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Extension Update by Larry Figart

"A vegetable garden doesn't just feed your body. It also feeds your soul." -Doug Green

To borrow a saying from Game of Thrones... "Winter is coming" but will we actually get cold temperatures this year? According to NOAA Climate Prediction Center, perhaps not. We are presently in La Niña conditions for the third consecutive year which means a warmer-than-average temperatures and drier conditions for the Southeastern United States from October to March.

Do you want to continue getting the New Leaf? You will receive a separate email from us with a link to a Qualtrics survey. The information gathered in the survey helps us improve our newsletter and maintain funding. Please respond promptly so we can determine if this newsletter was helpful. Additionally, it helps us to update our mailing list to ensure that you continue to receive our newsletter.

Finally, we at the Duval County Extension Office wish you good gardening and a happy and safe holiday season!

What's That? (answer on last page)



Image by Tyler Jones, UF/IFAS



Image by Larry Figart, UF/IFAS



Image by Larry Figart, UF IFAS



Around the Yard by Tonya Ashworth

In Praise of Yucca

Yucca? More like Yuck-O! I know, I know. I once felt the same way until my friend, the esteemed garden writer and speaker Carol Reese gave me one for a housewarming gift. She told me that she was converting gardeners from Yucca haters to Yucca lovers, one gift at a time. And, after living with a Yucca in the garden for a decade, I have seen the light.



Y. gloriosa by
Walter Bryant

There are about 50 species in the Yucca genus. Their native range spans south from Guatemala all the way to Alberta, Canada. On this side of the Mississippi, they make themselves at home from the coastal Southeast all the way up to Maine. There are 3 Yucca species native to Florida, *Y. aloifolia* (Spanish bayonet), *Y. gloriosa* (mound lily Yucca), and *Y. filamentosa* (Adam's needle), though our climate will allow us to grow a few more. Our native Yuccas are the host plant for the larvae of the cofaqui giant skipper and the Yucca giant skipper butterflies. They also make a good nectar source for other butterflies and the occasional hummingbird.

What I find most fascinating is their symbiotic relationship with their one and only pollinator, the Yucca moth. The Yucca moth is a small, white insect about the same color as the Yucca flower. The female moth will use tentacles to carry pollen from one Yucca flower to another. When pollination is complete, she lays eggs in the flower and her lifecycle is finished. As the flower turns into fruit, the eggs hatch and the larvae eat the fruit and seeds, but not all the seeds, ensuring more Yucca for the next generations. The larvae then pupate in the soil over the winter, emerging as adults in the spring. Barring us gardeners propagating Yucca by division, the Yucca and the Yucca moth are dependent on each other for their mutual survival.

What about their use in the landscape? No matter which Yucca you choose, you will be getting a statement piece. These are not green shrubby things to be sheared into meatballs or squares. Yuccas give your garden architectural interest. They serve as focal points. They create a feeling of drama when in bloom. These are the plants that keep your beds from looking like green blobby masses. They provide structure and textural contrast. Though they are superior in drought tolerance and won't tolerate wet soils, they shouldn't be limited to a xeriscape or a succulent bed. They can even take more shade than you might think.

Now, how do we tell the three native Yucca apart and what should we look for at the nursery? The Spanish bayonet can get up to 15' tall and grows on stalks. The distinctive feature is that all the leaves are very stiff and come out at acute angles up and down the stalk and do not bend. They are very sword-like and have the sharp leaf tips. The leaf edges are rough. Mound lily Yuccas (*Y. gloriosa*) get up to 8' tall eventually and develop a trunk-like stalk, making them look like a tree at maturity. Their leaves form more of a rosette and have smooth margins. The outer halves of the leaves bend towards the ground, unlike the Spanish bayonet. There is an improved selection of *Y. gloriosa* called Bright Star Yucca that has strappy leaves with bright yellow edges that curve gracefully down. It stays short, forming a rosette only 2' tall. It reminds me of the 'Color Guard' Yucca my friend Carol gave me. 'Color Guard' is a named variety of *Y. filamentosa*. Like all filamentosas, it also stays shorter, getting no more than about 3' tall. It has the growth habit of a sphere and shoots out a sunburst of green and gold striped leaves ending with sharp tips. I planted mine at the end of a bed as a punctuation mark. Even on the gloomiest days, this plant kept the garden cheery. This variety can go from the cactus bed to the elegant formal landscape with ease. Consider using it instead of a ball topiary in your pedestal planter. The symmetrical habit makes it work in a formal space. You will know you have a filamentosa because the leaf margins have filaments, or hairs growing from them. Two more variegated forms of the *Y. filamentosa* to try are 'Golden Sword' and 'Bright Edge'. Perhaps you want the short sphere, but variegation isn't your thing. If so, 'Ivory Tower' may be the Adam's needle variety for you.



Y. filamentosa 'Color Guard'
by T. Ashworth, UF/IFAS

There are reasons to give yucca a try. Maybe you're a native plant enthusiast. Plant Yucca. Interested in gardening for pollinators and butterflies? Yucca is good for that too. Need something to give a pop of color or do you want to grow only drought tolerant plants? Yucca fits again. Who knows? You might be the next convert.

Out on a Limb by Larry Figart

Pecans for North Florida

It is fall and soon it will be time to start collecting the pecans that have dropped from our trees. Some folks are lucky. Older neighborhoods such as Avondale have huge old pecan trees that have been growing there for decades. Most of us have to start our own trees. Whether you have a tree already, or have to start from scratch, pecans are a delicious and healthy crop that can be grown in a wide variety of places in NE Florida.



Pecans almost ready to harvest.
by Thomas Wright, UF/IFAS

The number one criteria for growing a pecan tree is space. Do you have room to grow a tree that will be 60 feet in height with a crown spread of 40-50 feet at maturity? Pecans do not produce as well when they are crowded. Good air movement and soil drainage are also critical for healthy pecan trees. The average water table depth should be at least 5 feet below the soil surface. The best pH for pecan trees is in the range of 5.5-6.5 although lime can be added if your pH is slightly lower.

Pecan trees can be purchased from the nursery as either bare root, or containerized. Most pecan trees in the nursery will be grafted. A grafted pecan tree will produce nuts several years sooner than a non-grafted tree. Grafted trees can start producing at 6-10 years of age where ungrafted trees will produce much later. Pecans should be planted during the dormant season. This will allow for additional root growth before

spring. The hole for a bare root pecan tree should be 2 feet wide and three feet deep. The tree should be planted so that the first major root is even with the soil surface. Containerized trees should be planted in a hole that is wider than the container but an inch or so shallower than the container is deep. The root ball of the containerized tree should be straightened out so that the roots will grow away from the tree rather than in the circular motion that they were growing in the container. Some judicious root pruning may be needed.

Several hundred pecan varieties have been developed over the years. Only a handful of them can be grown successfully in Northeast Florida. The limiting factor is a disease called Pecan Scab. The disease affects stem, leaf and nut growth, causing reduced yield. Our wet humid summers are perfect for disease development. Pecan scab is also the reason that many dooryard plantings of pecans do not yield as much nuts as expected. The current list of scab resistant varieties includes 'Moreland', 'Sumner', and 'Elliott'. Several years ago 'Stuart' was thought to be scab resistant but the disease has overcome the resistance. Raking up and discarding diseased nuts, leaves, and branches will help to reduce future disease occurrence.

In order to ensure the possibility of high yields, two or more cultivars should be planted together for cross pollination. This does not automatically mean that you would need to plant two trees. If there are pecan trees in your neighborhood that are of a different variety than the one you wish to plant, you should be fine. If your pecan tree is isolated, you may need to get your neighbor to plant another variety.

Pecan trees need fertilization for optimum growth. The first year after planting apply about 1 lb. of good quality pecan fertilizer around the tree in March and then again in June. After the first year of establishment, apply about 2 lbs. of fertilizer for every inch of trunk diameter (measured about a foot off the ground) during the winter, and again during the summer. Once the trees start bearing fruit, 2-4 lbs. of fertilizer per inch of trunk diameter should be applied in February and then again in June. It may seem like a daunting task to try and grow pecans but eating something that you grew own your own makes it all worth while.

In Focus: Celery

One of the Best Vegetables You May Not Have Grown

by Beth Marlowe

As the weather cools in the fall, we begin planning holiday menus. They often include dishes like stuffing, casseroles, seven-layer salads and —after Thanksgiving—turkey soup. A key ingredient in many of these favorites is celery. And if you hail from the New Orleans area, you may know celery as part of the ‘Holy Trinity’ that, along with onions and bell peppers, forms the base of many Cajun classic dishes like gumbo and etouffee. And still others love its crunchiness with wings and blue cheese dressing. Yet, have you ever thought much about growing it?

Celery (*Apium graveolens*) is in the carrot, or Apiaceae, family. It is a cool season marshland plant that has been cultivated for centuries, and prefers very moist, nutrient-rich soil. It is a biennial, so it only flowers and produces seeds in its second year. It is typically grown in Florida from seeds started in the fall. It requires a relatively long cool season (3-4 months) to produce harvestable stalks, so it’s best to get it started as soon as the weather starts to cool.

There are three forms of celery that are grown for different purposes in different places. Most of us know stalk celery, the common variety found at the grocery store. There is also a variety called leaf, Chinese or cutting celery, which forms shorter, slimmer stalks that grow outward from their base. The flavor of cutting celery is a bit stronger than stalk celery, which can provide a nice flavor punch. It also can be harvested just a few stalks at a time, allowing you to cut what you need for today’s chicken salad and continue growing more for next week’s stir fry. Cutting celery does not have to be blanched, as stalk celery typically is, and it is easier to grow. And even less well known is celeriac, also called celery root. The edible portion of celeriac is the base of the stem. It has a similar flavor to stalk and leaf celery, and can be eaten raw, cooked, sauteed or mashed.

Whichever variety you prefer, start the tiny seeds in cool weather (60-70°F.) or indoors. Plant them very shallowly, mist the soil and cover until they germinate, which can take up to three weeks. Once they are up and growing, you can transplant them to their permanent location. All versions of celery tend to be relatively pest-free. If you are lucky, maybe you will get to share some of your crop with black swallowtail butterflies. Larvae enjoy it along with other carrot family crops.



Stalk celery, UF IFAS



Cutting celery
Creative Commons, Bing online pictures



Celeriac
Creative Commons, Bing online pictures

Growing in the Garden

Written by and photo credit by Beth Marlowe

Strawberries

By early November, we have planted most of our cool season crops. All kinds of greens, broccoli, cauliflower, beets, carrots and alliums (onions, garlic and leeks). We have also planted cool season herbs, like dill, fennel, parsley, chervil and cilantro. But if you haven't planted yet, don't worry! There's still plenty of time since most of our cool season crops will grow well through fall, winter and early spring. Many of them can be direct-seeded in the bed or container where you will grow them, so you don't have to worry about starting seeds indoors. And if you want to make up for lost time, some varieties are available as transplants at garden centers.

One crop you do want to get in the ground as soon as possible is strawberries. One of the biggest surprises for gardeners new to Florida is that we grow strawberries through the fall and winter, harvesting in early spring. Why? Well, strawberries are one of those Goldilocks crops. They like everything "just right." Not too hot, not too cold, not too wet, not too dry. Specifically, they grow best at temperatures between 50°F. and 80°F. And we have those in the cool season.

Because we are growing them in the cool season, we need varieties that are adapted to short days, with less than 14 hours of sunlight each day. And we also typically grow them as annuals, so everbearing perennial varieties are not the best choice for us. Why do we grow them as annuals? Because our summer heat and humidity is hard for strawberries to withstand. They are more prone to insect and disease problems in the warm season, and they are generally not as productive after their first harvest season. So for many gardeners it's not worth dedicating the time, energy and limited space they have to a crop that is not very productive.

We typically start with bare-root plants. They are not grown in Florida, and are usually shipped from nurseries in California. They may not look alive, but they are just waiting for warm temperatures and moisture to wake back up and begin growing.

Strawberries are sensitive to planting depth. When planting a bare-root plant, identify the point where the tops of the roots meet the crown; this is the level at which it should be planted in the soil. Don't cover the crown, or it may rot and the plant will die. Don't leave roots exposed, or they may dry out and the plant may die. If the plants have any green leaves when planted, it can be helpful to water them from overhead for 1-2 weeks until the roots become established.

Besides fertilizing and watering, you need to protect your strawberries from frosts or freezes. The plants themselves will be fine, but temperatures below freezing will damage flowers and fruits, slowing down production. Drape a cover over a support or frame so the fabric is not touching the plants. Anchor the cloth to the ground so it will trap heat radiated back from the ground at night, keeping plants warmer.

Harvesting usually begins 3-4 months after planting. If all goes well, you should have strawberries to dip in chocolate and give to your valentine in February. And if temperatures stay mild, you may be able to continue harvesting into early June.



For more growing information and cultivar recommendations, read [Growing Strawberries in the Florida Home Garden](#).

What to Plant in Nov & Dec

Annuals: Ayssum, Clendula, Delphinium, Dianthus, Foxglove (digitalis), Hollyhock, Larkspur, Lobelia, Pansy, Petunia, Shasta daisy, Snapdragon, Verbena and Violas.

Bulbs: African lily (Agapanthus), Amaryllis, Anemone, Aztec lily, Calla, Daylily, Freesia, Hurricane lily, Hyacinth, Iris spp., Ixia, Kaffir lily, Moraea (African lily), Narcissus, Pineapple lily, Shell ginger

Herbs: Chervil, Chives, Cilantro, Dill, Fennel, Garlic, Lavender, Marjoram, Oregano, Parsley, Rosemary, Sage

Vegetables: Arugula, Beets, Broccoli, Brussel Sprouts, Cabbage, Carrots, Cauliflower, Celery, Chinese Cabbage, Collards, Kale, Kohlrabi, Mustard, Onions, Radish, Spinach, Sugar cane, Swiss Chard, Turnips

Upcoming Classes

Scan Code
for current list of
ALL Duval Extension Classes



Date, Time, Cost	Event & Registration	Location
November 12th 10:00 am Cost: \$10.00	Grow your own strawberries Join our IN-PERSON class to learn how to grow strawberries in the home garden. The class fee includes 10 bare-root strawberry plants. Class participants will receive the plants at the class.	Jarboe Park 1200 3rd Street, Neptune Beach
November 30th 2:00 pm Cost : \$5.00	November Backyard Hen Training Informational course on caring for backyard hens. This course is a pre-requisite to receive a Backyard Hen Permit from Duval County.	Extension Office 1010 N McDuff Ave.
December 10th 9:00 am Cost: \$5.00	Urban Demonstration Garden Open House Need a break from the holiday shopping? Come spend some time in our garden! See what's growing and take home a veggie or herb seedling.	Demonstration Garden 1032 Superior Street

What's That? Answer! Written by and photo credit: L. Figart, UF/IFAS

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/>

