Welcome to The Garden Connection
Newsletter!
By Mary Salinas

Do you want to learn more about plants that flourish in northwest Florida? Would you like sound advice on how to best care for your yard? What about timely tips on problems you may encounter in your vegetable garden?

In this newsletter, the Florida Master Gardener Volunteers of Santa Rosa County answer all those questions and more. You can be confident that all our information and advice is sound as it comes from research done at the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) and other high-quality universities.

Who are Florida Master Gardener Volunteers? They are dedicated individuals who give back to their communities by providing research-based horticultural education to Florida residents. In addition to this newsletter, they provide free plant clinics, do interactive programs in schools, and give workshops and presentations to the public and community groups. Their other activities include helping to protect and encourage roadside wildflowers, having plant sales, maintaining demonstration gardens, and much more.

Thanks so much for joining us. Please feel free to send your questions or suggestions for topics my way.

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Drought Tolerant Gardening

Ellie Mascara, SRCMGV

As we slip into the “Dog Days of Summer” the oppressive August heat and lack of rain cause us to seek the comfort of our air-conditioned homes. Unfortunately, our gardens cannot seek such a refuge and as a result, what was once a garden filled with beautiful flowers, now demands copious amounts of water to prevent wilting. You can avoid this situation by developing a drought tolerant landscape. A beautiful, low-maintenance, economical garden is possible if you implement the following strategies.

First, know the plants that you are considering. Are they hardy plants that do well in your area? You can learn all about each plant by going to The Florida-Friendly Landscaping website. You will find a Guide to Plant Selection and Landscape Design. This extensive list will indicate the height, spread, growth-rate, soil requirements and salt tolerance for each plant. It will also indicate moisture and light requirements.

Second, your choice should be determined by foliage rather than flowers. Flowers demand more time for deadheading, replacing, and weeding. Choose foliage with interesting forms and color.

In addition, consider large plants with a widespread, and low-growing plants that tend to mound. These plants will work well in a large area. You will use fewer plants with less maintenance. Evergreen plants such as junipers are good choices because they maintain color year-round. They do not require a lot of attention.

It is important to do a soil test to determine pH, fertility, and structure of the soil. This test is available at your county Extension Office. Using this information will help you to choose plants that naturally thrive in your soil. Work with your soil rather than against it. Amend your soil when needed. Mulch with pine straw or pine bark to protect roots from extreme heat or cold.

When developing a landscape design, allow your plants to slightly touch each other. In this way, the foliage will create shaded areas under the foliage resulting in less evaporation and more moisture retention. This practice will reduce weeding. It is also advisable to fit the shape of the plant to the shape of the space. If the plant is compatible to the space, less time will be spent trimming the plant to fit the space.

Finally, you can create shady areas by planting small trees or bushes. If they have tiny leaves, they will fall to the ground and will blend into the mulch below.

These are a just a few strategies that will help you to meet the challenges of the Dog Days of Summer. More information on this topic can be found at the following websites:

Landscape Design: Aesthetic Characteristics of Plants
Gardening Solutions: Planning your landscape to conserve water
Last winter, we bought two Meyer Lemon trees to begin our first foray into the world of growing citrus plants in our limited landscape space. What drew us to this citrus plant was the notion that they are easy to grow and won’t become 15-20-foot trees. Images found on the Internet show these trees growing in pots, standing about 5-6 feet tall with many yellow fruit. Anyone can grow these, right? Ours were already blooming at the big box store and were emanating the sweet fragrance of lemon flowers. We were off to a good start. But the growing and care of these plants will not be the subject of this article. Maybe later.

A particular butterfly loves citrus and one of them recently found us. Having first heard of “orange dogs” during a Master Gardener Volunteer training session, it always stuck with me because the larva resembles bird droppings, a natural defense mechanism. One day I noticed the leaves on our trees seemed to have thinned a little. Upon closer inspection, there they were! Several larvae of the Giant Swallowtail Butterfly, *Papilio cresphontes* Cramer, were on the lemon trees busily eating away. Here is one searching for leaves higher up on the tree. (Figure 1)

![Figure 1 Larva of Giant Swallowtail Butterfly, *Papilio cresphontes* Cramer, climbing up a Meyer Lemon tree. Photo: M. Burba](image)

Normally, we share our plants with butterfly larvae, until they take too much. For example, this year, the Eastern Black Swallowtail, *Papilio polyxenes astirius* (Stoll) completely ate our parsley and dill plants in the herb planter. There were 40 larvae on three plants that stripped them of all vegetation. Obviously, the herb plants will come back or be replaced with little cost, but we do not have that option with the lemon trees. We know they are coming again because one placed its chrysalis on the tree (Figure 2) and another laid an egg. (Figure 3) After watching this one hatch and grow two days, we discovered at least 10 more larvae in their first instars. Our small, immature lemon tree cannot survive this infestation and will need our help.

If this article moves you to learn more, then follow these links to the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension (UF/IFAS) Website: [https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/IN134](https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/IN134) and [https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/IN906](https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/IN906) for detailed information on both these butterflies. The linked documents, just like all others located there, contain detailed, research-based information published in an easily understandable manner. (Hold Control key and click on link)
Recent rains have inundated our area leaving overflowing ditches in many housing areas. Using good gardening practices can help alleviate some of this standing water. Here are some tips.

Healthy lawns will absorb water and send it to the aquifers that lie beneath. Roots penetrate the soil and direct the water below. Plant roots also hold precious topsoil in place, stopping erosion. Even weeds have a function, holding soil in place and feeding microorganisms.

Trees, shrubs, and plants are great at absorbing water. They also break through the hard ground making it more porous so water can penetrate. Please consider planting trees in your lawn. It's one of the best investments to long term environmental health individual lawn owners can make. Consider making a rain garden.

A rain garden is a plant bed made up of native plants that can take both flooding and drought.

The purpose is to absorb abundant rainwater. A rain garden can be placed by a gutter to slow down the water flow or fill in a low spot prone to flooding. I built one in the swell of my front yard, where the drainage is between my house and the road. I planted muhly grass, swamp sunflower, milkweed, scarlet sage salvia, coreopsis, and gaura. Since these plants are also pollinators, I have a sign that says "Butterfly Crossing". I have included a photo of my raingarden. For a list of native plants and how to care for them, follow this link:

Rain Gardens - Gardening Solutions - University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (ufl.edu)

Rain barrels are a great way to catch the rain falling from your roof before it courses its way through your yard. By directing the water from your downspouts into rain barrels, you can collect it to use later for watering your plants. It will give you a free source of water when the rain stops.

Here is a link to get you started:
Capturing Water with Rain Barrels - Gardening Solutions - University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (ufl.edu)

Standing water is unsightly and unhealthy. These ideas will help to save nature's most precious resource, rainwater and leave you with a more beautiful lawn.

Rachel Coggins
SRCMGV
August Crossword Puzzle

Across
6. ___________ is the process of exposing seeds to a period of cold temperatures.
8. Extreme dry weather
9. __________ grass is considered a very invasive plant.
10. Citrus trees should be pruned in __________ season.
11. A winter annual that can be found in lawns.
13. Plant roots can __________ water in a rain garden.
14. __________ are produced by flowers that have been pollinated.
15. Many perennials can be propagated by __________.

Down
1. ___________ is a natural process by which organic material is converted to a soil conditioner.
2. A division or segment of a compound leaf.
3. __________ irrigation helps in the conservation of water.
4. A group of individual flowers borne on a single stem.
5. Sucker growth originates on __________
7. A vine attachment
12. __________ will not produce a clone of the parent plant.
Where can I find more information?

The UF/IFAS Extension Solutions for Your Life website and Gardening Solutions website offer online material, including pre-recorded webinars and videos, that can be accessed at your convenience.

Lawn and Garden - UF/IFAS Extension (ufl.edu)
Gardening Solutions - University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (ufl.edu)

In addition, we have our Master Gardener webinar page and our Gardening in the Panhandle web archives full of educational content.
Webinars - Florida Master Gardener Volunteer Program - University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (ufl.edu)
Gardening in the Panhandle | (ufl.edu)

For a listing of local offices visit
Find Your Local Office - UF/IFAS Extension (ufl.edu)

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