

Summer 2019, Issue 10

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Veggie Garden

Lima beans, pole beans, collards, pumpkin and more thrive this time of year. For a complete list, download the North FL Gardening Calendar: [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/EP/EP45100.pdf)

[EP/EP45100.pdf](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/EP/EP45100.pdf)

or The Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/vh021>



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SAVE THE DATE

OCTOBER 5 & 6, 2019

UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County
3125 Agricultural Center Dr. • St. Augustine, FL 32086



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Florida-Friendly Landscape Plant:
Eastern Prickly Pear Cactus, Opuntia humifusa

Terra Freeman, Urban and
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A favorite of gopher tortoises and loved by pollinators, Prickly Pear Cactus makes an attractive addition to any hot, dry, well-drained landscape. Prickly pear prefers poor, sandy soils - in fact, if soil is too rich, it can cause the plant to grow too quickly and become soft, which can lead to problems with pests and diseases. Too much moisture can lead to root rot, so take advantage of those dry, well-drained areas of your landscape to grow this unique and useful plant. Salt tolerance is an added bonus to this native landscape specimen.

Blooms: Flowers are primarily yellow, but occasionally orange or red variations occur. While individual flowers last for only a day, the plant will bloom profusely for several weeks each spring. Flowers are followed by bright red fruits in mid to late summer.

Propagation: Growing prickly pear from seed can be a challenge, but it is very easy to propagate from the pads (so long as tongs and thick gloves are in your arsenal). Simply cut off a pad (flat, green, fleshy part) that is at least six months old (clean cut at the joint with a knife); set it out in a dry, shady location (takes about a week or two) until it forms a callus; then plant about an inch or two deep (can prop up with stones if falls over) in a pot filled with well-drained soilless medium (1/2 perlite and 1/2 peat works well). Place pot in a



bright location and water once or twice a week, letting it dry out in between watering. Once rooted, transplant into your garden or move to a larger pot.

Pests: The main pest of concern for the prickly pear is the cactus

moth, *Cactoblastis cactorum*, which can occur year round. The damage occurs when the larvae hollow out young cactus pads by feeding. This provides a place for pathogens to enter the plant, causing more problems. If you notice this damage early on, simply remove and destroy the eggs and/or infected pads to prevent spreading.

Edibility: Both the pads and the fruits are edible, so long as you remove the spines beforehand.

While the pads may or may not have obvious large spines, both pads and fruits have tiny, hair-like barbed spines known as glochids. Glochids are not something you want to eat or touch!

Harvesting with tongs and thick gloves is your best defense against getting pricked. When it comes time to prepare for eating, the easiest way to remove the spines is to singe them off with a flame.

This versatile plant can be used in breads, desserts, drinks, candies, jellies, as a side vegetable and more. It is best to eat the pads when they are young and tender, tasting a bit like green beans. The fruit can be eaten raw or prepared, at room temperature or chilled.

Spring Lawn Care

Carol O'Hagan,
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Chinch bug

Heat, water, weeds or you, which one can be the biggest problem for your summer lawn? It might surprise you to find out that your lawn's biggest problem might be your good intentions.

Heat and lack of rainfall can be a stressor for your lawn. How you manage that, however, can make a world of difference. Most Florida lawns thrive in the hot sun, as long as they get the right amount of water. Be careful to provide your lawn with $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ inches of water per week - more can be harmful. Get a rain gauge to determine your watering needs and keep your irrigation system turned off unless needed. Too much water will lead to bugs and disease.

Best time to water? In the morning between 4 and 8 am so the lawn dries quickly, therefore, reducing disease.

Weeds – physical or chemical? Pulling those weeds instead of using chemicals will give you exercise and also allow you the chance to check for pests. Using chemicals often necessitates the use of more chemicals. Keep your lawn care simple and you'll have more time for the things you like to do.

While you are scoping out the weeds here are some signs to look for when checking for pests. Light green or yellowing in the grass in small, circular areas may be a sign of a problem. Check for chinch bugs along sidewalks and driveways. Check the areas adjacent to any chinch bug suspected parts of the lawn. Search the thatch, undersides of stolon

and soil surface. A useful detection tool is to remove a section of thatch and thrash it against a piece of white paper. Look for the insects on the paper. You may need to do this in several sections of the area. Oftentimes lawns suffering from drought look very similar to those with chinch bug infestation. If your lawn greens up after applying water it is most likely a drought issue, not chinch bugs. There are a number of common predators of the chinch bug such as the big-eyed bug and anthocorids. Too much insecticide use can reduce these natural enemies. If, however, you find twenty to twenty-five chinch bugs per square foot you may need to apply an insecticide. Look for one specifically formulated for chinch bug control. Spot treat with a 5-foot buffer when infestation is first noticed, following up with $\frac{1}{4}$ inch of irrigation to move the insecticide into the thatch. Keep up your inspections for two to three times over the next four to six weeks. Because many insecticides do not kill the eggs you may need to repeat the application.

Follow these simple suggestions and learn to love your lawn again!

References:

<http://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/pinellasco/2017/06/16/healthy-lawn-healthy-environment/>

<http://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/marionco/2018/07/11/tips-mid-summer-lawn-care/>

The Florida Lawn Handbook: Trenholm, Laurie E and Unruh, Bryan. "Pest Management." *The Florida Lawn Handbook*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2005.

Big-eyed bug





The Enduring Canna

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We are in the “Dog Days” of summer. While it may be difficult for some to endure the heat and humidity, our garden plants must survive all types of weather conditions from drought to incessant rain. A suitable plant should also display gorgeous flowers, striking foliage and have the versatility to blend well with others.

Canna indica was cultivated for thousands of years for its starchy edible root by native Americans in tropical regions. The genus is native from southern South Carolina west to southern Texas and south to northern Argentina. Canna found its way around the globe where new varieties were created focusing on flowers and foliage. Today’s cultivars can trace their roots to *Canna indica* from the Americas.

All-American Selections® (AAS) announced *Canna generalis* ‘Tropical Rose’ as the 1992 AAS Flower Winner.

This was the first hybrid Canna to be grown from seed. This new generation of dwarf Canna features large blooms with vivid colors, compact stature and abundant blooms due to vigorous basal branching. Subsequent AAS

honors went to Canna ‘South Pacific Scarlet’ in 2013 and ‘South Pacific Orange’ in 2018.

Canna seeds can be purchased online from several seed companies. Soak the large seeds in warm water for a couple of hours to hasten germination. Sow seeds in sterile medium and expect the seeds to germinate easily within 10 days. Transplant the seedlings when they have a couple of leaves into 4-inch pots.

Cannas grow best in full sun; however, they can grow in partial shade with some reduced flower production. Cannas are winter hardy in our area and tolerate our heat and humidity. Plants can be afflicted with rust and fungal leaf spot if they are spaced too close or kept too wet. Canna leaf rollers can cause some cosmetic damage. Cut plants to the ground in early spring to allow fresh foliage to

emerge.

Take advantage of Canna’s beautiful foliage and flowers in containers or garden borders as focal points or in a supporting role to showcase other varieties. Visit the Botanical Gardens at the St. Johns County Extension Center where you can see survivors of the summer.

