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## Extension Update by Larry Figart

*"To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow."*  
*Audrey Hepburn*

### 2024 Master Gardener Plant Sale and Gardening Expo



Saturday, March 30, 2024

9:00 am - 2:00 pm

Duval County Extension Office

**Plant Prices Range from:**

**\$5, \$6, \$7, \$8 up to \$20 each for larger plants.** Cash, checks and credit cards accepted, but cash is encouraged for speedier checkout time!

- Urban Garden Tour and Seed Swap on Superior Street (shuttle provided)
- Master Gardeners available to take soil samples and help answer your gardening questions.

### Plant Sale "Plant Chats" by Master Gardener Volunteers

- 10:00 am - **Tools to Make Gardening Easier**  
by Mary Longanbach
- 11:00 am - **Attracting Birds with Native Plants**  
by Amy Franqui

- 12:00 pm - **Propagation in a Forsythe Pot**  
by Paula Weatherby
- 1:00 pm - **Now What Do I Cook with this Herb?**  
by Libby Clapp

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

Spreading plant



Annette Chandler, UF/IFAS

Fleshy stolon that roots at nodes



Annette Chandler, UF/IFAS

Small purple flowers



Annette Chandler, UF/IFAS



# Around the Yard by Tonya Ashworth

## Low Mow Spring

Spring is here, and with it comes a flurry of growth and activity in our gardens. Our native bees who are responsible for a large portion of pollination duties are emerging and looking for flowers to forage. It's only early March, and we haven't reached peak blooming season in our landscapes, but there is something you can do to help the bees find food; wait three weeks to mow or don't mow at all.

The concept of "**No Mow**" May was started in the U.S. by the Bee City affiliate town of Appleton, Wisconsin, in 2020. The city suspended their weed ordinances for the month of May and over 400 residents participated that first year. Here in Florida, "**No Mow**" May has been adapted to "**No Mow**" March or "**Slow Mow**" Spring to account for the timing of the native bee emergence in the spring this far south.

"**No Mow**" March or "**Slow Mow**" Spring will work best in landscapes that utilize the freedom lawn approach. A freedom lawn allows whatever forbs and grasses (some people may say weeds) to grow and then mow short to keep them the same height as the turfgrass. Starting slow to mow in the spring gives forb lawns time to put on blooms and provide pollen and nectar for our busy foraging friends. These lawns are free from irrigation, fertilizers, insecticides, fungicides, and herbicides. Freedom lawns free up time and money spent on these chemicals and their applications as well.



Honey bee on Bidens alba  
Image by T. Ashworth, UF/IFAS



Green Sweat Bee  
Image by Tyler Jones, UF/IFAS

Research has shown that less frequent mowing really does help. A study in Massachusetts found that lawns mowed every three weeks had over twice as many blooming forbs and a higher diversity of bee species. A whopping 111 different bee species were documented during the study. A meta-analysis of many different studies showed an increase in numbers and species of butterflies, bees, grasshoppers, crickets, and true bugs in less frequently mowed lawns. You might not care for the crickets and grasshoppers, but they provide food for baby birds who hatch in spring as well. In contrast, more manicured lawns had fewer bees and butterflies but more pest insects such as centipedes, millipedes, spiders, ticks, and mites.

You may be thinking, "I like bees, butterflies, and baby birds, but what will the neighbors think?" Well, you can download "**Low Mow**" Spring yard signs from Bee City USA's website at <https://beecityusa.org/no-mow-may/>, and use it as an opportunity to tell them about what you are doing and why. As long as you keep the grass under 15" in height you will stay in the good graces of City Code Enforcement too.

Perhaps you live in an HOA that dictates a weed-free St. Augustinegrass lawn. If this is the case, can you do a mullet landscape? It's business in the front but a party in the back...yard. Stop treating the backyard with chemicals and let the forbs grow. Even the dandelions that will come up quickly are good for the bees.

For more information on pollinator plants go to:

<https://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/design/gardening-with-wildlife/bee-plants.html>



# Out on a Limb by Larry Figart

## Are Palms Really Trees?

This article entertains an ongoing debate that I often hear. Are palm trees really trees? Could our state tree, the sable palm, not even be a tree? This has been argued in many different ways with the answer lying somewhere in the middle. Skip down to the end if you want to read what I think the answer is. However, keep reading if you want to learn why both sides have valid points.

You may wonder why this is even an argument. Palms grow tall, sometimes reaching 50-60 feet in height. If that is not a tree, then what is it?



Sable palm, our State tree.

Image by L. Figart, UF/IFAS

**Palms are very different anatomically** than most trees in many ways. The first way they are different is in how they transport water and nutrients up and down from the roots to the canopy. In typical trees you have this vascular tissue arranged in a very specific way. They have four distinct layers with the first three being very thin. First is the bark, that protects the tree. Second, you will encounter a very thin layer of phloem that transports the sugars made in the leaves throughout the tree. Third, will be a thin a ring of cambium (only two cells thick) that is constantly producing more wood allowing the tree to continually grow in diameter. The final layer is the xylem. It is the largest layer that transports water up the tree to the foliage. It's where the annual rings are and is the part that gives the tree its strength.

**The vascular system in palms is arranged very differently.** First, palms don't have bark. What appears to be bark is simply dried out tissue left over after the fronds are shed. This is commonly called a pseudobark. Also, palms do not increase in diameter as they get older. This is because they do not have a cambium that increases the trunk diameter. Palms likewise, don't have layers of phloem, and xylem with its annual rings. Instead, the xylem and phloem are arranged in bundles throughout the trunk. In between the bundles is a very fibrous tissue that adds strength to the palm trunk allowing it to remain upright.

Another huge difference between palms and typical trees is how they grow. In a typical tree there are many growth points or buds that create a large canopy of foliage. In palms there is only ONE bud. It is this one bud that creates new fronds and helps the tree increase in height. However, if the bud of the palm tree dies, the tree will die. It does not have the ability to grow another.

Finally, **palm roots are very different from typical tree roots.** In palms there is a zone at the bottom of the trunk called the root initiation zone. As roots die, more are formed from the root initiation zone at the base of the palm to take their place. The other interesting thing about palm roots is as they grow longer, they do not grow any thicker. It is rare that a palm root system damages a sidewalk. Don't be fooled though. Palm root systems can be extensive, often growing out 30-50 feet from the trunk.

As I said in the beginning, the basis of the debate is in biology. Palms are part of a group of plants called monocots. Other monocots include corn, grasses, lilies, and onions. Typical trees belong to a group of plants called dicots. Most shrubs, vines and other woody plants are dicots. The folks that don't see palms as trees (like me) simply argue that palms are closer to tall grasses than they are to trees. As time goes on, so does the debate. If you would like to find more information on palms, go to <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topics/palms>.

# Growing in the Vegetable Garden by Beth Marlowe

## It's Time to Transplant

Tomatoes, peppers and eggplants are all warm weather vegetables from the Solanaceae family. They feature prominently in many of our favorite Mediterranean cuisines—from Italian, Spanish and Portuguese to Middle Eastern and North African. All are packed with vitamins and minerals, and they are relatively low in carbohydrates; good options for people who are trying to reduce blood sugar, lose weight or just generally maintain good health.

All three need a long, warm growing season but can suffer with extreme heat, disease and insects in late summer. To help them get a head start and bear fruit before it gets too hot, you can start seeds indoors during January, and then transplant them outside once the threat of frost is past (March 15 for most of us), the soil has warmed up, and the days are reliably in the 70s. If you are not able to start your vegetables from seeds you can purchase transplants at most garden centers.

You can plant them in the ground, raised beds or even large (at least 5 gallon) containers. Dwarf varieties can make surprisingly attractive ornamentals, in addition to providing us with healthy food.



Eggplants, tomatoes and peppers are great additions to a spring garden. (Photo Credits: UF/IFAS)

## Keys to successful production include:

- Site selection: At least 6-8 hours of sun each day, and slightly acidic, well-drained soil.
- Cultivar selection: Choose a variety suited for our climate and bred for disease resistance.
- Healthy transplants: Dark green, robust, spot and insect free, 5-6 weeks old and 5-7 inches tall.
- Good cultural practices: Plant at appropriate depth, mulch, stake/cage, water consistently but not too much, and fertilize as needed for your soil, based on a soil nutrient analysis.
- Scout: Observe upper and lower leaf surfaces, stem and fruits for diseases and pests regularly.
- Crop rotation: Avoid planting vegetables from the same family in the same place each season.
- Check for ripening fruits frequently, and harvest often to encourage more fruit production. Then enjoy trying out new recipes with your homegrown veggies!

## Additional Reading:

Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide: (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/vh021>)

Tomato Disease in Florida Vegetable Gardens: <https://journals.flvc.org/edis/article/view/113389/108565>

Peppers: (<https://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/edibles/vegetables/peppers.html>)

Heirloom Eggplant Varieties in Florida: (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/HS1243>)

# Friendly Landscapes by Stephanie Means

## Weed & Feed: Is It Helpful or Hurtful?

As I wait in line at the garden center to pay for my new spring plant purchase, I see big stacks of “weed & feed” and other lawn fertilizers conveniently located to grab and go on the way out the door. The images of lush green grass and guarantees of a thicker lawn plus many months of weed-free bliss are hard to resist. I’m itching for that spring flush of green and the smell of fresh cut grass. It’s tempting to throw a couple bags in my cart since my yard looks patchy and brown right now. If I throw down some granules now, it’ll surely help speed up the process, right? Turns out, the answer is NO! I did the research, so you don’t make the same mistake I almost made (and so many homeowners in Florida do each year).

Here's what I learned:

## What does “weed & feed” even mean, and should I use it?

“Weed & feed” is a combination product containing herbicide and fertilizer in one. Weed = herbicide and feed = fertilizer. These products aim to kill weeds before they emerge while conveniently feeding the lawn at the same time. BUT there’s a CATCH! To be effective, the first application of a pre-emergent herbicide (like those contained in weed & feed products) should be applied in late February or early March when day temperatures reach 65 F to 75 F for four to five consecutive days. However, a fertilizer application this early in the year could be ineffective or even harmful to the lawn. At the time a pre-emergent herbicide should be applied, the lawn is generally still dormant, and roots are not actively growing enough to take up much fertilizer. This extra fertilizer runs off, wasting your money and leading to groundwater pollution.



Fertilize Appropriately  
Image by Tyler Jones, UF/IFAS

## When should I fertilize my lawn in north Florida?

Fertilizer should be applied ONLY when plants are actively growing. In general, lawns in our area should be first fertilized in April, but there is no set day on the calendar when it is recommended to fertilize because it really depends on the weather. A good rule of thumb is to wait until after you’ve had to mow your grass twice. Growing grass indicates warm enough weather for your lawn to completely come out of dormancy, meaning it will be able to take up and use the fertilizer that you put down. The last fertilization should take place no later than mid-September which is when the grass begins to go dormant for the cooler months.

## What if my lawn is brand new?

Wait at least 30-60 days before adding any fertilizer to a newly planted lawn. This allows time for roots to become established enough that they can take up and use the fertilizer; thus reducing the risk of nutrient leaching.

To sum up my findings, I learned it is important to understand the timing and proper application of herbicides as well as fertilizers to ensure the health and growth of your lawn. Applying these products at the right time can make a significant difference in the effectiveness and overall well-being of your grass, preventing waste and pollution. Practice FFL™ and leave the “weed & feed” at the store! If you have more questions about fertilizing your home lawn check out: <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/EP236>.



Fertilizer Bags In store  
Adobe Stock credit: Pavel Losevsky



## What to Plant in March and April

Annuals: Coleus, Angelonia, wax begonia, zinnia

Bulbs: Dahlia, blood lily, caladium, or canna, for spring and summer flowering

Vegetables: Warm-season such as: Beans, peppers, tomatoes, squash and corn.

Herbs: heat-loving herbs, including basil, oregano, sage, Mexican tarragon, and rosemary.

This is an ideal time to plant many bulbs. Louisiana iris and others make beautiful cut flowers !



UF/IFAS Photo:

## Upcoming Classes

Scan Code  
for current list of  
ALL Duval Extension Classes



Date, Time, Cost	Event & Registration	Location
<b>March 25th</b> 2:00 - 3:30 pm \$10.00	<b><u>March Backyard Hen Training</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>March 30th</b> 9:00am - 2:00pm Free	<b>Duval County Master Gardener Plant Sale and Gardening Expo</b>	Extension Office 1010 N McDuff Ave
<b>March-April</b> Various times & locations Free	<b><u>Jacksonville public libraries "Life Lit"</u></b> Life Lit Programs Life are free workshops offered by trained professionals and volunteers that focus on improving your day to day life. These programs cover a wide range of workshops from gardening to small business needs. Go support our UF/IFAS Extension staff and volunteers!	<b>March 25th 6:00pm</b> <b>Right Plant Right Place (Argyle Branch)</b>  <b>March 26th 7:00pm</b> <b>Carefree Gardening (Southeast Regional Branch)</b>  <b>April 16th 6:30pm</b> <b>Bats, Bees, Birds and Butterflies</b> <b>University Park Branch</b>  <b>April 2nd 6:00pm</b> <b>Gardening Mistakes (Maxville Branch)</b>  <b>April 22nd 6:00pm</b> <b>Weed Free Gardening (Argyle Branch)</b>

## What's That? Answer!

It's doveweed! Doveweed is a monocot, with fleshy, succulent leaves and stolons. It spreads out via it's stolons, which readily root at every node. Try to pull it up and it will often break into multiple pieces. Late in the season it has small purple flowers and produces a profuse quantity of seeds. Early in the growth season it blends in with your lawn and can be very difficult to see. By the time it is noticed it may be well established and hardy. Doveweed will germinate later than most of our warm season weeds, often around a month after early species such as crabgrass have sprouted. Doveweed is easiest to control with a preemergence (see below reading for recommendations); there are a few products that can be used postemergence but success can vary.

### Further Reading

Biology and Management of Doveweed (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep576>)



Annette Chandler, UF/IFAS