

A quarterly online magazine published for Master Gardeners in support of the educational mission of UF/IFAS Extension Service.

Wee Wonders for Your Garden

By Debi Ford, Master Gardener Volunteer

Gardeners often focus on larger plants to anchor their landscape spaces but there is a whole world of small plants that can add lots of color, texture, and visual interest to your plans! Think of smaller plants as accessories, just as you would add a necklace or a scarf to an outfit.

A small plant can be ornamental grasses, plants with blossoms such as dwarf daylilies or blue-eyed grass, or leafy plants such as hostas. You'll get the most for your money if you select perennials versus annuals. Yes, they do cost a little more than annuals, but you'll be rewarded with beautiful plants for many years. On the other hand, inexpensive annuals can offer the chance to have some fun without a long-term commitment!

Small plants can form a border to other plants in the bed, act as accent plants, or fill the bed entirely. Ornamental grasses such as *Pennisetum alopecuroides* 'Little Bunny', a miniature fountain grass, planted in such a way as to provide a backdrop for even smaller plants such as dwarf daylilies, will give your beds depth and dimension beyond a simple border. "Little Bunny" is best for the northern part of our county as zone nine is its southern limit. Rubrum dwarf (*Pennisetum setaceum*) is a dwarf purple fountain grass suitable for zones nine to ten.

Take care when you plan your planting layout so the small plants don't get lost in the landscape, especially if you're installing perennials. Consider the mature height and spread of each plant in the bed so you

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Pennisetum alopecuroides 'Little Bunny', a miniature fountain grass, *Pennisetum setaceum* 'Rubrum Dwarf', providing a backdrop for foliage. Photo credit: UF/IFAS

can evaluate your placement and make corrections before you start to dig.

Select your plants according to their light and moisture needs—right plant/right place practice—grouping plants with like needs together. Conduct a soil test for pH, and amend the soil accordingly, including organic matter to give the plants a good start. Plant at slightly above the soil level the plant enjoyed in its container. Water well, and let the plants settle in, watering when there are signs of wilting. It may be a good time to install a drip irrigation line to your beds to direct water towards the roots. A soaker hose is an alternative.

Two native perennials to consider are blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium angustifolium*) and twinflower (*Dyschoriste oblongifolia*). Some varieties of rain lilies, another perennial, are native as well. Creeping phlox (*Phlox subulata*), a native of North America, is another attractive perennial.



From left, blue eyed grass (height .5 to 1.5 feet, spread .5 to 1 foot); Twin flower (height .5 to 1 foot, spread .5 to 1 foot); Rain lily (height .4 to .8 inches, spread .5 to 1 foot); Creeping phlox (height .5 to 1 foot, spread is variable). Photo Credits: UF/IFAS

Non-native perennials include perennial peanut (*Arachis glabrata*) and impatiens (*Impatiens* spp.). Two non-native annuals are Ageratum (*Ageratum* spp.) and sweet alyssum (*Lobularia maritima*).

With a little research and planning, your “little ones” will bring you joy for years to come.



From left, perennial peanut (height .5 foot, spread is variable; impatiens (height .5 to 1 foot, spread 1 foot); Ageratum (height .5 to 1 foot, spread .5 to 1 foot); Sweet alyssum (height .5 to 1 foot, spread .5 to 1 foot). Photo Credits: UF/IFAS

From One Garden to Another

By Evan Earle, Jr., Master Gardener Volunteer

Marion and I moved to East Lake Woodlands in November 2018. One of the benefits we truly enjoy is the wildlife—deer, turkey, osprey, bald eagles, bluebirds (a pleasant surprise), alligators and more. To help support a more natural environment, we wanted to replace some of the original landscaping from forty plus years ago—ligustrum, St. Augustine grass, crotons, and ixoras. The standard who's who of development landscaping. We wanted to introduce Florida natives that were Florida-Friendly™, following the Right Plant/Right Place approach, and that would provide food and shelter for wildlife while improving the look of our landscaping.



This is what the landscaping looked like when we moved in-- the standard plants of development landscaping. Photo credit: Evan Earle, Jr.

Working closely and openly with our Home Owners Association (HOA), we created a landscape plan to remove the old plantings and install muhly grass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*), shiny leaf wild coffee (*Psychotria nervosa*), Simpson's stopper (*Myrcianthes fragrans*), beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*), privet (*Forestiera segregata*), coontie (*Zamia floridana*), and Dahoon holly (*Ilex cassine*). The latter replaced a diseased laurel oak (*Quercus laurifolia*) and a diseased Palatka holly (*Ilex x attenuata*). We even included a red bud (*Cercis canadensis*)! Oh yes, and many, many bales of pine straw for mulch! The key to this process was being open with our HOA, getting formal approval for our plans before moving forward, and doing all this in stages that allowed the HOA and our neighbors to see the improvements along the way.

Well, to date, our neighbors have been nothing but supportive and complimentary on what we have been able to accomplish. Over the past 16 months, we have helped to transform our landscape from

a St. Augustine dominated environment to a more diverse and, if I say so myself, more attractive setting. In addition, we hope that we have helped to generate interest in using native plants. Last October, when the muhly grass bloomed, it was a BIG hit with our neighbors. Yay! Mission accomplished.

I can't stress enough that making changes like this is possible but it requires working hand in hand with your HOA every step of the way. Our HOA has been nothing but supportive.

Happy landscaping. And...Go Native!



Left: Evan getting some help from their niece Dee Jay in removing St. Augustine grass from the berm in their yard and replacing it with muhly grass. Right: Good-bye turf! Photo credits: Evan Earle, Jr.

Birdbath Basics

By MaryPat Troy, Master Gardener Volunteer

What could be more amusing to watch than a blue jay wildly splashing around in a birdbath on a hot summer day with water going in all directions? Birdbaths are a great way to attract our feathered friends to our yards; the water provides a source of drinking water, a place to groom, and a way to cool off during the hot summer months. Birdbaths also provide a way for adult birds to teach their fledglings these skills as well. The fledglings are tentative in the beginning but soon get the idea that fresh clean water has many advantages.

There are many types of pre-made birdbaths at local stores as well as online so the possibilities are endless. When choosing a birdbath, keep in mind the size of the bird you are trying to attract to your yard. Birds such as blue jays, doves and mockingbirds can use a shallow basin with three inches of water while smaller birds such as wrens and tit-mice are better off with a large saucer; a clay pot saucer works well for them. The shallow water level is more to their liking. It is helpful to put a few rocks or some gravel in the birdbath so that birds can test the water. The rocks or gravel can also prevent them from slipping. A birdbath with a textured interior can serve the same purpose. Change the water every few days to prevent mosquito larvae from forming and to prevent build-up of algae. A hard bristled cleaning brush will remove algae buildup so that the birdbath looks clean and inviting.

If your birdbath sits on the ground or a base, make sure there are trees or shrubs a few feet away to act as cover. Birds are always wary of predators so shrubs or trees close by help them feel secure. A variety of levels is also important; birds like to hop from one level to the next as they enter and exit the birdbath. It is best for your birdbath to be in the shade so the water does not get too hot from the Florida sun.

A birdbath is a wonderful way to attract birds to your yard. Once they know they have a safe place to drink and bathe, they'll keep coming back. I still remember watching a blue jay that literally spent an entire afternoon splashing around in my birdbath, his feathers arrayed on a hot August day. It was a delightful experience for both of us!



Photo credit: MaryPat Troy.

Butterfly Reflections

By Ashley Deshotel, Master Gardener Volunteer



Photo credit: Ashley Deshotel

It is springtime once again here in Florida. Flowers are blooming; birds and insects are bustling about, making the outdoors a more beautiful and inspiring place. The unique energy which this season brings inspires me to reflect on how the season invites us to sprout and grow, resembling the seedlings in our gardens. It is a time to warm our own wings and take advantage of all the goodness Florida's sunshine has to offer.

One friend we can see warming its wings is the eastern tiger swallowtail (*Papilio glaucus*). Unmistakable by its immense wingspan and its vibrant colors, it easily attracts our attention. The butterfly's wings are a yellow that could melt one's heart, outlined in a border that is blacker than midnight, and peppered with touches of orange and blue that tickle at our childhood imagination. The colors are remarkable. They are, like many treasures in nature, a reminder of that state of wonder and admiration that allows us to feel connected to something more.

Seen here resting on our native beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*), it prepares for the day ahead of searching for nectar and a female partner. Surrounded by its primary host plant, the Sweet Bay (*Magnolia virginiana*), it will have prime opportunity to reproduce and continue the allure that is the Eastern tiger swallowtail.

Find Your Passion

By Ashley Deshotel, Master Gardener Volunteer

While watering the garden at sunrise, there is a mild aroma dancing on the breeze. A delicate, fruity fragrance delights the senses. It is springtime and my passion vine is in bloom.

Pineland passion vine (*Passiflora pallens*) is uncommon in Central Florida. Since it is a state endangered species, it isn't seen much even in its native southern counties. I purchased two at a native nursery in Pinellas County. They have been thriving and outgrowing my fence ever since. It has found its central home quite suitable.

With white petals that gently draw you nearer to appreciate the bloom's magnificence, you notice the petite purple striped filaments surrounding the water fountain of reproductive components. A true treasure to witness. The closer you come to the flower, the more there is to indulge the eyes and the nose.

The pineland passion vine relies on bees for its pollination and during the day many of these little helpers' buzz along visiting every bloom. This honeybee is happy to add a little more pollen to his cargo. These vines have become quite a focal point in my garden. Because they grow and propagate with ease, I hope the pineland passion vine becomes a Florida staple once again.

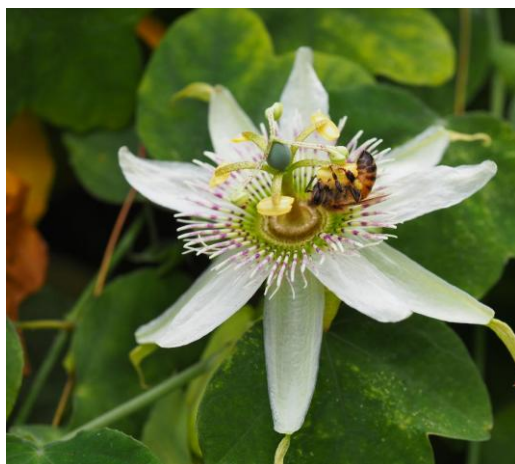


Photo credit: Ashley Deshotel

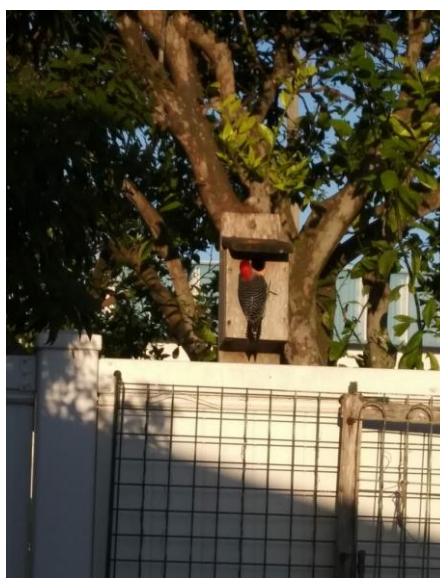
Spring Has Sprung

By Denise Hawks, Master Gardener Volunteer

In this time of pandemic, we sometimes get lost in the daily news briefs and politics of the day and wonder if activity is worth the effort. So, I am going to offer some alternative thoughts to get us out of that media onslaught and heal our eyes and fingers.

When the traffic noise slowed down on the street behind my house, Antilles, otherwise known as 137th Street in Seminole, a cacophony of noise assaulted my ears. Oh my, all of a sudden the bird songs are so obvious and not muted. Noise chirps from the anoles abound. I swear you can even hear the black snake slither by. Screams of joy from the kids hitting the pool down the street make one smile.

A deafening noise was that of a Red Bellied Woodpecker trying to make a birdhouse hole bigger in the tree behind our fence. In the past year, they have cut down many pines in the surrounding neighborhoods. The woodpecker seemed to be exclaiming, "Wow, look a hole. It might be mine". This every morning routine would last about 10 minutes and went on for almost two weeks. Sometimes the male and female worked at it together. While they eventually found a home elsewhere, we now have a more inviting hole for maybe another bird. The anole that lives in the birdhouse is happy they are gone.



Left: A Red-bellied Woodpecker. Photo Credit: IFAS. Right: The birdhouse in Denise's backyard. Photo credit: Denise Hawks

So, here we are on a beautiful day doing yard work, tending the garden and oh...let me get rid of that smilax. I tried to get my arm through the schefflera bush and encountered a bird that was in the bush. Voila, a nest with three eggs in it that turned out to be from a cardinal couple that hangs out here. Under the Indian hawthorn (*Rhapheolepsis indica*) nearby, a couple of doves have been trying to lay eggs after being defeated by rotating blades of a patio fan and us stuffing a towel in a column gap at the front porch. Bless them as both the snake and rabbit live in the hawthorn.

We have a varied array of plants, vegetables and structures in our yard. One important item is a birdbath that attracts a lot of activity throughout the day. We have plants that create food the wildlife likes to eat or are in close proximity to other foods they want. I hope that you all have a safe and secure habitat. Take walks outside and observe what you might have in your own yards.



Left: Schefflera (*Schefflera arboricola*). Right: Indian hawthorn (*Rhapheolepsis indica*). Photo credits: Denise Hawks

Beat the Heat—Summer Vegetables for Central Florida

By Debi Ford, Master Gardener Volunteer



For our northern climate friends, summer is the time to set out their tomato, corn, and other warm weather crops; in fact, they wait for that time all winter long.

For those of us in the South, it's a time to retreat indoors—our prime gardening time in spring has passed. Often times, people liken summer in Pinellas County to being on the surface of the sun! (Yeah, it's that hot!) However, you do not have to abandon your gardening endeavors; you just have to plant different crops. In fact, there are vegetable varieties that love our hot summers.

Of course, you still have to consider the light and moisture needs of the heat-loving plants, but applying “right plant/right place” practices will go a long way to getting your plants off to a good start. Pay attention to “days to harvest” so you can plant accordingly. You'll also want to plant vegetables that can stand up to disease and insects as the heat and humidity can really push plants to their limits. Use mulch to both conserve moisture and keep weed production down. It's also a good time to think about pest management. You can manage disease, insects, and weeds so they have less effect on the plants. Breeding has created many plants that are disease resistant, so look for those plants to have the best chance of having a healthy harvest. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is a system of managing insects and weeds by beginning with the least toxic methods. For stronger methods such as pesticides (even the organic ones), pay attention to the “waiting period to harvest” so that you're harvesting safely.

Stagger your plantings so you have a continuous harvest over several weeks rather than all at once. We are lucky in much of Florida to have two growing seasons in spring and fall, so you'll be able to return to your tomatoes and other spring crops after the heat of summer has passed. Don't pass up the opportunity to plant some heat-tolerant vegetables this spring. You can plant cooler season varieties when the heat breaks.

You can find more information online on various varieties that should be successful. Check out <https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/search-result/?q=vegetables>.

Until then, here are a few varieties and their estimated harvest days to get you thinking (plant times are for our central growing region in Florida):

<u>Name</u>	<u>Plant Time</u>	<u>Variety</u>	<u>Days to Harvest</u>
<u>Lima Beans</u>	Through May	Fordhook 242	65
		Jackson Wonder	68
<u>Eggplant</u>	End of March	Black Beauty	74
<u>Okra</u>	All summer through September	Clemson Spineless	56
<u>Southern Peas (Field Peas, Cow Peas)</u>	All summer through October	California Blackeye No. 5	80
<u>Peppers</u>	End of March	<i>Bell:</i>	
		California Wonder	75
		<i>Sweet:</i>	
		Cubanelle	70-80
		<i>Hot:</i>	
<u>Sweet Potatoes</u>	End of June	Hungarian Hot Wax	70
		Habanero	95-100
<u>Sweet Potatoes</u>	End of June	Centennial	90-100
		Beauregard	90-95
		Vardaman	100
<u>Watermelon</u>	End of March	Crimson Sweet	80

Florida Friendly Landscaping™—The Smart Way to Grow

By Debi Ford, Master Gardener Volunteer

Have you ever wished for a fun, interactive resource to help you through the Florida-Friendly Landscaping (FFL) practices? Well, one exists, and it's only a click away. Floridayards.org, <http://floridayards.org/index.php>, is an on-line resource devoted to the FFL practices. The experts from The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), The University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS), The Florida-Friendly™ Landscaping Program, and the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD), have collaborated to create a site that is both fun and informative. Here are just some of the experiences you can expect:

Florida-Friendly Landscaping 101 (<http://floridayards.org/landscape/index.php>) is a resource to refresh your memory or learn a few new tips to incorporate into your landscape. You can also browse some landscape design examples or pick up an idea or two for your own yard. Try your hand at the interactive tutorial of the nine FFL Principles or take the Florida-Friendly landscaping quiz. There's also information in the Florida-Friendly Tool Shed to take you to resources such as the Master Gardener Program. You can download resources such as "What You Need to Know About Fertilizing Your Lawn and Landscape to Protect Florida's Springs" or "The Waterwise Florida Landscapes Guide". There are also links to a variety of web sites such as Native and Florida-friendly Plant Resources and Composting and Recycling Yard Wastes, just to name a few.

Florida-Friendly Plant Data Base (<http://floridayards.org/fyplants/index.php>)

This terrific resource allows you look up a specific plant or search the database for plant suggestions. You can search for a particular plant by entering either the scientific or the common name. While the database is quite large, no resource will contain every plant known. However, there's a wide variety listed.

To browse the database for ideas, simply follow the step-by-step instructions to search by state, region, and plant type. The database will prompt you to fill in criteria for your search and then return a list of results the plants that you'd like to learn more about. A plant listing will contain the options for you to create a personal plant listing (helpful when shopping!) and view detailed information about the plant such as cold-hardiness zone, light and moisture conditions, if the

plant is native and other essential information to help you put the “right plant in the right place”. The resource allows you to print out individual plant results as well as your personal plant list. This is a goldmine of information; take advantage of it often!

Florida-Friendly Interactive Yard (<http://floridayards.org/interactive/index.php>)

Have fun and learn about design and plant selection by using this fun interactive resource. Simply follow the instructions to begin your experience. If you’re new to the site, there’s a tutorial available to guide you through the process. You’ll learn how to use and understand the process of creating “your own” landscape with the preset design and plant options. You’ll be able to explore such concepts as region choice, bed placement and plant choices, mulch, irrigation, and much more. There’s even an option to include a compost bin or rain barrel! If you’ve visited the site and tried it before, you can return multiple times to see what new designs and plants you can create!

The Professional’s Corner (<http://floridayards.org/professional/index.php>)

Even if you’re not a professional, you will find a wealth of information in this section. Topics such as “Stories of Success with Florida-Friendly Yards” and “The Changing Landscape”, let you delve into the experiences from the pro’s perspective. There’s also additional links to other topics related to the FFL principles such as the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program or the “Florida House Learning Center”.

Visit the site and take advantage of the numerous opportunities contained within the resources and experiences. Learn something new, have fun, and enjoy getting to know both Florida-Friendly Landscaping and your own backyard a little better. It’s all just “a click” away!





Send your Articles and Photos

The next Issue of *The Dirt* is June 2020. The deadline for articles is June 7. Share your passion for gardening with your fellow Master Gardeners by writing an article for *The Dirt*. Include images where possible. However, if you include images they must fall under one of the following guidelines:

- your own
- UF/IFAS image
- open access image, as in wiki-commons, where all rights are open and the photographer is credited
- used with the express permission of the photographer

When you do send images, please do not embed them within the article. Include them separately. Please send all files as Word files. I cannot edit .pdf files.

Do you like to photograph plants or trees but don't like to write? Send me your photos with a description, even without an accompanying article, and I'll publish them with the description as well as a credit to you, the photographer.

Send your articles, images, and your photos to Dianne Fecteau at dianne@kendiacorp.com. My phone number is 727.366.1392.

All articles are subject to editing. In addition, Theresa Badurek, Urban Horticulture Extension Agent and Master Gardener Coordinator, reviews and approves all articles prior to publication.

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