Summer Cutting Garden Rewards You Indoors and Out!

By Maureen Hirthler, Master Gardener Volunteer

It’s hot. Your vegetable garden and self-watering planters are empty, and the perennials are wilting. What is a gardener to do?

The answer is simple – plant a cut flower garden! Many types of flowers love the heat when cared for properly. Summer flowers brighten your landscape and can provide beautiful bouquets indoors all summer long. As a bonus, they attract butterflies, pollinators, and even hummingbirds.

One of the secrets of planting a mixed species garden is raising flowers of varying heights. We will rely on this principle when arranging the cut flowers in vases.

A species that loves Florida heat is zinnia (*Zinnia* spp.), and they are the mainstay of my cutting garden. There are so many colors, sizes, and varieties from which to choose. Single-petal zinnias are excellent pollinators. Double-petal zinnias are fuller, and the dahlia and globe types are dense and deep. I suggest planting all varieties. You can choose to plant a palette of a single color or go random.

Salvia (*Salvia* spp.) can be blue, lavender, red, or white, and its narrow, tall habit adds interest to both the garden and the vase. Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*) and gerbera (*Gerbera jamesonii*) varieties provide a daisy addition.

Gaillardia (*Gaillardia pulchella*) comes in shades and mixes of red and yellow. The plant is medium-sized, and the flowers can serve as a second layer in an arrangement.

Nasturtiums (*Trapaecolum* spp.) are available in all the colors of a sunset. They grow on a shorter plant with abundant variegated and unusually shaped leaves. Nasturtiums would be a bedding or outer layer flower.

Coneflowers (*Echinacea* spp.) are perennial but can be grown as annuals. The purple variety (*E. purpurea*) is native to Florida but coneflowers also come in red, white, orange, and yellow. They can be a focal point of any arrangement.
Cut flower plants require water, which usually isn't an issue in summer, but watch for wilting during dry, hot weather. They benefit from a light application of ornamental fertilizer and monitoring for pests, especially at the bud stage. Neem oil, horticultural oil or soap, or gentle washing and wiping can take care of them.

Now comes the fun part. The first step in arranging your flowers is to choose a vase of the right size, shape, and color. When in doubt, choose white or clear. You can place a flower frog, florist's green foam, pebbles, beads, or nothing in the bottom. It's your choice.

You've selected your flowers, made sure the cuts are done with a clean tool, fresh and on an angle, and remove all leaves that will be inside the container. We'll then use the principles of flower arrangement—balance, scale, dominance, rhythm, color, and orientation—to make our bouquet.

A focal point consisting of one or two tall flowers of the same color goes in the center, then medium flowers around that. Small flowers are tucked around the edges or into bare spots.

To finish the arrangement, flowers in a color related to the focal point are scattered throughout the arrangement (salvias work great for this) and can be a bit taller than the plants in the focal area. Don't forget green. A few pieces of palm frond, fern, or shrub in different shades of green add contrast and natural beauty to the arrangement. A sturdy herb like rosemary gives a bit of scent.

Many home remedies are suggested to prolong the life of your flowers (vodka!) but changing the water every three days and cleaning the vase is all that's needed. Gradually thin the bouquet as flowers wilt. You can replace it with new flowers or just enjoy the changing focus.

If all that doesn't appeal to you, just put the flowers in a vase and move them around until you're happy.

A cutting garden is minimal-care, sensory-rich, and beautifying. It's an ideal outlet for expressing creativity and harmony.

You can see many of these flowers at the Extension Educational Gardens.

Make the very best of our Florida summer!

Additional resources:

https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/design/types-of-gardens/cut-flower-garden.html
https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/ornamentals/zinnia.html
https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/ornamentals/nasturtium.html
https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/ornamentals/salvia.html
https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/ornamentals/gaillardia.html
**Q:** Yesterday while walking I found several seed pods near a park in Palmetto, Florida. Is it possible to identify what type of tree they came from?

**A:** The seed pods you found are from *Acacia auriculiformis*, earleaf acacia. Not native to Florida, this tree is planted because it isn’t too big, grows quickly, and sprouts an abundance of yellow flowers followed by these twisted seed pods. However, the University of Florida advises against planting this tree in South Florida because of its invasive qualities; here in Central Florida it is a “caution” species, meaning it should be managed to prevent escape from cultivation. (For more information its invasiveness, see [https://assessment.ifas.ufl.edu/assessments/acacia-auriculiformis/](https://assessment.ifas.ufl.edu/assessments/acacia-auriculiformis/))

I've included a link to information and pictures of this tree for your reference.

[https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/st004](https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/st004)

Master Gardener Volunteer Karen Holleran answers your email questions. Send questions and / or photos for identification or for diagnosis of residential gardening problems to ManateeMg@gmail.com. Or call us at 941-722-4524 weekdays (except Wednesdays) from 10:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. and press 1 to speak to the Master Gardener Diagnostic Plant Clinic. In-person visits to the Plant Clinic are welcome at Manatee County Extension office 1303 14th Street West, Palmetto, FL 34221.

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**WHAT’S THIS?: BEES IN MAGNOLIA**

*By Amy L. Stripe, Master Gardener Volunteer*

That buzzing sound coming from Master Gardener Volunteer Nancy Hammer’s Southern magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora* ‘Little Gem’) are European honey bees (*Apis mellifera*) a species of which now consists of several subspecies, including the African honey bee. Whilst honey bees are probably the most widely recognized bee in our gardens, they are only one of over 300 species in Florida.

[https://entnemdept.ufl.edu/creatures/MISC/BEES/euro_honey_bee.htm](https://entnemdept.ufl.edu/creatures/MISC/BEES/euro_honey_bee.htm)

[https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/ST375](https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/ST375)

[https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/IN1285?downloadOpen=true](https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/IN1285?downloadOpen=true)
Native Blooming Now: Twinflower
By Sally Herb, Master Gardener Volunteer

Twinflower (Dyschoriste oblongifolia) is a lovely Florida native groundcover. As the name indicates, it has small, paired lavender flowers that occur year-round. Its native habitat is sandhills, flatwoods and mixed upland forests in Zones 8A-10B. Twinflower attracts bees and many butterflies including malachites and white peacocks, and it is the host plant for the common buckeye. The buckeye lays individual eggs on leaves and the caterpillars devour both leaves and flowers. This is a sprawly, shade loving, drought tolerant plant, although it will tolerate sun if given extra watering. Topping out at six to eight feet and spreading by underground runners and reseeding, twinflower makes a lush carpet-like groundcover.

https://www.fnps.org/plant/dyschoriste-oblongifolia
https://www.flawildflowers.org/flower-friday-dyschoriste-oblongifolia/
https://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/nassauco/2017/06/11/fact-sheet-twinflower/

Your votes are in from the April issue of “The Bench.”
... and, the top nominees for Florida state bird are...!

In third place, the flamingo. In second place, the Florida scrub-jay. And in first place, the roseate spoonbill!

We didn’t get enough votes to warrant a place on the Florida state legislature docket, unfortunately, but we do appreciate those of you who weighed in. It was fun to learn, write and read about some of Florida’s amazing birds! The Northern mockingbird, busy with official duties in three other states as well as our own, will just have to soldier on.

Master Gardener Volunteer Plant Sales!

Thank you to our customers and volunteers for a successful Spring Plant Sale (April 29th.) Orchids, perennials, annuals, wildflowers, ornamental shrubs and grasses, natives, succulents, herbs, and much more were on offer, including a limited number of citrus-greening tolerant ‘Sugar Belle®’ mandarins. Here are some of the lovely plants for sale (photos by Francis Kurlinski, Master Gardener Volunteer).

Top: Succulents, Middle right and bottom left: Native wildflowers, Middle left: Herbs, Bottom right: Rare and unusual plants.

Mark your calendars for the Fall Plant Sale to be held on Saturday, October 7th. Stay tuned to “The Bench” for upcoming details. We’re hoping to have more ‘Sugar Bells’ for sale then.
All mildews are molds, but not all molds are mildews. However, both are fungi. Let’s dig in!

Molds are fungi that spread via tiny reproductive cells called spores. They often have a raised growth habit, in a variety of colors. An unsightly black mold called sooty mold is a common sight in Florida. Sooty mold grows on leaves when honeydew (an endearing term for sugary insect excretions) from sap sucking insects covers leaf surfaces. If you see this velvety black mold on your landscape plants, check for aphids, mealy bugs, scales, or whiteflies. Once the little sap suckers are dealt with by predatory insects, blasting with water from a hose, or by spraying with insecticidal soap, the mold will degrade.

Mildews are a white to gray mold, with a flat growth habit, that may multiply on plant surfaces. Powdery mildew creates circular white leaf spots, with leaves turning yellow over time. Prevention is key - plant in sunny areas where there is good air movement, irrigate only root zones, and if necessary, use a fungicide listed specifically for powdery mildew.

Common names can be misleading. Downy mildew, another common pathogen, is not in fact mildew – but more closely related to algae. It creates gray angular leaf spots which are limited by leaf veins. Leaves may yellow before the leaf spots are visible. Once again, grow plants in the sun with good air circulation, water only root zones, and if necessary, use a fungicide specific to downy mildew.

Mosses are ancient non-flowering plants that thrive in moist, acidic areas. Unlike other plants, they do not have vascular systems. Instead, they absorb what they need by osmosis. They do not have true roots but have root-like structures that are parts of the stem. Also, they do not have true leaves, rather needles and scales. In Florida, mosses may be found growing on exposed tree roots, high in trees, on rocks, and even on our sandy soils.

If one searches online for mosses, invariably Spanish moss pops up. However, as another example of tricky common names, Spanish moss is not a moss, but a bromeliad that is an epiphyte.

Epiphytes (also called air plants) are plants that survive on moisture and nutrients from the air and plant debris–no soil required. Some bromeliads, orchids, and ferns are air plants. As mentioned, Spanish moss is also an epiphyte. However, unlike most air plants, Spanish moss does not have aerial roots, but scaly stems that wrap around and hang from trees. Spanish moss has the inaccurate reputation of being harmful to trees. It does use trees for support but is not parasitic.

Lichens are a mutually beneficial epiphytic combination of fungi and algae/bacteria. They can be found in an array of colors, including pink, orange and gray. They may be present on trees, shrubs, or even rocks. Lichens are sometimes blamed for the decline of trees, but that is not the case. The presence of much lichen or Spanish moss may be an indication of shrub or tree deterioration, but they are not the cause.

For more information search AskIFAS.
There are many reasons we use landscape plants for screening. I found myself looking for screening solutions when my neighbors erected ugly plastic fencing and I wanted to soften the view with some greenery. Luckily, one of the biggest hurdles most people have – finding landscaping solutions that will fill in a space quickly – is often easily solved with Florida’s choice of plants, climate, and long growing season.

First, identify your primary reason for screening – are you looking for visual height, a sound buffer, restricting physical access, hiding ugly features, or a wind break? Do you prefer flowers and scents or a specific color palette? Do you want to frame a patio or seating area for privacy? Or create smaller areas within a landscape instead of having one big plot of land?

When selecting screening plants, consider:

- **Style** – What is your gardening style? Screening plants that are easily pruned can be used to achieve a classic hedge look. Flowering hedges add color and softened texture to the landscape. Coastal styles call for more beachy and lighter looks.
- **Maintenance** – Usually we want fast growing plants that will establish a screen quickly. But this may also mean more time spent to maintain desired shapes and sizes, at least until establishment.
- **Florida-friendly** – Avoid any plant classified as invasive by the University of Florida Assessment of Non-native Plants. (See https://assessment.ifas.ufl.edu/)
- **Dimensions** – Check the height and spread limits to be sure it is compatible with your long-term goal.

Here are some favorite palm and palm-like screening solutions:

**BAMBOO**

Bamboo is an extremely fast-growing plant. But choose a slow-spreading, clumping bamboo that has a tight growing habit. For best growth, bamboo requires full exposure to sun and regular water. *Bambusa multiplex* ‘Alphonso Karr’ is an attractive choice featuring yellow stalks with bright green streaks. It grows 20 to 35 feet tall and 10 feet wide.

**CLUMPING PALMS**

The most popular palm for privacy screens and landscape backdrops might be the **areca palm** (*Dypsis lutescens*). Although it can reach a height of 40 feet and 15-foot diameter, new fronds sprout very close to the ground which offers more screening.

The **fishtail palm** (*Caryota mitis*) is a great alternative to bamboo. The ruffled fronds can reach 20-25 feet tall. When planting them in a row for privacy, plant 5 to 6 feet apart so they fill in faster.

The **paurotis palm** (*Acoelorrhaphe wrightii*) is a Florida native and can grow to 20-30 feet with a 15-foot canopy spread.

**Part 2: Ornamentals** coming to The Bench next month!
Wonderful Weavers
By Jennifer Tonge-Martin, Master Gardener Volunteer

Pity poor Arachne! According to Greek legend, she was more skilled at weaving (and more beautiful than) a goddess, so she was cursed to become an ugly, scary eight-legged creature, forced to weave webs for her very survival. Can this myth make us more sympathetic to spiders? Their webs can be an annoyance, but garden spiders are very beneficial for our yards, gobbling up thousands of insect pests in a lifetime.

We’re more likely to encounter arachnids now, as warm weather brings both prey and predator out together. Those beautifully symmetrical orb webs are made by three common spiders. The first, and smallest, is no more than ½ inch long, oval and dotted with spiny growths: the spiny orb weaver, Gasteracantha cancriformis. Their colorful form resembles a miniature crab (although the common name “crab spider” refers to a different species.) The females often string their webs on our foundation plantings and the walls of our homes, so don't be surprised if you literally run into one. They are after flying pests attracted to the light from our windows and porches; they may bite a person defensively, but it is not harmful. See: https://entnemdept.ufl.edu/creatures/beneficial/g_cancriformis.htm

The yellow garden spider, Argiope aurantia, makes an orb web with patches of “zig zag” patterns in them. They often rest on a central zig zag patch, so are nicknamed the “zipper spider”. Usually dark green or brown with yellow spots or stripes, the female can get up to three inches long. The webs of young spiders are not as “pretty” as mature spiders’ webs. It seems they must learn their craft, including where as well as how to weave. Leave them in peace so they can grow up to become the artists of the garden! See: https://entnemdept.ufl.edu/creatures/MISC/SPIDERS/yellow-garden-spider.html

The most dramatic of the orb weavers is the golden silk spider, Trichonephila clavipes. The female is up to 4 inches long with its legs paired up and stretched out in a characteristic X pattern on the center of its dramatic web. Her long body is usually yellow, and we refer to her as the “banana spider”. They prefer larger prey and tend to be up in the tops of trees. They are often found in orange groves. Their silk really is golden yellow, and the silk from their larger cousins in Indonesia can be woven into the most expensive silk in the world. See: https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/IN467

Because of their size, both mature female “zipper” and “banana” spiders can inflict a painful bite (so please let them be) but their venom is not dangerous to humans. Wouldn’t you bite if someone destroyed your great work of art and then tried to crush you?

There is not much to say about the male counterparts of these three great weavers. The males usually climb onto a female’s web, steal her food, mate, and then get eaten; I don’t know what the ancient Greeks would have said about that!
JUNE CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thursday 6/1/23</td>
<td>10:30AM</td>
<td><strong>Landscaping for Hurricane Season</strong> As we approach hurricane season, we can take steps to prepare our landscapes for challenges related to flooding, high winds, sudden temperature changes and the slow appearance of stress damage over time. We will discuss lawn and landscape considerations as well as tree and palm pruning. <a href="https://www.eventbrite.com/e/community-tree-care-tickets-608556919127">https://www.eventbrite.com/e/community-tree-care-tickets-608556919127</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday 6/23/23</td>
<td>10:00AM</td>
<td><strong>Composting with Worms</strong> Now you can compost even if you live in an apartment, condo or mobile home! Worm bins are easily maintained indoors with no mess or smell. Workshop is $5 but after the class you’ll have an opportunity to purchase a worm composter for the special discount rate of $69.00 plus tax. (Cash or check only.) <a href="https://www.eventbrite.com/e/all-about-trees-tickets-608646848107">https://www.eventbrite.com/e/all-about-trees-tickets-608646848107</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday 6/28/23</td>
<td>10:00AM</td>
<td><strong>Snakes of Southwest Florida</strong> Want to find out more about these interesting and often misunderstood reptiles? You’ll learn which ones you’re most likely to see in your SW Florida yard and how to distinguish between venomous and non-venomous snakes. <a href="https://www.eventbrite.com/e/orchid-mounting-make-and-take-workshop-tickets-608684601027">https://www.eventbrite.com/e/orchid-mounting-make-and-take-workshop-tickets-608684601027</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday 6/29/23</td>
<td>8:30AM</td>
<td><strong>Mushroom Hike - Rye Preserve</strong> Join UF/IFAS for an engaging walk into the fantastic world of fungi on a tour through one of our local natural areas. These walks will focus on practicing skills needed for identification of local mushroom species as well as on the broader ecology associated. Be prepared to walk a long distance. Appropriate footwear, hat, sunscreen etc. are required. <a href="https://www.eventbrite.com/e/gardening-with-mushrooms-tickets-519089038287">https://www.eventbrite.com/e/gardening-with-mushrooms-tickets-519089038287</a></td>
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University of Florida IFAS Extension - Manatee County
1303 17th St. W., Palmetto, FL 34221
Telephone: (941) 722-4524
Website: [http://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/manatee/](http://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/manatee/)
Email: ManateeMG@gmail.com

### Master Gardener Volunteer Plant Clinics

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Day(s)</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bob Gardner Park</td>
<td>2710 White Eagle Blvd., Lakewood Ranch</td>
<td>Third Sundays</td>
<td>9AM - 12PM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crowder Bros. Ace</td>
<td>5409 Manatee Ave W., Bradenton</td>
<td>Third Saturdays 9AM - 12PM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hardware</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Central Library</td>
<td>1301 1st St. W., Bradenton</td>
<td>Third Saturdays 11:30AM - 2:30PM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lakewood Ranch Farmers Market</td>
<td>Watertise Place, 7500 Island Cove Terrace, Sarasota</td>
<td>First Sundays</td>
<td>10AM - 2PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rocky Bluff Library</td>
<td>6750 US Hwy 301 N., Ellenton</td>
<td>Second &amp; Fourth Saturdays</td>
<td>10AM - 1PM</td>
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<tr>
<td>St. George's Episcopal Church</td>
<td>912 63rd Ave. W., Bradenton</td>
<td>First and Third Thursdays</td>
<td>9AM - 12PM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Island Branch Library</td>
<td>5701 Marina Dr, Holmes Beach</td>
<td>First Saturdays</td>
<td>10AM - 1PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UF/IFAS Extension</td>
<td>1303 17th St. W., Palmetto</td>
<td>Every weekday except Wednesdays</td>
<td>9AM - 4PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manatee County</td>
<td>Tel. 941-722-4524 <a href="mailto:manateemg@gmail.com">manateemg@gmail.com</a></td>
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