

The Master Gardening Bench



The Manatee County Master Gardener Newsletter

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All articles are researched utilizing UF/IFAS Extension and/or other educational sources unless otherwise noted.



Easy Container Plants for Decks, Patios, and Lanais

By Norma Kisida, Master Gardener 2012

Well-chosen plants can create focal points and greatly enhance the attractiveness of your patio, lanai, and other outdoor spaces. Some advantages of container gardens are the ability to move plants to suitable growing areas, easy access for the gardener, control of soil type, and protection from adverse weather.

Important things to consider when choosing plants are the type of sun exposure and the amount of water the plants will receive from rainfall. You will likely have some areas which get bright light but not direct sun and these are great for plants that don't do well in intense sun. The smaller and more porous the container, the more often the plants will need to be watered. Start with a good quality soil mix suitable for the plant type and make sure the container has good drainage. Protect the patio surface with a saucer so that dirt, water, and fertilizer don't stain the area; empty saucer after watering. Plants in the same container or grouped together need to have similar growing requirements. A water-soluble fertilizer may be used as directed while a slow release fertilize only needs to be used every three to four months.

Tips to enhance attractiveness are to display containers in groups which are linked by common elements such as pot color, shape, or similar plants; and, using different sized pots or elevating containers to different heights to make them more eye catching. Patio gardening is not restricted to bottom surfaces as there are many creative ways to use wall or ceiling space with hanging containers and vertical gardening ideas.

Plants with only foliage will be less messy than flowering plants which can require deadheading or drop spent blossoms to the ground. Foliage plants come in many shapes, sizes, and color variations, and many can last in containers for years as opposed to just one season.

There are many sun-loving foliage plants that work well in containers. Succulents require little care, are drought tolerant and have become very popular and widely available. They need a light, well-drained soil and don't mind being in a shallow container. Ti plant (*Cordyline* spp.) and *Dracaena* spp. thrive in bright indirect sun and work well as background plant in a mixed container. Some varieties of *Croton* spp. will have the best color in sunny areas while others do best in part sun or light shade. Herbs and salad greens are an attractive and useful choice.

Small palms such as cat palm (*Chamaedorea cataractarum*), pygmy date palm (*Phoenix roebelenii*), Christmas palm (*Adonidia merrillii*) and ponytail "palm" (*Baucarnea recurvata*), may be grown in containers. Clumping bamboo and native and ornamental grasses in groups or as an accent are attractive additions.

Some examples of shade or part-shade patio plants include caladiums (*Caladium x hortulanum*), peacock ginger (*Kaempferia* spp.), ferns, tricolor (*Stromanthe sanguinea*), *Philodendron xanadu*, *Coleus* spp., lady palms (*Rhapis excelsa*), and orchids. Bromeliads are extremely easy care with colorful foliage and some have beautiful flowers which last for months.

If you have pets that might nibble your plants, check to make sure they are not toxic to animals.



What's This? Leaf Damage!

By Nancy Porter, Master Gardener 2014

Do you ever scratch your head while pondering what insect put those holes or notches in the leaves of your plants? It can be confusing!

Fortunately, there is an informative website to help identify just what critter is doing the damage, provided by the University of Florida. The damage done, a description of the bug and any similar pests can be found. The reader is also instructed on how to scout and detect what's happening on their plants. It offers suggestions for managing the pests and has a gallery of photos.

<http://pest.ifas.ufl.edu/list.html#type&ui-page=Tlist-25>

As a rule, notched leaves are the result of weevils, caterpillars or grasshoppers. Holes in leaves are the made by snails, slugs and beetles. Here are examples of damage made by the pesky little leaf chewers:



Presenting the Sri Lanka weevil. When adult weevils feed (**chew**) on leaves, they feed inward from the leaf margins (or edges), causing this typical leaf notching (see photo, left). There are some instances when leaf material is completely consumed where the weevil has fed along the leaf veins. The adults prefer new plant growth. Intense feeding by numerous weevils may cause plant decline or stunting. Young seedlings may not survive a large amount of feeding damage. With healthy plants, however, the feeding damage may be considered cosmetic.



Then, there is the cute little slug. Slow moving, but nevertheless a very rapid eater! The slug is a member of the Mollusca family. This makes it a distant cousin to oysters, squid, cuttlefish and octopus. This critter has rasping mouth parts and will chew up your lettuce seedlings, or in my case, the pretty sun hostas I recently planted, in a heartbeat!



Another great example is the Southern green stinkbug. It attacks blossoms and fruit, causing the fruit to drop, or deforming it. To make it more interesting, there are both good and bad stink bugs. All stink bugs have long, thin, tubular **piercing-sucking mouthparts**. The good bugs use their mouthparts to extract fluid from other insects, particularly caterpillars and beetle grubs. The bad bugs use their mouthparts to extract plant sap.

I'm New to Florida: So Help Me with Vegetable Gardening Here!

By Nancy Hammer, Master Gardener 2014

Many folks new to Florida from the Midwest and Northeast, accustomed to hardiness zones 4, 5, or 6 (e.g., starting large slicing tomato seedlings around Mother's Day or Memorial Day), may become sorely disappointed when these tomatoes wither and die in Florida's summer heat and humidity.

More appropriate vegetables for Florida summers include okra, sweet potatoes, and southern peas. In Manatee County, the zones range from 9 to 10 depending on how close one is to the moderating influences of the Gulf. Temperatures away from the Gulf, and certainly east of I-75, tend to get hotter in the summer, and colder in the winter.

Luckily for the new Florida veggie gardener, there is a helpful UF/IFAS Extension publication, "Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide." Tables 3 and 4 are particularly helpful. Table 3 provides guidelines on which months to plant specific vegetables by region. We generally follow the Central Florida guidelines. Note that tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, summer squash and others can be started in January through March, and then again in August and September.

Two growing seasons ... welcome to Florida! Lettuce, broccoli, carrots, and more can be started in September through March. (Try that in Michigan!) Table 4 suggests varieties suitable for Florida and provides valuable growing tips. Certain varieties handle our heat and humidity, and insect and disease pressures, better.

We encourage you to call or stop by our Plant Clinic with questions about vegetable gardening in Manatee County. We have the resources and expertise to guide you through the very different world of Florida gardening. Or attend our workshop "Gardening in Central Florida – A Newcomer's Guide" on February 2, 2019. To register, [click here](#).

Finally, for help with your landscape, ask about our Landscape Assistance Program. Our volunteers will help you make Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ choices on your property.

The "Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide" can be found at:

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/VH/VH02100.pdf>.



Tomato Tips

Planting the Right Tomatoes in the Right Place: Soils and Sunshine

By Jim Haupt, Master Gardener 2016

Florida is one of the largest commercial producers of tomatoes in the United States and tomatoes are one of the most popular home-grown vegetables in the country - a perfect formula for trying your own at home! Tomatoes can be grown in containers, (upside down, or right side up), grow boxes, raised beds, or traditional garden plots. With the hundreds of tomato varieties on the market, it can be difficult to decide which kind to buy.

Before visiting your local nursery or garden center, there are a several things to consider pertaining to "Right plant, right place", the first principle of Florida-Friendly Landscaping™. Knowing the amount of sunlight, the soil pH and composition, the climate and temperature ranges, and the amount of growing space in your yard are all key factors in determining whether this year's garden experience will be relaxing, enjoyable, or just plain exasperating.

What is your soil's pH? Tomatoes prefer a pH of 6.2 to 6.5 (slightly acidic). Soil can be tested at your county Extension office. Do this well in advance of putting plants in the ground. This allows sufficient time to amend your soil to raise or lower the pH. In the case of acidification to lower pH, this is only a temporary adjustment. Raising the pH is a careful science. If you intend to keep growing tomatoes at a specific site, this will become a continuous task.

What type of soil do you have? If it is sandy, compost and other amendments may be another garden necessity.

Finding a spot with the right amount of sunlight for optimal growth is another factor. Tomatoes generally need 4 to 6 hours of sunlight per day.

Be aware of the amount of space you are providing for your tomatoes. If you are thinking about planting

them in a 4 X 8 raised bed, you may want to consider planting determinate varieties or bush tomatoes. Determinate varieties are more compact, bush-like, and produce all their fruit at the same time. Many commercial growers select determinate varieties because they tend to be more disease resistant. However, if space is not an issue, indeterminate ever bearing varieties may be in order.

Indeterminates produce fruit throughout the growing season. Because of their sprawling nature, pruning and staking may be necessary. Indeterminate varieties are often grown in commercial greenhouses where they are harvested over a 10-month period, growing to a height around 9 or 10 feet. If you enjoy harvesting tomatoes throughout the growing season and are not bothered by pruning and staking, then this is the right variety for you.

Where in Florida do you live? North, Central, and South Florida all vary in terms of temperature. Some tomato varieties like 'Bonnie Bell' grow better in North Florida. Flowers will drop if heat becomes too excessive for an extended period. Tomatoes will drop flowers in only 4 hours if temperatures exceed 104 degrees. Temperatures that drop below 55 degrees will also cause tomatoes to abort their flowers. If this is an issue, heat resistant varieties are sold on-line as well as at retail outlets. For more information on tomatoes, visit:

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/hs1189> (Tomato Varieties in Florida),

<http://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/pascoco/2017/04/26/determinate-vs-indeterminate-tomatoes/>,

<http://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/edibles/vegetables/tomatoes.html>.





Photo by Vicki Denig

“Shrubs” - no, not the kind planted in your landscape - but a new drink mixer with an old history. I was recently in Atlanta at a trendy bar and was handed a menu of “shrubs” on offer. Being out of touch with what’s new, I was totally unaware of what a shrub was, so I declined to try one.

The next day, I did some research and discovered that shrubs were a means of preserving fruit using vinegar in use since the 1500’s by early Persians. “Shrub” is derived from the Arab word *sharab* meaning “to drink.” Shrubs made their way to Europe by the 17th century and were brought to America by our early settlers. Fruits in the wild were usually abundant but did not last very long, so a means of preserving them for the “off season” was needed.

Early American recipes for shrubs used vinegar poured over fruit (usually berries) and left to infuse anywhere from overnight up to several days. Afterwards, the fruit pulp would be strained out and the remaining liquid

would be mixed with a sweetener such as sugar or honey (either straight or mixed with herbs and spices,) and then reduced to make a syrup to be bottled which could last until the next season.

Making shrubs uses a simple ratio of 1:1:1 of fruit, vinegar, and sugar. A good shrub is a perfect balance of tart and sweet. Of course, our early settlers also had to first know how to make vinegar, which they would also use in pickling, but that’s another story. The syrup, also known as “drinking vinegar,” would usually be mixed with water to make a soft drink or mixed with alcohol as a cocktail. Shrubs were also used as a means of preserving medicinal herbs, thus making them more palatable.

Shrubs went out of favor shortly after the invention of refrigeration but found their way back into trendy bars and restaurants just a few years ago, as a retro bar drink. The Internet is full of shrub recipes; just be sure to search for “shrub drinks” or you may find yourself back in the “shrub” of landscaping!

Splendid Color

Visit the Extension Master Gardeners at the Manatee County Fair January 17-27 to pick up one of these beauties free!



Begonia (*Begonia spp.*) grows well in pots, beds and hanging baskets. Keep soil moist. Depending on the species, they do well in partial shade to full sun.



Impatiens (*Impatiens spp.*) Beautiful as mass plantings, this flower needs regular water and fertilizer. Plant in Spring in a location with morning or afternoon sun.



Snapdragons (*Antirrhinum spp.*) are generally used as a bedding plant and do best in well-drained soil in full sun. Water daily until established.



Salvia (*Salvia spp.*) Butterfly-and-bee attracting salvia does best in full sun and drier soil conditions. An ideal plant for Spring, Summer, and Fall.

Rugose Spiraling Whitefly

By Joy Derksen, Master Gardener 2004



Rugose spiraling whitefly
(*Aleurodicus rugioperculatus*)

Rugose spiraling whitefly (*Aleurodicus rugioperculatus*) is making a comeback in South Florida which means that Manatee County will probably be seeing a resurgence of this pest sometime between now and Spring weather. If you suddenly see shrubbery under a palm tree covered with black sooty mold, look for insects on the underside of the leaves or palm fronds above you.

Black sooty mold isn't a disease in and of itself—it is simply a mold that grows on the sugary excretions of sap sucking insects. The black sooty mold on a plant's leaves is a clue that something is feeding on them. Rugose spiraling whitefly is relatively easy to spot. The whiteflies cluster together and are about 3 times the size of a fruit fly. If you shake a plant with a spiraling whitefly infestation, you can see them take off in a mini cloud. They also lay their eggs in a decorative spiral on the underside of the plant that they are sucking on.



Sooty mold near a rugose spiraling whitefly
(*Aleurodicus rugioperculatus*) infested tree.

The principal threat of this whitefly is the huge mess it makes, not its lethality to the infested plant. Apart from the prolific quantities of sooty mold, it also produces a waxy substance that encompasses whole leaves of the host plant.

You have several options in dealing with the pest. My favorite and first choice is waiting to see if the local beneficial insects will start preying on them again. There is a tiny micro wasp (*Encarsia noyesi*) that loves to snack on spiraling whitefly. Florida Department of Agriculture grows and releases these wasps when spiraling whitefly is noted to be a problem in an area. Ladybug larvae and lacewing larvae also eat the eggs and progeny of the adults. You can buy these larvae on the Internet—or you can just keep an eye on things and see if the predatory bugs appear in your landscape.



Rugose spiraling whitefly
feeding on white bird of paradise leaf.

If you have a very heavy infestation and are worried about losing a plant, another approach is to use a soil drench of imidicloprid or dinotefuran. This is much more expensive but can be quite effective. The plant takes up the insecticide from its roots and the sap then becomes poisonous to sap-sucking insects. It takes a few weeks for the insecticide to get into the leaves, so don't expect instant bug death! The good news about the soil drench is that it lasts for several months. Don't spray the leaves as this will result in killing the predatory bugs that eat the whitefly. Follow the directions on the label; some pesticides can't be used on food producing plants.

Here are links to some of the newest information on spiraling whitefly:

<http://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/collierco/2018/10/24/rugose-spiraling-whitefly-aleurodicus-rugioperculatus-hemiptera-aleyrodidae-popping-up-on-coconut-palms-oct-2018/>,

<http://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/miamidadeco/2018/11/19/common-questions-about-the-rugose-spiraling-whitefly-aleurodicus-rugioperculatus/>.



DOES ROUNDUP® CAUSE CANCER IN HUMANS?

By Amy L. Stripe, Master Gardener 2008

In a highly-publicized California lawsuit last year, a jury awarded \$289 million in damages to a former school groundskeeper, citing that his development of non-Hodgkin lymphoma was due to exposure to Monsanto's herbicide Roundup®. As you might expect, Monsanto is appealing.

Many homeowners have asked us at Extension if they should be concerned about using glyphosate, the active ingredient in Roundup and other herbicides sold under different trade names. Glyphosate is a broad-spectrum (largely non-selective) herbicide absorbed through living foliage and usually applied as weed control. It is the single-most popularly used commercial herbicide around the world today.

Because of its widespread use in home and commercial landscapes, and in agriculture, weed scientists at the University of Florida (UF) carefully track scientific studies as to the potential of glyphosate to have negative impacts on people's health. With no scientific evidence to the contrary, UF states that glyphosate is a safe and effective herbicide, but does remind us to *follow all label directions in terms of protective clothing and proper application.*

Some homeowners ask us about "less toxic" herbicides. There are several, including oils, acids, salts, even boiling water or fire! Clearly there are safety and effectiveness issues with these, not just for the applicator, but for the surrounding landscape.

The dosage rates of "home remedies" is always problematic. For example, acetic acid in household vinegar is too low to be effective, whereas the higher concentrated vinegars are so high as to be dangerous to the applicator and have been mostly discontinued. And "less toxic" herbicides – even the commercial ones – usually require repeated applications.

On the other hand, the application of mulch and hand-weeding are probably the most effective, least toxic methods of all!

For more information on research studies about glyphosate, visit:
<https://pested.ifas.ufl.edu/blog/2018/09/14/glyphosate-use-important-update-for-weed-control/>.

For a discussion on glyphosate alternatives, visit:
<http://nwdistrict.ifas.ufl.edu/phag/2016/05/27/challenges-for-use-of-glyphosate-alternatives-in-urban-landscapes/>.

January

CALENDAR OF EVENTS



Photographer: Jerry Drown, TNPS

Date	Time	Event
1 st Saturday	10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.	Ask a Master Gardener – Island Library – 5701 Marina Drive, Holmes Beach. Visit the Extension Master Gardener information table and get answers to your gardening questions.
2 nd & 4 th Saturday	10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.	Ask a Master Gardener – Rocky Bluff Library – 6750 US Highway 301 N., Ellenton. Visit the Extension Master Gardener information table and get answers to your gardening questions.
2 nd Saturday	10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.	Ask a Master Gardener – South Manatee Library – 6081 26 th Street West, Bradenton. Visit the Extension Master Gardener information table and get answers to your gardening questions.
Wednesday January 9	1:00-3:00 p.m.	Design Your Landscape to Your Site Conditions - Learn about how your soil type, sun exposures, location, drainage, proximity to salt water and soil pH, among other factors effect which plants would best be suited for your landscape. Register on-line at http://uf-ifas-extension-manatee.eventbrite.com or call Erik ext. 1828. NOTE: This workshop is being held at the South County Library.
Friday January 11	1:00-3:00 p.m.	Basic Irrigation System Operation and Maintenance - Learn about basic in-ground irrigation system operations along with how you can repair your system by yourself. Register on-line at http://uf-ifas-extension-manatee.eventbrite.com or call Erik ext. 1828. NOTE: This workshop is being held at the South County Library.
Saturday January 12	9:00-11:00 a.m.	Extension Master Gardener Plant ID Tour - Riverview Pointe Preserve – DeSoto National Memorial – Stroll through Riverview Pointe Preserve to learn more about Florida’s native plants and inhabitants of a coastal habitat. Suitable for all ages. The hike begins in the parking area of the DeSoto National Memorial Park and enters into the Riverview Preserve at 8250 DeSoto Memorial Highway, Bradenton. To register call the Extension Master Gardeners at (941) 722-4524.
Saturday January 12	9:00-11:00 a.m.	Extension Master Gardener Plant ID Tour – Emerson Point Preserve - Stroll through Emerson Point Preserve to learn more about Florida’s native plants and inhabitants of a coastal habitat. Suitable for all ages. Call the Extension Master Gardeners to register (941) 722-4524.

Come Join Us at the Fair January 17 - 27! The Extension Master Gardeners are hosting Gardening Table Talks during the County Fair! No registration is required. While enjoying the fair, stop by the Extension Master Gardener educational gardens/greenhouse to receive a free plant seedling (one per family). Hours are limited. Come before garden gates close at 7:00 p.m. The Master Gardeners will host various demonstrations in their educational gardens from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. on the following dates:

January 19 – Container Gardening with Herbs
 January 20 – Planting for Butterflies
 January 21 – Kid’s Korner Gardening Activities

January 23 – Worm Composting
 January 26 – Winter Veggie Gardening
 January 27 – Success with Fruit Trees

Saturday January 19	9:00-11:00 a.m.	Extension Master Gardener Plant ID Tour – Rye Preserve - Take a hike through upland habitats along Rye Branch and learn about Florida native plants, natural history, and early settlement of the area. Drinking water, sturdy shoes, and hiking sticks are recommended. Visitor Center open 9am-noon and 1-4pm. Call the Extension Master Gardeners to register (941) 722-4524.
Sunday January 20	9:00-11:00 a.m.	Extension Master Gardener Plant ID Tour – Robinson Preserve - Stroll through the Robinson Preserve’s salt marshes to learn more about Florida’s native plants and inhabitants of a coastal habitat. Suitable for all ages. Trail consists of shell paths with little shade. Good walking shoes, drinking water, hat, and sunscreen are recommended. Call the Extension Master Gardeners to register (941) 722-4524.



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