

Garden Scoop

The Basics of Growing Tomatoes

K.S.Kennen MGV

Many people want to try to grow tomatoes without first considering some of the basics of doing so successfully in central Florida. The season to plant tomatoes definitely is not like up North when you plant in the summer, because our summers are too warm and a large fruited plant will not set fruit when the nighttime temperatures average 80 degrees or higher. The plant will grow big and leafy but have no tomatoes. There are two seasons for planting and growing tomatoes here; one is in March and the other is August.

Besides knowing when to plant, knowing what you are planting is also important. There are two types of tomatoes: vining and bushy. Vining will need more growing room and need staking or a tomato cage to support and keep the fruit off of the ground. Plants can also be determinate or indeterminate. Determinate tomato plants will produce only one set of tomatoes and are bushier plants. Indeterminate plants will continue to produce tomatoes even after the first set of fruit on vines as they continue to grow.

Two more things to consider when growing tomatoes are how long does it take before tomatoes will be produced and to what diseases is the plant resistant. Many purchased starter tomato plants will have an identifier tag with this information. The image here is for a hybrid patio tomato tag; it says the maturity is 70 days after planting which is important to be sure the growing time does not run into the hot nights. Also, the tag lists that this plant is resistant to F (fusarium wilt), ASC (alternaria stem cancer), and St (gray leaf spot).

Many of the diseases are the result of cultural conditions and one that can be controlled is how you water your plant. Watering at the base of the plant and not overhead is best for the plant and can help ward off fungal diseases. Also not over-watering is important to help avoid root problems. Water your tomatoes with one to two inches of water a week and if in a container check two inches in the soil to be sure it is moist. Where and how you plant your tomatoes will play a role in a successful crop production. When selecting a site consider six things. One, does the site receive five to six hours of sun? Some homes simply have too much shade. Is the planting site away from tree roots? Tree roots extend three times the width of the canopy out from the tree, only a foot deep and will interfere with the tomato plant growth. Also, does the area drain well or is there standing water after a heavy rain? If you will have more than one plant, is there enough space to allow for sufficient air movement between the plants? Finally, is the soil pH between 5.5 to 6.5? If any of these could be a problem, you might want to consider growing your tomato plants in containers.

This article is as the title implies, the basics of growing tomatoes but for more information you can refer to any of the many papers written by the university at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/>.

Disease resistance: F, ASC, St

- **LIGHT:** Full Sun 6+ hrs
- **LUZ:** Sol Directo
- **SPACING:** 18-24" apart
- **ESPACIAMIENTO:** 45-60 cm aparte
- **PLANTING DEPTH:** Bury 2/3 of plant
- **PROFUNDIDAD DE LA SIEMBRA:** Entierre 2/3 de la planta
- **MATURITY:** 70 days after planting
- **MADURACIÓN:** 70 días después de la siembra

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Inside this issue:

Tomato Varieties.....	2
Cicadas:	
Harmless Musicians.....	3
Clinic Clatter.....	4
Three, White	
Bloomers.....	5
Tremendous- Persimmon.....	6
Events.....	7
Discovery Garden.....	7

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Lake County MGV Mission Statement

The mission of UF/IFAS Lake County Master Gardener Volunteers is to assist extension agents by providing horticultural education programs and current research-based information to the public through plant clinics, community outreach and Discovery Gardens.

For more information contact: UF/IFAS Extension, Lake County Office lakemg.ifas@ufl.edu •

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Which Tomato?

When purchasing tomatoes for your garden, you have basically two options: seeds or transplants. Transplants can be found at many places but will be limited to certain varieties. Purchasing seeds can offer more selection but you need to be sure the plant will do well in Florida and have resistance to insects and disease problems. Also be sure that you start your seeds soon enough to allow time to plant them at the proper time. If you want to consider growing during the summer months, cherry tomatoes are an excellent option along with a heat tolerant cultivar like "Heat Wave II".

The chart below was compiled in 2013 and other varieties may have been developed. Since growing tomatoes is not an exact science, you might ask others what varieties they have had success growing. Two favorites are Patio and Red Cherry which I grow in pots since I have very little room that is not interfered with by tree roots. Experiment and keep a record of what will work for you. Happy growing.

Tomato Varieties				
Variety	Determinate or Indeterminate	Large, Medium or Small fruit	Resistance to Nematodes (N), Fusarium Wilt (F), Verticillium Wilt (V), Gray Leaf Spot (S)	Notes
Better Boy	I	L	N, F, V	
Big Beef	I	L	N, F, V	
Bonnie Best	I	M		Grows better in North Florida than in South Florida. Likes cages.
Bragger	I	L		
Carnival	D	L	N	
Castlette	D	S		
Celebrity	D	L	N	
Champion	I	L	N	
Chelsea	D	S		
Cherry	D	S		
Cherry Grande	D	S		
Duke	D	L	F, V, S	
First Lady	I	L	N, F, V	
Flora-Dade	D	L	F, V, S	Big red fruits. Highly recommended
Floradel	I	L	F, S	
Floragold	D	S		
Floramerica	D	L	N, F, S	
Florida Basket	D	S		
Florida Lanai	D	S		
Florida Petite	D	S		
Manalucie	I	L	F, S	
Manapal	I	M		
Micro-Tom	D	S		
Patio	D	S		
Red Cherry	I	S		
Roma	D	S		
San Marzano	D	S		
Solar Set	D	L		Sets fruit at higher temperatures than most varieties.
Suncoast	D	L	F, V, S	
Sunny	D	L	F, V, S	
Sweet 100	I	S		Beautiful "hands" of fruit that are one inch or less in diameter.
Sweet Chelsea	I	S		Vines vigorously. Fruits profusely.
Sweet Million	I	S		Fruits similar to cherry types, but produced in extra long clusters.
Tropic	I	L	F, V, S	
Walter	D	L	F, S	

Plant Clinic Clatter

Dear Master Gardener,

My family in Michigan had an apple orchard and I was wondering if I could grow apples here in Central Florida?



Dear Homeowner,

The one criteria you will have to meet before you consider growing apples in Lake County is the number of hours the temperature is below 45 degrees which is known as chill hours since many fruit trees need a minimum for chill hours in order to bear fruit. In Northern Lake County the chill hours are 310 to 430 and in Southern Lake County the chill hours are 210 to 310. The best varieties to plant would be “Anna” (300 hours), “Dorsett Golden” (250 hours), and “Tropic Sweet” (250 hours). Plant your trees between late December and February.



UF/IFAS North Florida Research and Education Center

Water regularly and your trees should bear fruit within two years. Be sure to plant more than one tree since they need cross pollination to set fruit. They should ripen in June or July. For a “how to plant your tree” refer to <https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/care/planting/planting-and-establishing-trees.html>

Dear Master Gardener,

I am trying to be more organized in how I handle my yard and garden. What should I be doing now to keep my landscape looking good.

Needing help in Clermont.

Dear Clermont Homeowner,

There are a few things you can do this spring to help keep your landscape growing well.

1. Cut back your flowering shrub after they are done blooming.
2. There should be new plant growth this spring. Be sure to check for aphids.
3. Be sure to water if rainfall is insufficient this spring.
4. Transplant now before it gets too hot and replace cool season annuals with warm season ones.
5. Fertilize lawn when new growth appears with controlled release fertilizer for longer lasting results. No weed and feed.

These five things should help keep you busy and your landscape looking fresh.

Plant Clinic

Remember that if you have questions or concerns about plants you can visit the plant clinic from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. with your questions. Please remember that COVID cautions are in place and a controlled number of visitors with masks are allowed into the office.

You can also call at 352-343-4101 or email lake@ifas.ufl.edu with your questions.

Cicadas: Harmless Musicians

Reggie Daugherty MGv

While northern states are getting ready for the [17-year cicada brood X](#), *The Great Eastern Brood*, to land and start making sweet music, Florida residents already know what they sound like and what damage they may cause – EVERY YEAR! Growing up in NJ, I recall being told that the louder and noisier they were, the hotter our summer would be. It seemed true to me...even more so now that I live in the Sunshine State (for more info on temperatures and cicada decibels, [click here](#)).

There are over 3,000 species of cicadas in the world. Florida has 19 as annual species! Their loud cacophony is created by the males as a mating song. The louder they are, the better their shot is at procreation because it's a symbol of strength in the insect world.

In Florida, cicadas mostly keep to pine trees and shrubs, but do little damage to them. They do not bite, sting, nor carry harmful diseases. They are a food source for wildlife (and humans). The cicadas in Florida are considered an annual species, as they emerge from the ground as soon as the temperature is right every year. You'll find their little brown exoskeletons scattered about between late March through early October when they shed their fifth, and final, nymph exoskeleton.

According to the [UF Entomology department](#), "When cicadas *oviposit* (lay eggs) in the twigs of trees, the twigs sometimes break and the leaves beyond the break die. This results in brown "flags" near the ends of branches in otherwise green trees. Such flagging is rarely reported in Florida but can severely damage northern orchards in the aftermath of emergings of periodical cicadas".

So, you may be startled by cicadas when they fly in your car window and smash into your face (yes, that's happened to me) or when a bunch of the adults decide to fly at the same time (they don't swarm) into a crowd of 5K walkers (yes, this happened too), but they are pretty harmless in Florida. They live symbiotically with nature – living off the sap/juices of roots as nymphs underground or twigs from branch tips as adults. Actually, adult cicadas spend more time mating and evading predators (they're really bad fliers) than eating.

Photo UF/IFAS



More information: [Cicadas \(ufl.edu\)](#) | [EDIS IN60200](#) | [Photos of FL cicadas](#) | [Cicadas in FL](#) | [Cicada killer](#) | [Brood X](#) | [FL Cicadas](#) | [Cicada diet](#)



Photos-University Florida



More Spooky Exoskeleton (Photos: R.Doherty)



Three, White Bloomers

By K.S. Kennen, MGCV

Three small, spring blooming trees that we are fortunate to have as natives in Florida are *Prunus umbellata* (Flatwoods plum), *Prunus angustiflora* (Chickasaw plum), and *Chionanthus virginicus* (Fringetree). They all have white blooms in the spring and add showy elegance to your landscape. All have a tolerance for a wide range of soil types and can grow in full sun or dappled shade but will flower better if they have full sun part of the day with afternoon shade. The three trees are deciduous and will lose their leaves before blooming in the late winter or early spring.

Flatwoods plum is also known as hog plum or sloe plum and can be pruned to grow as a small, single, trunk tree. The tree, a member of the Rosaceae family, does have thorns and bears small one-inch fruit that has a tart to slightly sweet taste and provides food for wildlife and humans. It can be eaten fresh or turned into jam or jelly. The short stature (20 feet) makes this tree appropriate to plant under power lines without worry of interference. The tree when young is a quick grower but slows when it begins to bear fruit. Another positive characteristic is that the tree has very few suckers and pests. It is also host for the red-spotted purple butterfly.



The Chickasaw plum also called the Florida sand plum, sandhill plum, or sand plum has a short trunk and requires regular pruning to create a strong structure. It can grow as large as 20 feet tall and 20 feet wide. Unlike the Flatwoods plum, Chickasaw plum's ½ inch fruit consistently ripens to a sweet red in the spring and is gone by July. Unfortunately, the plant does have suckers. You can prune these back to keep a neat appearance. This is host for both the red-spotted purple and tiger swallowtail butterflies.

The fringetree is appropriately named because of its fringe-like white blooms that appear in April or May. It is very striking in appearance with its cloud-like flowering and is also sometimes called Old Man's Beard or Grancy Greybeard. The female of the species will have olive-like fruit that is eaten by birds. It is necessary to prune a young tree so it will establish a single trunk. Once established, the tree should need no further pruning. The tree should be scouted occasionally for mites, powdery mildew, or stem cankers.



Treemendous: Persimmon

Jamie Daugherty, RHA

The Common Persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*) is a native forest tree that can grow in zones 4B-9B. These are large canopy trees that grow to be 40-60 feet tall and can be 20-35 feet wide. In more northern areas they have a nice, showy, red, fall color. We do not get that as much in Lake County, but they will still have a color change for the fall.



Photo Credit - Gitta Hasing
UF/IFAS. Persimmon Bark



Three elements of the persimmon tree to consider are the bark, flowers, and fruit. The bark is a very interesting pattern. It resembles a chunky, square pattern. Orange can be seen coming through the fissures. This is perfectly normal. Flowers are small whitish to green with a bell shape. Flowering occurs in the late spring/early summer. Male flowers will be found in groups of 3 while female flowers are found singularly. The fruit is a large berry measuring 1 1/2- 2 inches long and ripens in the mid to late fall. They are orange when ripe and are very similar in look to a tomato. When you cut into the fruit you will find a much more solid interior with a very sweet taste. This fruit is good to eat on its own, or you can use it in baked goods. My first experience eating a persimmon was in cookies. They were very good!

If you have not tried this fruit yet, I recommend giving it a try. If you are looking for an interesting, edible tree for your yard, this is a great one to consider.

Events

Due to COVID 19 activities and educational offerings are virtual. Please refer to our website for future offerings. The site for is at <http://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/lake/> or <https://lakegardeningprograms.eventbrite.com> Extension programs are open to all persons without regard to race, color, sex, age, disability, religion, or national origin.

UF/IFAS EXTENSION ORANGE COUNTY PRESENTS: LIFESCAPING SERIES ONLINE SERIES - APRIL 8, 15, 22, 2021

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Discovery Gardens

Please plan a visit to over twenty different gardens located at 1951 Woodlea Road in Tavares. The hours are Monday through Friday and the third Saturday of the month from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. Just like your yard Discovery Garden changes with the seasons and will reveal something new with each visit. Pictured to the right is a fountain at the entrance to the garden.



<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/lake/lawn-and-garden---florida-friendly-landscaping/>