

Guide to planting an African American/African Focused Yard in Miami-Dade



John McLaughlin PhD

Miami-Dade Extension Office

- *Acknowledgments:*
- Dr Bob Knight (University of Florida)
- Dr Carlos Balerdi, Dr Jo Garofalo, Teresa Olczyk (Miami-Dade County Extension Office)
- Dr Dorothy Fields (Black Archives of Miami-Dade)
- African American Yards in the Rural South by Richard Westmacott

Aim and Scope

It is not possible to exactly recreate a slave garden or even a rural African American yard post emancipation for the following reasons:

- *Insufficient written or recovered evidence as to garden design and crops grown.*
- *Availability of heirloom cultivars/varieties.*
- *Plus in Miami-Dade local conditions – climate and soil*

Historical Record

- Slave garden reconstructions based on projections from uncovered remains and written accounts of what vegetables were in *general* cultivation
- Post emancipation somewhat more information: that passed down by word of mouth and from government sources (e.g. Work Projects Administration).

Slave Garden Plots

American South

- Planted with consent of owner (bonding).
- Crops supplemented diet or sold.
- Work day over when assigned tasks completed.
- Temperate climate row crops

Caribbean

- Plots usually hidden
- Crops usually consumed
- Worked from sun up to sunset.
- Crops and growing practices showed strong African influences

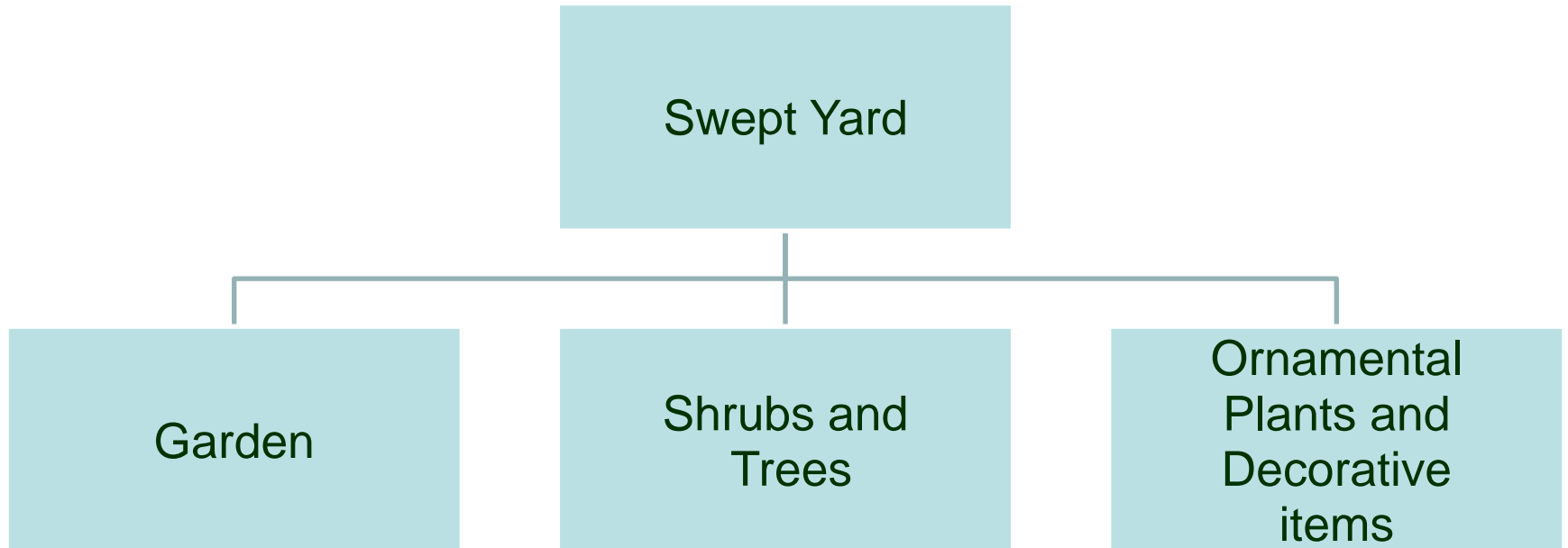
Miami Dade Factors

- No history of plantation agriculture in Miami-Dade.
- Cotton and tobacco plantations developed in region with a temperate climate compared to local subtropical climate.
- Local soil porous, poor in organic matter and calcareous (high pH).
- Local growing season is winter (dry season – need for irrigation).

Adapting to Miami-Dade Conditions

- Rather than aiming for an exact historic reconstruction of a slave garden take advantage of Miami conditions:
 - Take those elements from traditional rural African American Yard that can be adapted to local conditions **plus**
 - Take advantage of sub-tropical climate to incorporate plants, both crops and ornamentals from Africa.

Features of a Rural African American Yard



Swept Yard

- Common in tropical countries with distinct wet/dry seasons.
- Turf grass a feature of northern latitudes.
- All vegetation and loose dirt removed - area kept smooth “ironed” – i.e. regularly swept with homemade broom.
- Area used as outdoor work/leisure area.

The Garden

- An area of the yard specifically set aside for growing vegetables.
- The term garden as understood in many other parts of the country would also include the growing of ornamental plants.
- Crops planted in straight rows – no raised beds or intensive system.

Shrubs, Trees and Shade

- Trees provided shade (e.g., oaks, sweet gums and pecans) for outdoor activities. Quick growing trees such as chinaberry.
- Might be a few fruit trees – peach, plum, edible fig and mulberry.
- Single shrubs scattered within swept yard – rarely grown in groups or as a hedge. Flowering shrubs such as roses, azaleas, hydrangeas and forsythia rather than evergreens.

Ornamental Plants and Decorative Items

- Use of ornamental plants increased slowly after emancipation as yard became less utilitarian.
- Mainly annuals with vibrant colors placed at the front of the yard
- Improvised planters often used: feed troughs, tires, wheelbarrows.
- Fieldstone used as edging for flower beds and colored glass bottles hung in trees or used to edge path.

Projected Layout of Slave Yard (After Westmacott)

□ Living quarters – to right is the garden plot.

- Rain barrel

T - work table

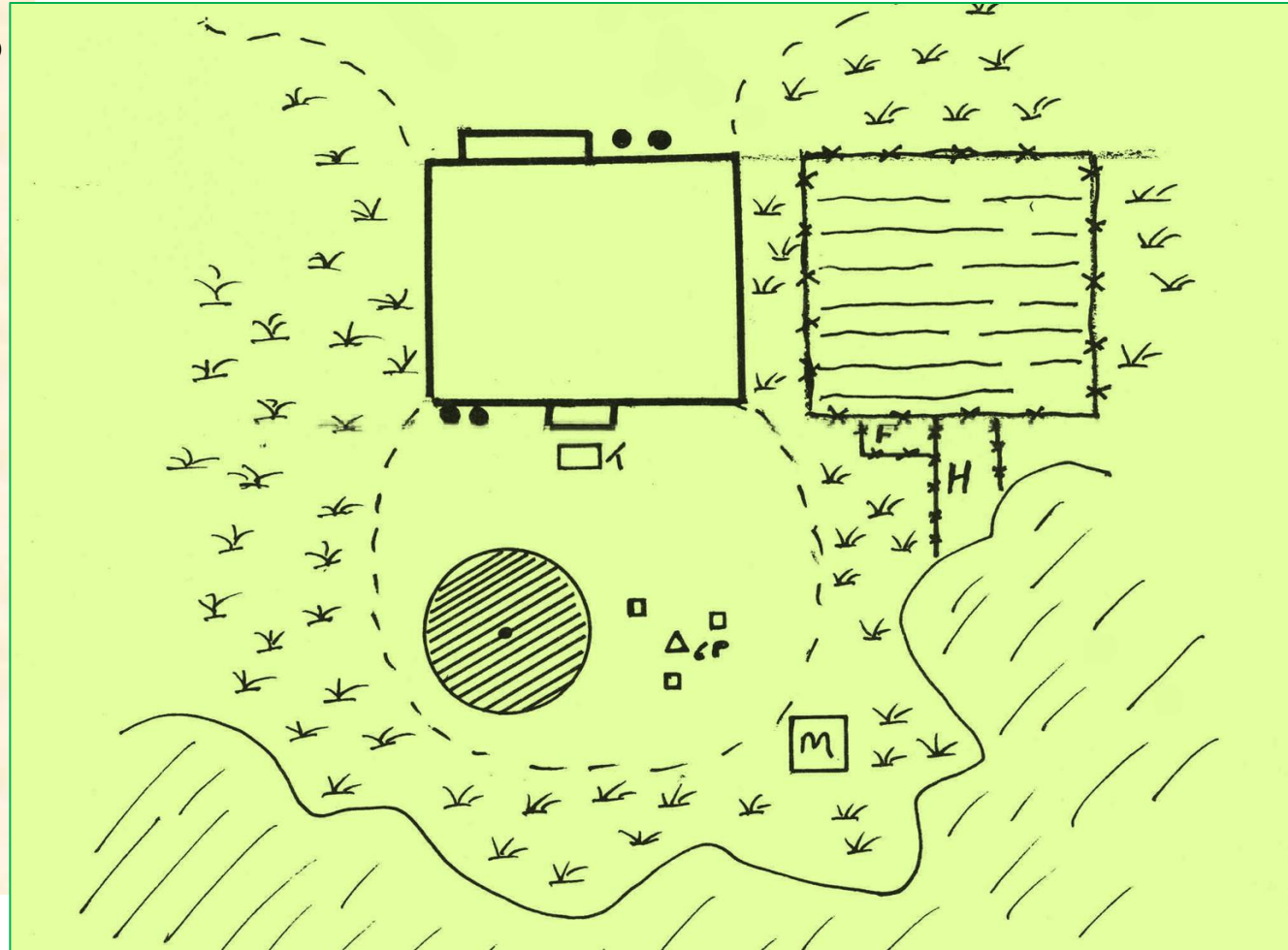
F - chicken coop

H - hog pen

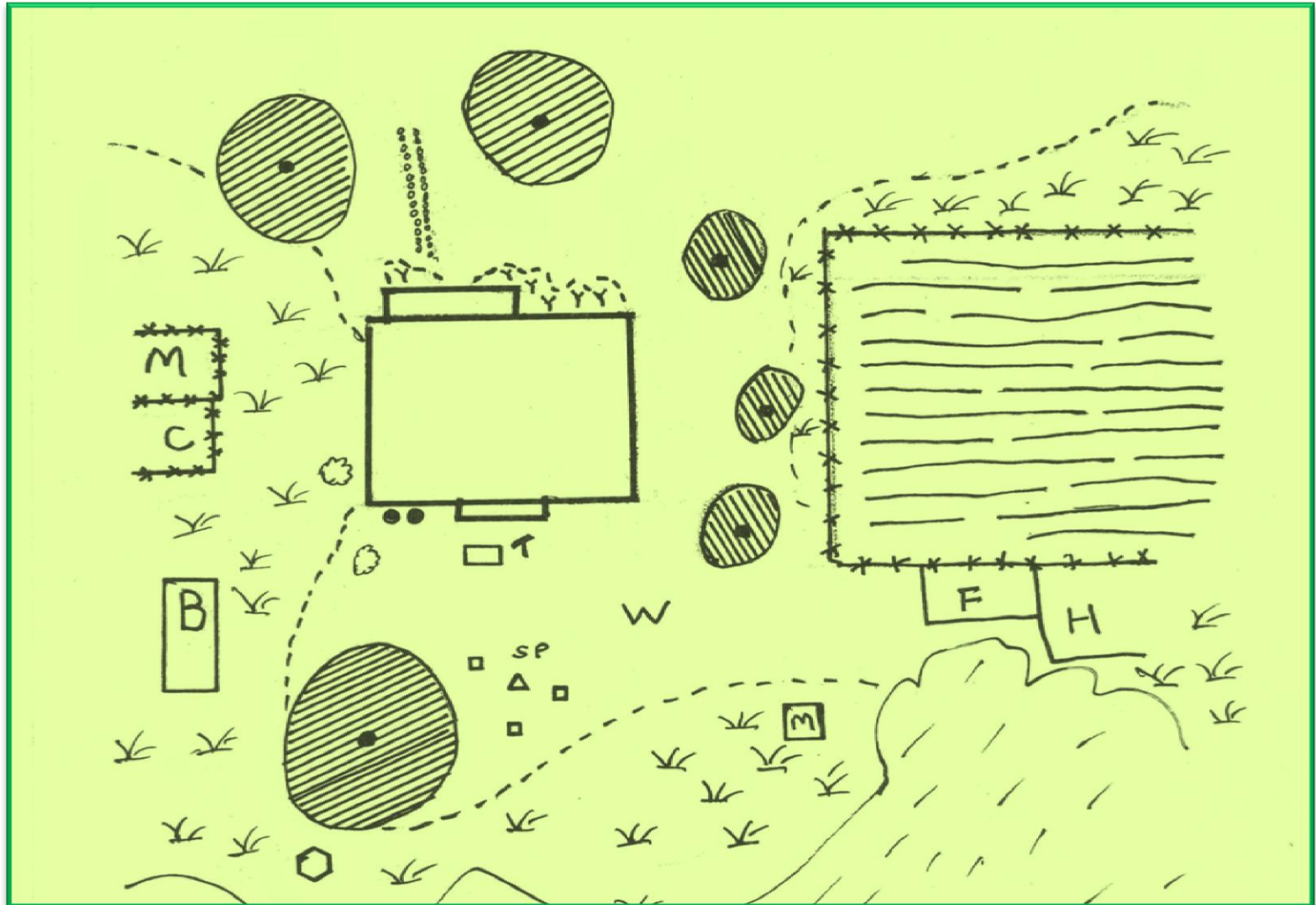
M – refuse heap

---- limit of swept yard

which contains shade tree (large hatched circle) and to right cooking pot and improvised seating.



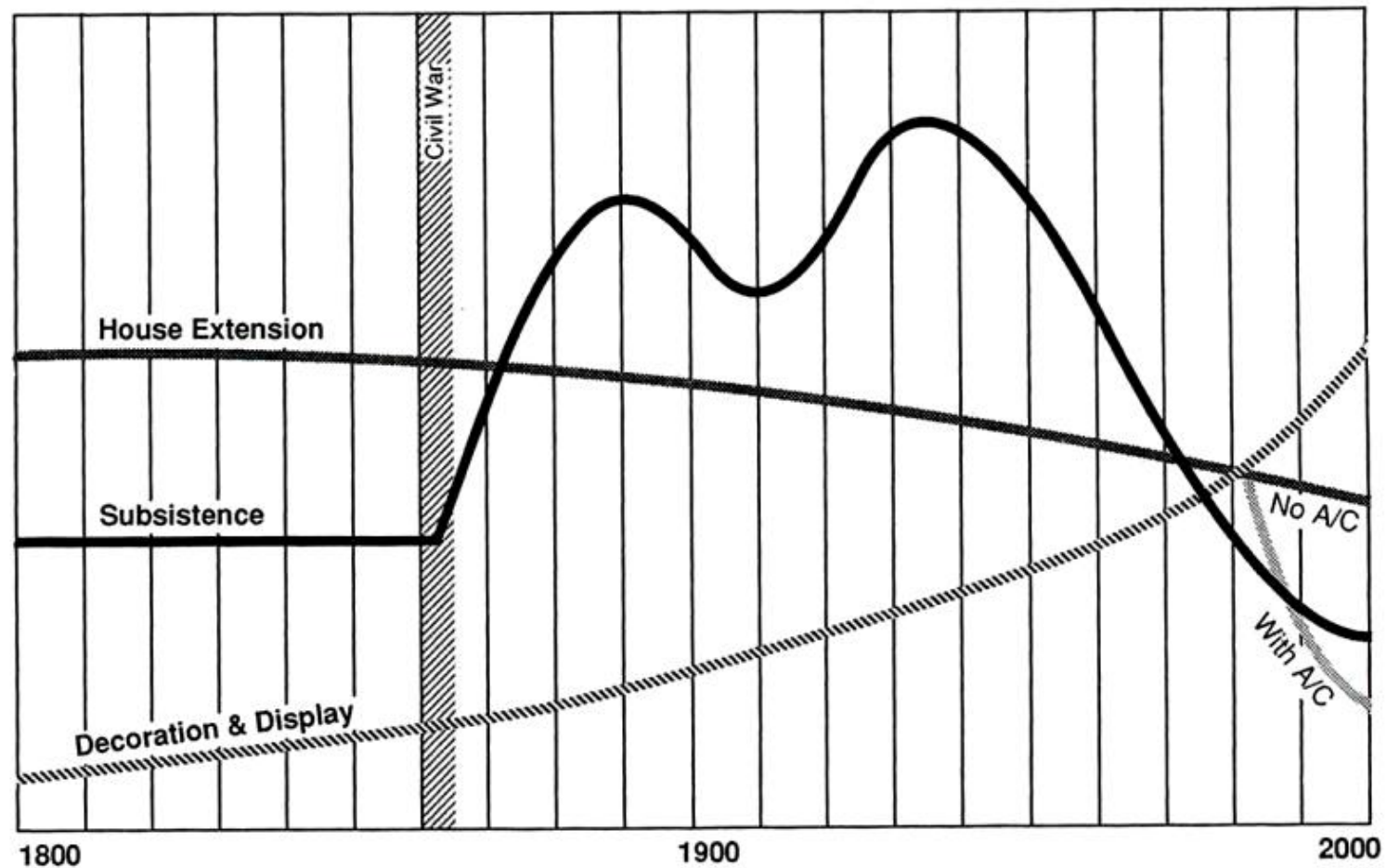
Rural African American Yard - post emancipation (after Westmacott) see next slide for legend



Yard Lay-out Post Emancipation (renter)

- Compare layout with slave's yard - legend the same with following additions:
- At left M, C and B – mule, cow and barn
- Note larger vegetable garden and more shade trees plus a few fruit trees (latter smaller shaded circles).
- W – well
- In addition a smokehouse, privy, additional small sheds plus shrubs at front of cabin and path with improvised edging up to front door.

Changes over time in Three Functions of the Rural African American Yard



What vegetable crops to plant in a Miami-Dade Garden?

Westmacott's survey of African American Yards in the South found the following to be absent:

- *broccoli, cauliflower, lettuce, parsnips, pumpkins and spinach.*

The following found vegetables were found but are unsuited to Miami-Dade:

- *globe artichoke, Jerusalem artichoke, asparagus, peanuts, English peas, (sweet corn?).*

Reasons not to grow the following vegetables in Miami-Dade

- Globe artichoke (edible flower bud) – poorly adapted to S. Florida summers.
- Jerusalem artichoke (tuber of *Helianthus tuberosus*) - requires cooler, drier climate.
- Asparagus – requires cooler climate to develop plump spears.
- English peas – become increasingly unreliable as winter temperatures increase above 70°F.
- Peanuts – pods require dry weather to mature (ripen in S. Florida rainy season)
- Sweet Corn – can be grown, but many pests.

What vegetable crops to plant?

- From Dr Larry Rivers study of slavery in Florida:
 - black-eye peas, collards, okra, Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, squash, turnips and watermelons.
- Westmacott's survey of African American yards in the rural South:
 - butter/lima beans, snap/string beans, black-eye peas, cabbage, collards, turnip greens, bell peppers, tomatoes, egg plant, cantaloupe, cucumber squash, Irish and sweet potatoes, onion, okra, (water melon) and (sweet corn).

Choose from the following.....

- Each vegetable crop described in the succeeding slides has been rated as to ease of cultivation:
 - * relatively easy
 - ** moderately easy
 - *** can be difficult due to pests, climate or cultural requirements.

Beans (*Phaseolus* spp. Central/South America)

- ****Butter/Lima (seeds):**

- Plant, Sept – April
Harvest 65 - 75 days
(120 dried beans)

Bush – Henderson, Fordhook

Pole – Florida Butter, Sieva

- ***Snap/String (seeds):**

- Plant (as above)
- Harvest 50-60 days

Bush – Opus, Leon, Mirada

Pole – McCaslan 242, Kentucky
Wonder 191

Rows 2-4'/plants 2-6"



*Southern Peas (*Vigna unguiculata* – India.S Africa)*

- Drought tolerant and useful as cover crop.
- Bush and vining types
- Sow seed directly
- Plant: Aug – April
- Space: seed 3"/rows 3' (thin to 18")
- Harvest: 2-3 mos.
- Varieties: California No.5
Black-eye, Purple Hull,
Zipper Cream.



*Collards (*Brassica oleracea* var. *acephala* – coastal W. Europe)*

- An open headed cabbage that requires cool weather for best quality
- Seed, transplants best
- Plant: Nov – Feb
- Space: plants 15"/rows 2'
- Harvest : 40-60 days
- Varieties : Georgia, Vates, Hicrop, Blue max



**Cabbage (*Brassica oleracea* var. *capitata* – N. Europe)

- Referred to as hard heading cabbages – usually fail to develop tight head due to lack of sufficiently cool weather
- Seed/transplants
- Plant: Nov – Feb
- Space: plants 18"/rows 3'
- Harvest: 70 – 90 days
- Varieties: Gourmet, King Cole, Market Prize, Savoy Chieftan



*Turnip greens (*Brassica rapa* subsp. *Rapifera*)

- Choose varieties grown for greens. Like all greens watch for insect leaf damage. Sow seeds then thin if harvesting roots.
- Plant: Oct – Feb.
(Mustard Greens more heat tolerant)
- Space: Seed 4"/Rows 18"
- Harvest: 40 days (tops)
- Varieties: All Top (tops),
Just Rite, Purple Top
White Globe (tops/roots)



*Tomato (*Lycopersicon esculentum* – Ecuador/Peru)

- Determinate (bush) fruit all matures at same time. Indeterminate (vining) fruits throughout season.
- Plant: Oct – March; seed but transplants easier
- Space: plants 18" rows 3'
- Harvest: 75 – 90 days.
- Varieties: Arkansas Traveler, Better Boy etc.- cherry types can be grown thru summer.



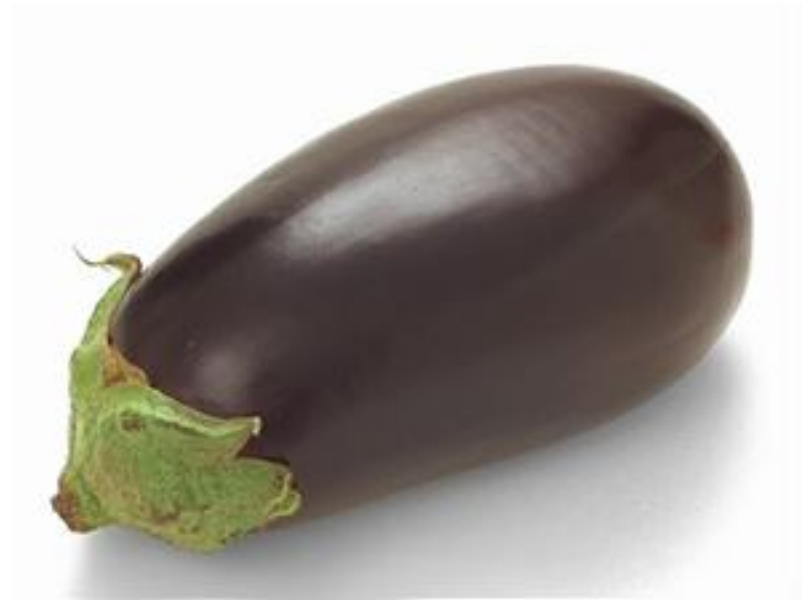
**Pepper (*Capsicum annuum* -Tropical America)

- More tolerant of heat than tomato – weevils a problem in summer.
- Seed available - easier to use transplants.
- Plant: Oct – March
- Space: 18"plants/rows 3'
- Harvest: 60 – 80 days
- Varieties: Yolo Wonder, Big Bertha, "bird" peppers



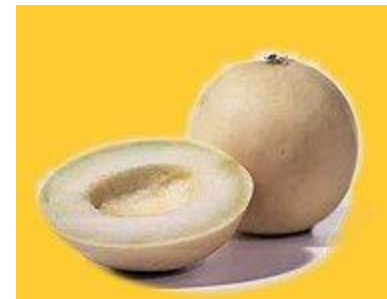
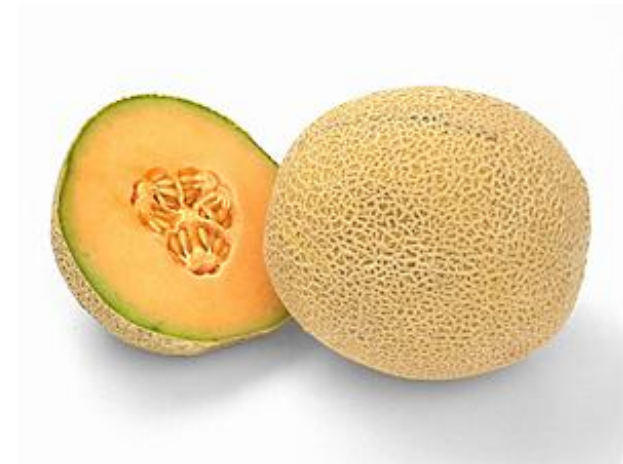
**Egg Plant (*Solanum melongena* – Sri Lanka)

- Can be grown into summer - increase in bitterness. Plants need to be staked. Watch for mites, melon thrips and root/basal stem diseases
- Seed, transplants easier
- Plant: Oct – March
- Space: plants 2'/rows 3'
- Harvest: 2½ - 3 mos.
- Varieties: Black Beauty, Megal



***Cantaloupe (*Cucumis melo* – Africa)

- A misnomer (actually a musk melon). Requires warm dry weather but moist soil and is prone to insect pests and disease.
- Seed/transplants
- Plant: mid Dec – March
- Space: plants 2½'/rows 5'
- Harvest: 2-3 mos.
- Varieties: Smith's Perfect
Edisto 47, (Tam Dew)



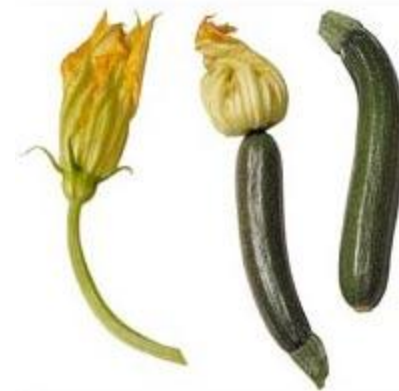
****Cucumber (*Cucumis sativus* NE India- W. China)**

- **Picklers and slicers (salads).**
Watch for pickle worms and mildews. If no bees use parthenocarpic varieties to avoid hand pollination.
- **Seeds or transplants**
- **Plant: Oct thru Feb**
- **Space: plants 18'/rows 4'**
- **Harvest: 40-50 days**
- **Vars: *Slicers* Dasher II,
General Lee, Sweet Success
Picklers Eureka,
Transamerica.**



**Squash (*Cucurbita pepo* – Central America)

- Locally mostly summer squash (usually a bush). Bees or hand pollination. Pickle worms/mildews.
- Seed, transplants easier
- Plant: Sept – Feb
- Space: plants 2'/rows 3'
- Harvest: 1½ mos.
- Varieties: Medallion, Dixie (CM); Goldbar, Lemon Drop (SM)



Onions (*Alium cepa* – Pakistan/W. Iran)

- Bulb, bunching and multipliers. For Florida use only early (short day) types and seeds not sets.
- Plant: Oct-Nov (bulbing)
Oct-Feb (bunching – scallions). Space: 4"
Harvest: 4-5 mos. (bulb),
50-75 days (bunch).
- Varieties: Excel, Granex
White (bulb)/Evergreen,
White Portugal (bunch)



*Okra (*Abelmoschus esculentus* – old world tropics i.e. Ethiopia – W. Africa)

- A summer annual grown for immature fruit (seed capsules). Yields lower if fruit allowed to mature. A magnet for root knot nematodes
- Soak seeds, select those that swell
- Plant: late Feb – Sept.
- Space: plants 8"/rows 2'
- Harvest: 50-75 days
- Varieties: Clemson Spineless, Emerald



***Sweet corn (*Zea mays* – N. America)

- Requires moist rich soil
- Many pest problems in Miami-Dade – silk fly, armyworms
- Plant: Sept – March
- Space: plants 12"/rows 2'
- Harvest: 60 – 95 days
- Varieties: only Florida recommended – Silver Queen, Bonanza, Florida Staysweet



Irish potatoes (*Solanum tuberosum*)***

- Require sufficient depth of soil. Pests: wireworms melon thrips and blight
- Grow from seed potatoes
- Plant: Nov – Jan
- Space: plants 12"/rows 4'
- Harvest: 3-4 mos.
- Varieties: use only those suited to Florida La Rouge (red) La Chipper, Sebago (white)



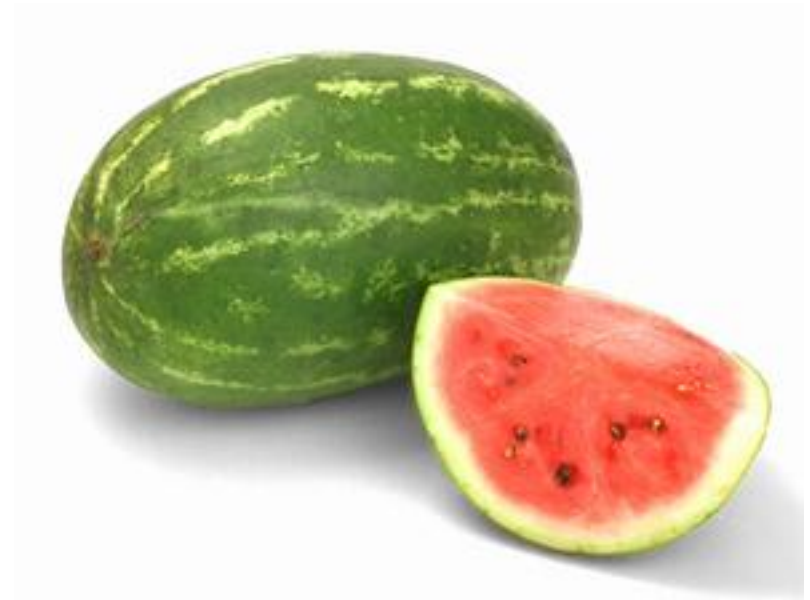
**Sweet Potatoes (*Ipomoea batatas* – Central to S. America)

- Tuberous roots of plant in morning glory family that grows year round. Weevils a problem.
- Transplants: 6- 8" slips;
- Plant: Feb – July
- Varieties: Georgia Red, Coastal Sweet – *Boniato*, Cuban sweet potato has white interior.
- Harvest: 3-4 mos.



Watermelon (*Citrullus lanatus* – S. Central Africa)***

- Plant early (Jan – March) to avoid rainy season.
- May need to hand pollinate.
- Difficult to grow in Miami (disease problems).
- For home garden choose small varieties: Minilee, Mickylee, Sugar Baby.
- Space: seeds 2'/rows 4'
- Harvest: 80-90 days



Vegetable crop salt tolerance if saline soils or well water a problem

Low	Moderate	High
<i>Beans</i> <i>Cucumber</i>	<i>Potatoes</i> <i>Squash</i> <i>Corn</i>	<i>Peppers</i> <i>Tomatoes</i> <i>Corn</i> <i>Collards</i>

Summary of Vegetable Growing Seasons (Miami-Dade)

Cool (Nov – Feb)	Warm Oct - March	Summer Feb – July
Cabbage	Beans	Sweet potatoes
Collards	[Cantaloupe]	Cherry tomatoes
Turnip Greens	Sweet corn	Southern peas
Irish Potatoes	Eggplant	Okra
Onions (bulb)	Tomatoes	Tropical root crops
	Peppers	Tropical greens
	Squash (Summer)	
	[Cucumber]	

Related African Vegetables – seeds may be available from on-line sources

- *Tylosema esculentum*
Marama Bean, seeds/tubers
- *Sphenostylis stenocarpa*
African Yam Bean,
seeds/tubers (W. Africa)
- *Cajanus cajan* Pigeon
pea/Congo pea
- *Cucumis anguira* West
Indian Gherkin
- *Cucumis metuliferus*,
African Horned
Cucumber southern Africa
- *Brassica carinata* Ethiopian
cabbage
- *Solanum macrocarpon*
Gboma eggplant leaves, fruit
(caution) W. Africa
- *Telfairia pedata* Oyster nut,
and *T. occidentalis*, fluted
pumpkin: cucurbits grown
for seeds (lianas from E. and
W. Africa respectively).
- *Trichosanthes cucumerina*
Snake tomato (cucurbit) red
pulp used like tomato

Pigeon peas



Krobonko (Fluted pumpkin)



African Vegetables

- **African Yam Bean**



- **Gboma eggplant**



- **Egyptian bean**



- **African horned cucumber**



African Vegetables

- Snake Tomato



Ethiopian Cabbage



Starchy Root Crops – W. Africa:

Tannia

Tannia (*Xanthosoma* spp – malanga) Aroid grown for edible (cooked) tubers. Needs a moist not wet soil of sufficient depth. Plant whole tuber or pieces in March and harvest after 9-10 mos. Taken to Africa from S. America during slave trade – Nigeria and Ghana world leaders.



Starchy Root Crops – W. Africa

Yams

Yams (*Dioscorea rotunda* – a vine) Africa grows 95% of world production. Not to be confused with sweet potatoes (candied-yams). Do not plant or eat wild yams (air potatoes). Plant in late Feb using pieces of tuber. Trellis, harvest after 10 -12 months.



Starchy root crops – W. Africa

Cassava

Cassava

(*Manihot esculenta* – yucca) is a shrubby perennial in the spurge family. Roots and leaves must be cooked before eating. For propagation use 10" stem pieces cut just below node. Plant in late Feb and harvest after ≈10 mo. Brought during slave trade from Brazil



Leafy vegetables – W. Africa (used as pot herbs and in stews)

Krin-krin, *Corchorus olitorius*
West African sorrel also a source of jute.

Shokotoh-yokotoh, *Celosia argentea* and ajewo *C. leptostachya* nutty flavored.

Bologi, *Crassocephalum bialae* is a climbing plant in the daisy family – needs moist soil and part shade

Broad Bologi, *Basella alba* - Malabar spinach in US.
Lagos bologi, *Talinum triangulare* leaves succulent related to purslane. Efon-yori, *Emilia* spp, daisy family (tassel flower). Young leaves of two tropical lianas (*Gnetum* sp. eru). Leaves of bean plants, horseradish tree (*Moringa oleifera*) and Patmenji, sweet basil.

Hibiscus sabdariffa (Roselle) and *Hibiscus acetosella* (False Roselle)

False Roselle: woody perennial
the tart leaves/young shoots
consumed. Self-seeds.

Roselle: leaves edible; fleshy
calyx (taste like cranberries)
of more interest.

Short day plants – use either
seeds/cuttings in mid-May.
Remove young leaves as
needed and ‘fruit’ when
plump but not woody.
Unlike related okra, false
roselle is not susceptible to
nematode damage.



Fruit Crops: Suitability for Miami-Dade

Rural African American

Peach, Pear, Plum, Apple, Pecan and Walnut are **not successful** in Miami.

More success possible with Grapes – bunch use Florida cvs - muscadine, Strawberries (winter annual), Persimmons and Sugar cane. Locally at least jujube (zizables – *Zizyphus mauritiana*).

W. Africa

Banana and plantain, mango pineapples, papayas, avocado, breadfruit, soursop, carambola, cashew apple, coconut.

Trees endemic: Tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*) and akee (*Blighia sapida*).

Others: Jumbling (*Phyllanthus acidus*, Imbe *Garcinia livingstonei*, Natal Plum *Carissa macrocarpa*

Ornamental plants in a rural African American Yard: Annuals

- Range of bold, vibrantly colored annuals used - often grown in improvised planters. Traditionally placed at the front of the house as a welcoming statement.
- This was in accord with the front yard as a place for informal socializing with friends, neighbors and passersby. Contrast with modern practice where leisure and entertaining are at the rear of the house secluded behind a fence or hedge.

Annuals/Bedding Plants: Planting and Removal Times

PetuniasNov – Feb
Remove: May

Sultanas.....Oct – Feb
Remove: summer, shade

Sunflowers.....Nov – Feb
Remove: May

Pelargoniums... Nov – Feb
Remove: June

Pinks.....Nov – Feb
Remove: June

Marigolds.....Feb-Dec
Remove: after 3-4 mos.

Wax Begonia.....Oct-March
Remove: Aug+

Catharanthus.....Nov- May
Remove: when diseased

Zinnia.....Feb - April
Remove: when diseased

Moss Rose.....March-Aug
Remove: After Flowering

Salvia.....Feb-Nov
Remove: when diseased

Coleus.....March-Sept
Remove: if deteriorated

Ornamental Plants in a rural African American Yard: Heirloom roses

Vincent Godsiff 'Bermuda Rose' (putative China)

Roses typified the use of cuttings to pass on plants to friends and neighbors and continued long after the introduction of hybrid tea roses as these were both grafted and expensive.



THE END....

but for further information use the following
link to the Miami-Dade County Extension

Office publications page: http://miami-dade.ifas.ufl.edu/pdfs/urban_hort/Planning%20anAfrican%20American%20Focused%20Garden.pdf