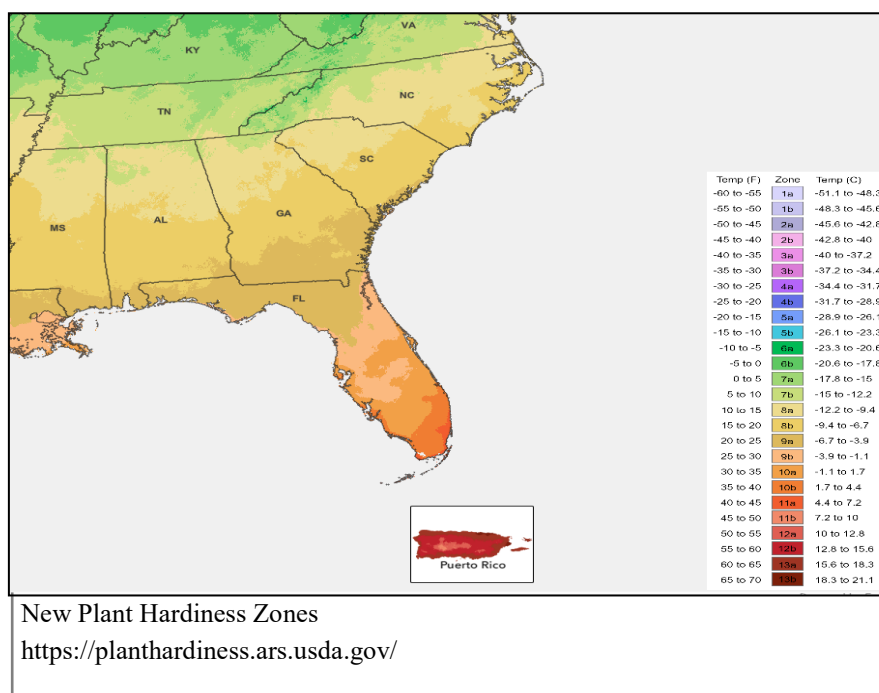


# Around the Yard by Tonya Ashworth

## New Hardiness Zone Announced for Half of Duval County

The USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture) released an updated Plant Hardiness Zone Map in mid-November. The most recent edition of the map until now was published in 2012 and put Duval County in Zone 9A. The average annual extreme low temperature for 9A is 20 to 25 degrees Fahrenheit. In the 2023 edition of the map, half of Duval has been bumped up to Zone 9B. This zone has an average expected extreme low temperature of 25 to 30 degrees Fahrenheit. The area of the county inside the I-295 loop and nearly all areas to the east of the loop are now in 9B. The rest of the county remains in zone 9A. Duval County is not the only area to see a zone shift. About half of the country is now placed a half zone warmer than they were in the 2012 map.

What caused this shift in the new map? Mainly more accurate data collected over a long time. The 2012 map used temperatures from 7,983 weather stations, and the update used data from 13,412 weather stations. It is easy to understand how almost twice the data can give much more accurate results. The 2023 and 2012 versions of the map were based on 30 years of data, while an earlier version from 1990 used only 12 years of data. This 30-year period smooths out year-to-year fluctuations in temperatures and lines up with the time period that climatologists use to describe baseline “normal” climate in the U.S.



Why would only half of Duval County have a change? There are a couple of reasons. The first is the urban heat island effect. Urban areas with a lot of concrete and asphalt covering the land have higher temperatures than the rural areas that surround them. The second reason would be the buffering effects of the Atlantic Ocean and the St. John's River. Areas near large bodies of water tend to create a microclimate with slightly warmer temperatures. Even before the release of this map, serious gardeners in Duval already knew that they could “cheat the zone” and get slightly more tropical plants to survive the winter if they lived near downtown or out at the beach.

This information is most useful as you decide what you want to plant in your landscape and whether it can survive the winter. One important thing to note is that the map uses the *average* expected low temperature. That means that half the winters will not get to that lowest extreme temperature and the other half of our winters will get even colder than 20 to 25 degrees. Plant researchers assign a hardiness zone range to plants based on this USDA map. For some of us in Duval, a whole new world of possibilities just opened to our landscapes. Some notable zone 9B and warmer plants include avocado, jacaranda, jatrophia, banana, tabebuia, ixora, bougainvillea, mandevilla, leatherleaf fern, and cardboard palm. Unfortunately, there are some favorites that are zoned 9A and cooler. Expect Eastern redbud, flowering dogwood, saucer magnolia, and mahonia to struggle if you live inside the loop or east towards the beach.

To check out the updated map for yourself, go to: <https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/>



# Out on a Limb by Larry Figart

## Pruning Crapemyrtle Trees

It is that time of year when folks start thinking about pruning their **Crapemyrtle** trees. The winter time is the perfect time to prune these popular flowering trees. Unfortunately, for many folks that involves topping the tree. Southern Living magazine coined the term “**Crape Murder**” to refer to the severe removal of large branches out of the tops of the trees. Topping requires less skill and time than other pruning methods, but it also results in delayed flowering, weak growth and unattractive sprouting. Not only is topping crapemyrtles ugly, it **increases** maintenance requirements on an otherwise low-maintenance tree.



Remove Rubbing Branches  
Image by L. Figart UF/IFAS

There is a technique called pollarding where the new growth is pruned at the same place each year. There are large old trees in Europe that are pollarded every year. In the winter time the cut branches have large knots where the sprouts are cut back to every year. Crapemyrtle trees that are pollarded look very interesting. The difference between pollarding and “crape murder” is all in the technique. A topping cut wound is large because it removes the whole branch, whereas pollarding only removes the new sprouts that have formed the year prior.

In the past, it was true that you pruned crapemyrtles to reduce powdery mildew infestations. With today’s resistant cultivars, crapemyrtles require very little pruning. In fact, a crapemyrtle planted in full sun with plenty of space to grow needs little to no pruning at all. If you find yourself in the position to prune crapemyrtles, here are a few simple steps to follow.

**First-**Prune sucker sprouts and basal sprouts. If left to grow, these sprouts may form woody stems that eventually compete with existing main stems.

**Second-**Prune any rubbing or crossing branches, as well as dead branches. This may include branches that are crossing through the canopy from one side to another. As always make the pruning cuts at the branch collar.

**Third (this one is optional)-** Tip prune the branches to remove spent flower buds. This is also called pencil pruning because the branches removed are no thicker than a pencil. This type of pruning is the most labor intensive, but it also results in a more aesthetically attractive tree.

Recent research from the University of Florida has demonstrated that the number of crapemyrtle blooms decrease in direct correlation to the size of the branch removed. In other words, the larger the branch removed, the fewer the blooms. However, blooms on pruned trees were larger than blooms on unpruned trees. To receive the benefit of larger flowers from pruning, prune just pencil sized branches without jeopardizing overall tree health caused by topping the tree. For more information refer to: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/EP/EP39900.pdf>.



Remove Basal Sprouts  
Image by L. Figart UF/IFAS



Prune spent flowers (optional)  
Image by L. Figart UF/IFAS

# Growing in the Vegetable Garden by Beth Marlowe

## Impact of Hardiness Zone Change on Edible Gardens in Duval County

By now you have likely heard that in November the U.S. Department of Agriculture updated its plant hardiness zone map for the first time since 2012. Part of Duval County from around the St. John's River and east changed from Zone 9a to Zone 9b. You may be wondering what it means for you, your garden and edible crops you grow. If so, read on for answers to specific questions you may have!

### What does a change to Zone 9b mean for my vegetable garden?



Grow cool season crops when it will be the coldest  
Credit: Tyler Jones UF/IFAS

For vegetable gardening, we always recommend right plant, right place, right season. That means we grow our most cold-tolerant crops in winter when we have our coldest lows. These include the Brassicas like collards, kale, cauliflower, broccoli, turnips and mustards. Other good cold hardy crops are lettuce, carrots, celery, onions and strawberries. Some of these you may need to cover or harvest before a hard freeze, but most will sail through a short period of temperatures just below freezing quite well. If a longer, deeper or multi-day freeze is predicted, then you will need to cover even the most cold-tolerant vegetables. The change to Zone 9b might just mean there are fewer days (on average!) that you need to worry about covering your crops. If you are trying to nurse along some fall tomatoes or hot peppers, the change in zone won't matter. Either way, the extreme lows are too cold for most of our warm season crops. Because we will still have frosts and freezes in Zone 9b, we still won't likely be able to grow more tropical crops except as annuals during our warm season.

### How will the change affect fruit trees and shrubs?

Slightly warmer winter lows likely won't affect most fruit trees we grow. What might be detrimental to more temperate zone crops like apples, pears, peaches or blueberries is a decrease in chilling hours. The Plant Hardiness Zone Map does not address any potential changes to chilling hours. As Julio Perez, Horticulture Extension Agent in Putnam County explains, "Chill hours...represent the seasonal accumulation of temperatures below 45 degrees F, crucial for certain trees and shrubs—especially fruit-bearing ones—to break dormancy and flower. When selecting fruit tree varieties, it's essential to

consider information from both factors to ensure they survive and produce fruit." If the tag on a nursery tree does not state how many chilling hours are required for it to flower and produce fruit, you can often find that information on a reputable nursery's website. Chilling hour requirements can vary significantly between varieties. In general, look for low chill varieties. For more information on chilling hours and fruit trees, visit this [blog from our Extension friends in the Panhandle](#).

For up-to-date information on chill hour accumulation near Jacksonville, see [AgroClimate's Chill Hours Calculator](#). The closest monitoring station to Jacksonville is in Baker County. As of mid-December, it logged 96 chilling hours. The average chill hours per year for us in Duval County is between 540-660 hours. Be aware that chilling hours in the city are typically lower than those in more rural areas because of urban heat island effects.

### Does a change in Zone impact insects?

It may. As minimum temperatures warm, certain plants and insects may expand into areas where they previously wouldn't have survived the coldest winter temperatures. This could mean that vegetable insect pests like whiteflies become more problematic during our warm season. Why? Whiteflies typically are not able to overwinter in large numbers in north Florida. They move north each season from south Florida, which is why they

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# Friendly Landscapes by Stephanie Means

## Five quick fixes for a Florida Friendly New Year

With the turn of the calendar into a new year comes the pressure to create and stick to a resolution. The topics of conservation and environmental impact are top of mind for many this time of year. Here are 5 easy environmentally friendly modifications you can implement in your landscape. These changes require less than 5 minutes of your time but yield significant results.



Pop up sprinkler.  
Credit: Tyler Jones, UF/IFAS

**Pick up pet waste :** Pet waste is a major contributor to stormwater pollution. It can introduce harmful organisms, disease and bacteria into soil and groundwater. When it rains, bacteria from pet waste can wash directly into storm drains, retention ponds, or drainage ditches and eventually into the St Johns River. Scoop that poop! Whether in your own backyard or a public street or park, always bag it and throw it in the trash or flush it down the toilet.

**Aim downspouts at the yard, not the driveway:** Ideally, the rain that falls in your yard should soak into

your yard. A 1" rain storm creates a whopping 623 gallons of runoff from a 1,000 square foot roof! Redirect all this runoff away from impervious areas such as concrete sidewalks, driveways, and pavement onto pervious natural or landscape areas. Disconnecting the continuous path of impervious surfaces towards the storm drains gives the opportunity for stormwater to be filtered through the soil before it reaches the waterways.

**Turn your irrigation to manual and only water as needed:** Turf grasses don't need as much water as we think they do, and appropriately placed established trees and shrubs shouldn't need any supplemental watering except in cases of long term drought. When it comes to irrigation, many homeowners "set it and forget it" and over water their lawns, damaging or even killing turf and plants. Too much water encourages weed, insect and disease problems and shallow roots. Turf depends on deep roots to stay healthy and to survive dry spells. Watering less frequently for longer periods of time will encourage deeper rooting.



Re-direct rain runoff  
Credit: Tyler Jones: UF/IFAS



Leaf blades folded in half lengthwise.  
Credit: Laurie Trenholm, UF/IFAS

A lawn will tell you when it's time to water by showing at least one of the three signs of wilt:

- Folding leaf blades
- Blue-gray color
- Footprints remain visible

Unless rain is forecast in the next 24 hours, irrigate your lawn with  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  of water only when 30% or more shows wilt.

**Sweep or blow grass clippings back into the lawn :** This will prevent them from traveling to the storm drain and eventual contact with water. Grass clippings contain a lot of nitrogen, and when there is too much of it, it leads to the growth of algae in our water bodies. Bonus-leaving them on the lawn will improve soil health.

## Impact of Hardiness Zone Change on Edible Gardens in Duval County

(continued from page 4)

are typically more abundant in the late summer and fall here. The change to Zone 9b may still not allow large populations of whiteflies to overwinter here, but much of the Orlando area is now Zone 10a, meaning their extreme lows (30-35°F.) may be above freezing. Whiteflies may have an increasingly short distance to go when repopulating our north Florida gardens. So, whiteflies and the damage and disease they cause may show up earlier in our growing season.

### Does the change to Zone 9b mean I can plant my tomatoes earlier?

No. The Plant Hardiness Zone Map is based only on extreme minimum temperature averages. These occur when we are not growing tomatoes, so the change in hardiness zone does not affect planting dates for warm season crops. The average last date of frost for the winter season determines when we typically plant our warm season crops outside. You can find data from the [National Weather Service on Jacksonville's first and last frost dates](#) online. For the period 2000-2023, our average last date of frost was Feb. 24. The earliest was Jan. 22 in 2020; the latest was Apr. 8 in 2007! There's lots of variation from year to year, so pay attention to local weather, and check and keep records of temperatures in your own garden.



The change in hardiness zones will not affect tomato planting dates.

Credit: Camila Guillen UF/IFAS

## Five quick fixes for a Florida Friendly New Year

(continued from page 5)



Grass clippings can be kept on the lawn after mowing. This prevents them from moving into the stormwater and allows nutrients to return to the lawn.

Credit: UF/IFAS

### Check plants for invasiveness before planting :

The beautiful plants you got at your local garden center may look nice in your yard, but by planting them you might be inviting bad acting non-native invasive species in. Invasive plants can quickly multiply and escape your yard spreading to other areas where they'll be bio pollution-an ecological and economic nightmare. Save the headache and check the [UF/IFAS Assessment](#) before buying and avoid planting anything with a red indicator box after its name.

Every small change will add up to a cumulative greater good. In conclusion, implementing these 5 easy fixes, such as picking up pet waste, redirecting downspouts, adjusting irrigation, managing grass clippings, and checking for plant invasiveness, can have a significant positive impact on the environment and protect natural resources. Share this with a friend who will be happy to learn it's easy to be Florida-Friendly this year!



## What to Plant in January and February

Annuals: Dianthus, pansy, petunia, viola and snapdragon.

Bulbs: Agapanthus, crinum, dahlia. These plants produce foliage in the winter to flower in late summer.

Vegetables: Beets, Broccoli, carrot, cabbage, collards, onions, potatoes, arugula, lettuce and spinach.

Herbs: Cilantro, dill, fennel, parsley, sage and thyme.

Now is a great time to plant most hardy perennials, particularly trees and shrubs!



UF/IFAS Photo: Thomas Wright

## Upcoming Classes

Scan Code  
for current list of  
ALL Duval Extension Classes



Date, Time, Cost	Event & Registration	Location
<b>January 25th</b> 10:00 - 12:00 \$5.00	<b><u><a href="#">How to Water Your Vegetable Garden</a></u></b> This class will cover multiple methods of efficient and low-flow irrigation methods for vegetable and edible gardens.	Urban Demonstration Garden 1032 Superior Street
<b>January 27th</b> 9:00 am - 2:00 pm Free	<b><u><a href="#">Ortega Camellia Festival</a></u></b> Come visit out Master Gardeners as they man the educational booth along with the crafters selling gardening crafts.	Ortega Church 4807 Roosevelt Blvd.
<b>January 30th</b> 2:00 - 3:30 pm \$10.00	<b><u><a href="#">January Backyard Hen Training</a></u></b> This informational course is on caring for backyard hens and is a prerequisite to receive a Backyard Hen Permit from Duval County.	Extension Office 1010 N McDuff Ave
<b>February 1</b> 6:00 - 7:00 pm \$75.00	<b><u><a href="#">Make and Take Rain Barrel Workshop</a></u></b> Save some \$\$\$ on your water bill. Learn about Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ and save the rain to water your garden!	Extension Office 1010 N McDuff Ave.
<b>February 9th</b> 10:00 am– 12:00pm \$5.00	<b><u><a href="#">Lets Talk Tomatoes!</a></u></b> Come join us to learn about growing tomatoes.	Extension Office 1010 N McDuff Ave.
<b>February 24th</b> 9:30 am– 2:30pm \$25.00	<b><u><a href="#">A Day of Gardening</a></u></b> We encourage gardeners, landscapers, growers, and all other plant enthusiasts to register!	Extension Office 1010 N McDuff Ave.

## What's That? Answer!

American or oak mistletoe (*Phoradendron serotinum*) grows on deciduous trees and is common on pecan, oak and hickory. Mistletoe is a plant that is used in many Christmas and New Year's celebrations, and is frequently seen in the landscape, becoming more noticeable as deciduous trees lose their leaves.

It produces a white berry that has a sticky seed that is spread by birds and mammals to other trees. The seed germinates and sends out a root that anchors into the vascular system of the tree. Mistletoe is green and produces some of its own food, but is also a parasite, benefiting from water and nutrients from the host plant. It doesn't kill the tree, but may weaken branches. For more information go to:

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/lawn-and-garden/mistletoe/>



Credit: L. Figart, UF/IFAS