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SOLUTIONS

UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County

St. Johns Lawn and Garden Gazette

Winter 2024, Issue 29

In this Issue

Veggie Garden

Bulbing onions, lettuce, arugula, spinach and more thrive this time of year. For a complete list, download the North FL Gardening Calendar: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/EP/EP45100.pdf or The Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/vh021

Florida Arbor Day Tree Giveaway

Celebrate Florida Arbor Day with UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County Master Gardener Volunteers as we distribute trees at Bartram Library, Hastings Library, Anastasia Island Library, Publix at Nocatee, and St. Johns County Extension.

Friday, January 19, 2024

10:00 am to Noon

Free Bareroot Native Trees/Shrubs:

Southern Red Cedar, River Birch, Buttonbush, Fringe Tree, Dahoun Holly, and Cherry Laurel

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FLORIDA MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER

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For more information contact: UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County
Terra Freeman ▪ terraf@ufl.edu ▪ (904)209-0430 ▪ FAX (904)209-0431

Upcoming Programs

Your Florida-Friendly Landscape

Unlock the secrets of a thriving and sustainable landscape in Northeast Florida! Join us for an enlightening program where we delve into the 9 principles of Florida-Friendly Landscaping, tailored specifically for Northeast Florida's unique climate and conditions. Whether you are a seasoned gardener or a newbie, this program offers valuable insight to help you create and maintain a thriving landscape.

Date: Friday, Feb. 9, 2024

Time: 10 am to 11:30 am

Location: St. Johns County Extension Auditorium

Preregistration on Eventbrite: $12.51 (includes Eventbrite fees)

Eventbrite registration link:

https://www.eventbrite.com/e/772391643197?aff=oddtdtcreator

Upcoming Programs:

Master Gardener Volunteer Training

About the Master Gardener Volunteer Program:

The Florida Master Gardener Volunteer Program is a volunteer-driven program that benefits UF/IFAS Extension and the citizens of Florida. The program relies on dedicated volunteers who have an interest in gardening and in giving back to their communities. In return for training, Master Gardener Volunteers serve 75 volunteer hours assisting extension agents in providing research-based horticulture education to Florida residents. Master Gardener Volunteers can renew their certification by participating in 10 learning hours and completing 35 volunteer hours each year. They must also adhere to the Master Gardener Volunteer policies.

For more information on the MGV program, please visit this site:

https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/mastergardener/about/

For more information or to apply for the 2024 Master Gardener Volunteer training program at UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County (St. Johns County residents only), please **send an e-mail to S.tomlinson1@ufl.edu.** Application deadline is Jan. 31, 2024

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FLORIDA MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER

USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map Change

Terra Freeman, Urban and Commercial Horticulture Agent, UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County

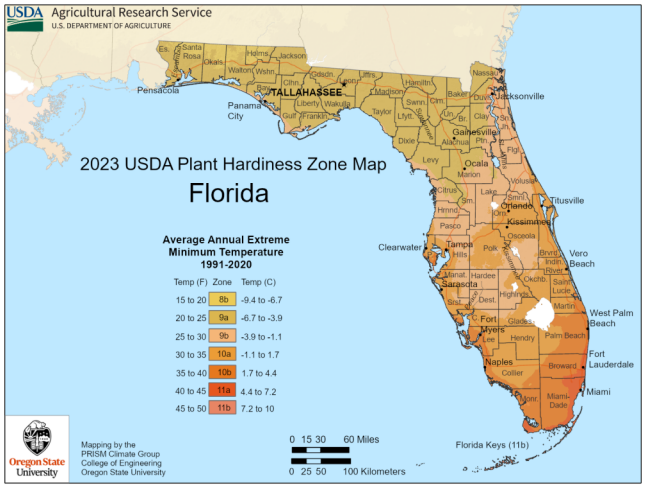
As a Florida-Friendly gardener, you are certainly familiar with the USDA Plant Hardiness Zone map. It is our go-to source for learning which plants are hardy to our area based on the average annual extreme minimum temperature they can withstand. Every plant has a designated USDA Hardiness Zone range for which it will optimally survive, and as Florida-Friendly gardeners, we look to this information to select plants for our landscape that are hardy in the zone in which we live.

The hardiness zone map is updated and released once every decade, and the most recent fell on November 15, 2023. Like many gardeners, I was surprised to learn the hardiness zone for St. Johns County has changed from 9a to 9b. Floridians, however, are not the only ones adjusting to this change; about 50% of the country has shifted to the next warmer half zone.

The USDA Hardiness zone map is divided into 10 -degree Fahrenheit zones which are further divided into 5-degree Fahrenheit half zones. With 13 zones throughout the US, each is split into half zones designated as a or b. For example, St. Johns County used to be zone 9a (which represented an annual minimum temperature extreme of 20-25 degrees Fahrenheit); our new zone is 9b (representing an annual minimum temperature extreme of 25-30 degrees Fahrenheit). The areas that shifted a half zone change warmed in the range of 0-5 degrees Fahrenheit.

So how does this effect our gardening choices? Well, we can now expand our plant palette to include those that may have needed a slightly warmer zone previously, while other plants may now require a slightly cooler zone. We may need to adjust our variety recommendations regarding chill hour dependent plants such as stone fruits, which require a specific number of cold hours each winter in order to flower and produce fruit. Other crops, such as Passion fruit (*Passiflora edula*), are now on the SJC growing menu.

Use this link to access the USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map : https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/



Lasagna Gardening

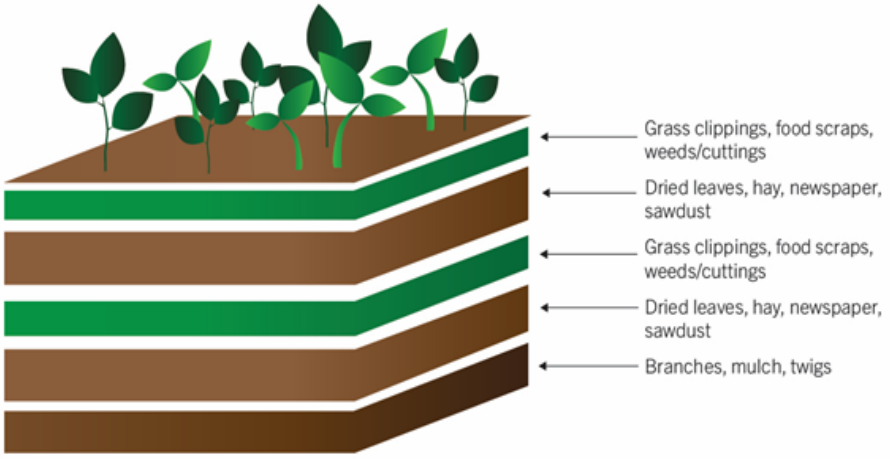
Sarah Tomlinson
Horticulture Program Assistant,
UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County

Cozy up this winter with some lasagna….gardening! Lasagna gardening is a simple, no-dig method of gardening that is a great way to add organic matter back into your soil. This method of gardening can also be referred to as "sheet composting" or "sheet mulching" due to the layering process of the garden bed. In lasagna gardening, thick layers of nitrogen-rich organic matter are stacked between thick layers of carbon-rich organic matter, resulting in a large, mounded garden bed. This method can be done directly onto your lawn or in a raised bed. You can plant right into the mound, or you can prepare the garden bed the season before you would like to plant and allow the layers to naturally decompose. Winter is a great time to prepare the garden bed for spring and summer planting!

Making Lasagna

Before you start layering, mow down the grass and weeds where you want the bed. Next you will need to gather materials for your carbon and nitrogen layers. Some examples of materials for the carbon layer include newspaper, sawdust, straw, and fallen leaves. The nitrogen layer should include materials such as grass clippings, kitchen scraps, compost, or manure. To start the layering process, lay down a few sheets of newspaper and/or cardboard wherever you would like the bed. After watering the newspaper and carboard down, it's time to make lasagna! Alternate the nitrogen and carbon layers until you've reached the desired height and you're done!

The lasagna gardening method has many benefits. The initial layer of newspaper and cardboard is great for blocking and preventing weeds from sprouting up into your garden bed. This is also a great way to add organic matter into Florida' sandy soils without needing to add extra fertilizer. Because of all the organic matter added, the soil will now be loose, healthy, and great for water retention. Maintaining the lasagna garden bed is also very easy, simply add more carbon and nitrogen layers each year and watch your garden grow!



https://171dxwjpaqv2danpq11ixf2j-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/word-image-4.jpeg From Clemson University, 2019.

Gainesville Garden Tours

Lana Bandy,
Master Gardener Volunteer
UF/IFAS Extension SJC

When nature lovers are looking for an interesting travel destination, there's no reason to drive too far. While the Gainesville area might be better known to football fans than to plant lovers, it has a lot to offer in both regards.

This beautiful area, about 90 miles southwest of St. Johns County, features not only the University of Florida, its Butterfly Rainforest and bat houses, but also an amazing botanical garden.
UF's Butterfly Rainforest is a walk-through exhibit inside a 6,400-square-foot screened area at the Florida Museum of Natural History. It is home to more than 700 butterflies from across the world, from 50+ butterfly and moth species. Visitors will also find tropical plants, flowers, and trees as well as waterfalls, turtles, and fish. From the walking path, visitors are able to view the butterflies up close, especially when they feed on the fresh fruit trays. If you're lucky, one might even land on your arm.

Outside the rainforest, visitors will find several museum exhibits about butterflies, including the Wall of Wings. This wall includes thousands of preserved and framed butterflies and moths. The museum is also home to the McGuire Center for Lepidoptera & Biodiversity, the world's largest scientific facility dedicated to butterflies and moths. Visitors can see scientists in action and marvel over the lab's huge collection of more than 10 million specimens.
Before leaving, visitors should check out the museum store, which usually has plants for sale at great prices. For instance, some recent offerings were night-blooming jasmine and apricot lantern mallow plants for just $6.

Not far from the museum, across from Lake Alice, are the UF bat houses. These stilted buildings are home to nearly 500,000 bats. There is interesting signage about the bats, the colony, and their history at UF. While it's good to learn about them during daylight, it's best to visit in the evening, about 20 minutes before sunset. This is when the bats emerge in search of insects for dinner. Thousands of bats pour out of the buildings and fly high in the sky, creating quite an amazing scene.

Beside the bat houses is an interesting garden full of fruits, vegetables, flowers, and trees. Plant lovers will enjoy perusing the many varieties that UF College of Agricultural and Life Sciences students maintain. Student volunteers grow these plants and, in doing so, learn sustainable farming practices. Students share their harvest with Gainesville residents facing food insecurity.

Less than four miles from the UF campus is Kanapaha Botanical Gardens. This 68-acre garden has a paved walkway that goes 1½ miles through its collections. The ponds and water lilies are a highlight, as are the camellias, Florida's largest bamboo display, and the huge herb garden.

After visiting these Gainesville attractions, gardeners will be inspired to try some new varieties at home. Kanapaha and UF both offer plant sales throughout the year, which makes visiting the area several times a year a must-do!

The Mother of Them All...

Pat Ludwig, Jane Palmer, Linda Mundy, and Pam Hutcherson
Master Gardener Volunteers
UF/IFAS Extension SJC

Motherwort, *Leonurus cardiaca,* is a perennial herb belonging to the *Lamiaceae* family. This erect herb is a native of Asia that made its way to Europe and then to North America with the settlers who used it as an herb for medicinal purposes, especially in the preparations of tonics and decoctions for strengthening palpitations of the heart. The tops and leaves of the plant were used.

The plants grow from 18 inches to 5 feet with hollow aerial stalks growing from the rhizomes. The distinctive leaves are lobed and covered with stiff hairs. Flowers, grouped in 10-20 clusters in the leaf's axils, are often pink and about a half inch long. The prime season for growing motherwort is late spring to early summer. It is considered a valuable bee plant with a long blooming period and excellent nectar for honey production.

Motherwort grows best in partial sun with moist rich soil, often preferring a woodland location. It grows from a rhizomatous root system which will spread to form colonies; under the right conditions it will spread and take over your garden. For this reason, gardeners often plant motherwort in containers. While motherwort has been added to the list of invasive plants in Southern Florida, it is not considered invasive in Northern Florida.

Unlike many other species in the *Lamiacae* family, the leaves of the motherwort are bitter and are usually combined with another herb or vegetable for flavoring in recipes. Some cuisines employ it as condiment in various vegetable soup recipes, particularly the lentil or split peas ones, or for flavoring of beer and tea.

This herb has been researched for its potential application in treating several cardiac disorders, as well as female-specific afflictions. This application has made *L. cardiaca* a very good candidate for development of alternative treatments in both traditional eastern and modern medicine. Today, the general public can find tonic of motherwort readily available, a testament to our native Americans and early settlers use of this herb.

Motherwort is not a common herb in the North Florida garden. But if you're looking for a new addition to your herb garden and have a place to contain it in your landscape, you will find it a wonderful addition for pollinators.

References:

National Institute of Health, National Center for Biotechnology Information, Abstract PMC6500680, *Leonurus cardiaca* L. as a Source of Bioactive Compounds April 2019

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Don't Throw Out That Poinsettia!

Patty Plourde
Master Gardener Volunteers
UF/IFAS Extension SJC

Do you throw your poinsettias away after the holidays? If so, you are like countless other people who only enjoy the beautiful display of poinsettias during the holidays and then discard them into the garbage or compost in January. With a bit of knowledge and gentle coaxing your poinsettias can keep growing and even rebloom the following holiday season.

Poinsettias are a perennial shrub native to Mexico. They are most often grown as an annual plant for display during the holidays. In tropical climates, where temperatures typically do not dip below fifty-five degrees, poinsettias can be grown as perennial shrubs. In these climates, they can reach an amazing ten feet in height and three to seven feet wide (IFAS).

While this is valuable information for those living in the tropical climates, Central and North Floridians need to take a different approach to enjoying their poinsettias year after year. The following schedule will lead to a reblooming display of your poinsettias next year:

1. After the holidays, remove the foil wrapping around the pot. This will prevent water from collecting at the bottom. Poinsettias require good drainage.
2. When temperatures begin to dip below fifty-five degrees, bring your poinsettia indoors and place it in front of your sunniest window. It will need to receive six hours of sunlight each day.
3. If you want your poinsettia to grow taller, just provide routine care at this point. Start fertilizing with all-purpose plant fertilizer. Poinsettias dislike drying out completely, but they also need to be a bit dry between waterings.
4. As your poinsettia grows, transfer them into the next largest pot size that is two inches larger in diameter than the previous pot. Let your plant continue growing in its sunny window and continue routine watering and fertilizing.
5. When the outside temperature warms up to fifty-five degrees and above, place your plants outdoors again. It is advisable to acclimatize your plants slowly when moving them outside. As the plants grow, it is important to occasionally pinch back the leaves, so plants become fuller and eventually burst with flower heads.
6. It is important to know that most insects can be controlled with an insecticidal soap product, and diseases can be minimized by keeping the poinsettias foliage dry and not watering it too late in the day (IFAS).
7. In the fall, it is time to bring your plants back indoors before minimum temperatures start to go below fifty-five degrees. You will need to give poinsettias short day lengths by providing fourteen hours of uninterrupted darkness each night. You can do this by moving them to a dark location such as a closet. After fourteen hours of darkness each evening, move your plants back to their sunny window. Do this for ten weeks.
8. By Thanksgiving, stop the fourteen hours of darkness and place poinsettias back in the sunlight. At this point they will develop the beautiful, colorful bracts once again.

Successful reblooming of poinsettias will not only save money, but give plant enthusiasts the opportunity to explore and learn from the experience.