

Summer 2020, Issue 14

In this Issue

Title	Page
Overview.....	1
Florida Friendly Landscaping™..	2
Lawn Care Tips.....	3
Wild Edibles.....	4
Snakes.....	5
Succulents.....	6
Okra.....	7
Summer Garden.....	8
Horticultural Wonders.....	9
All American Selections™.....	10

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/EP/EP45100.pdf> or The Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/vh021>

UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County
Horticulture Department

This summer edition of the *St. Johns Lawn and Garden Gazette*, offers a variety of horticultural topics to educate and inspire our community throughout this unconventional summer. I hope you will be inspired to experiment with new plant varieties or gardening techniques, whether it is growing succulents for the first time, exploring your neighborhood with field guides (internet searches work in a pinch!), or making delicacies from the plants in your backyard. Perhaps you will form a newfound appreciation for the role of snakes in our environment or the horticultural wonders that surround us. Maybe you will finally consult the Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide (link to the left) to learn how to have more success with your summer vegetable garden. Whatever you choose to do with this information, know the St. Johns County Extension Horticulture Department is available to assist with your horticultural inquiries with University research-based information. You can reach me via e-mail at terraf@ufl.edu.

Wishing you a safe and healthy summer!

Happy Gardening!



Florida-Friendly Native Shrubs

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

Throughout many evening walks around my neighborhood, I've come to appreciate the vast diversity of native trees, shrubs, vines and wildflowers that grace the natural areas alongside these suburban sidewalks. In a quest to familiarize myself with every plant in my surroundings, I've spent many pandemic hours combing through field guides learning about the attributes that differentiate one species from another and the gifts they bring to humans and wildlife alike.

Carolina Willow, *Salix caroliniana*, is prolific in moist areas such as streams, swamps, marshes, retention ponds and other wetland areas of northeast Florida. Narrow, lance-shaped leaves grace the long, wispy stems of this small, multi-branched tree that serves as the larval host plant for the Viceroy butterfly as well as a nectar source for native bees and other butterflies.

To differentiate this from other willows, you'll need a magnifying lens to see yellowish glands that dot the tip of its serrated leaf margins. Additionally, the base of young leaves have small, round, wing-like leaves that resemble mouse ears. The willow's inconspicuous yellow flowers in early spring are followed by masses of white fluff when fruiting that beckon you to reach out and touch.

Woven wooden structures such as garden fences, furniture, and basketry, as well as medicinal benefits from the plant's salicylic acid, are among the willow's many uses. This willow could make an excellent addition to a moist, sunny area of your landscape.

Another gem of my evening strolls includes **Saltbush, *Baccharis halimifolia***. This shrub goes largely unnoticed this time of year; but just wait until fall when it becomes a roadside showstopper! You'll wonder where this plant has been hiding all year, as it flowers and is most showy when few others are in bloom.

Its dioecious nature means it has separate male and female plants, and the flowers differ accordingly. The female flowers and fruit are showiest with feathery, white, dandelion-like bristles in late summer and fall. The male flowers are yellow, tubular, and less conspicuous to the human eye; however, migrating monarchs and other butterflies are attracted to their rich nectar source. Birds use the shrub for nesting and cover as well.

While this shrub is not commonly used in the home landscape, it does possess many appealing qualities, including a moderate size (6 to 10 feet), salt tolerance and ability to tolerate flooding and drought. Saltbush would make an excellent Florida-Friendly addition to many home landscapes. To learn more, visit my video at <http://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/stjohnsco/2020/11/13/saltbush-baccharis-halimifolia/>. For videos on other native plants, visit the St. Johns County Parks and Recreation Facebook page.



Baccharis halimifolia seed fluff.

Credit: NC State University

Summer Lawn Care

Carol O'Hagan,
Master Gardener,
UF/IFAS Extension SJC

Summer is here and things are really heating up in Florida. This also tends to be a rainier and more humid season. Afternoon showers become the norm. All of those elements can come together to stress your lawn. Here are a few bits of information to help you out.

Mowing—If you haven't already done so, now is the time to ensure your mower blade is sharp. A sharp blade creates a cleaner cut that is quicker to heal. If you have this region's most common turf, St. Augustine, it should be mowed higher than other turf types because of its thick blades. Depending on the cultivar, it should be mowed at a height of 2.5 (dwarf varieties) to 4 (standard varieties) inches. However, when mowing your lawn, you should never remove more than 1/3 of the blade at a time. That means the grass should be no more than 6" when mowed or you will need to mow over several days to get to the optimum height. Mow in a different direction each time to reduce wear, never mow wet turf and leave the clippings on the lawn. If clippings clump excessively, use a rake or leaf blower to distribute them. [Mowing your Florida Lawn.](#)

Irrigation—In ground sprinkler systems are pretty common here. Overwatering can be as hazardous to your lawn as under-watering. It is important to make sure the sprinklers are calibrated to ensure they are providing ½ to ¾ inch of water to each region. Put some small cans (tuna cans work well) around the different areas of your yard. Run your sprinkler for 10 minutes and measure the water in each can. Determine how long that zone should run to receive ½ to ¾ inches of water. So, if after 10 minutes you have ¼ inch of water in a can, that zone should run for 20 to 30 minutes at a time. Optimum time to water is from 4 to 7 am and you should only be watering on an as needed basis when you see these signs:

- *Leaf blades are folded in half lengthwise in an attempt to conserve water (Figure 1).*
- *Grass takes on a blue-gray tint rather than green.*
- *Footprints and tire tracks remain visible.*



Figure 1. Photo by Laurie Trenholm, UF/IFAS

Turning on your irrigation system only when watering is needed, and not relying on the rain sensor, is important too. Here is more info on [managing your irrigation controller.](#)

Pests — Chinch bugs like it hot and dry. Patchy areas in your lawn of yellow that quickly brown may be a sign of chinch bug infestation. Good practices in irrigation and mowing will help your lawn be less susceptible to these pests. Chinch bugs also love fast-growing lawns so do not use quick-release nitrogen products. If you suspect chinch bug's, here is some helpful information on managing this pest: [Chinch bug help.](#)

Disease – Humid and wet weather can bring on disease in your turfgrass. Gray leaf spot will initially show up as gray spots on the blades of grass. This is especially prevalent during periods of 12 hours or greater humidity of at least 95% and leaf wetness. The disease develops more rapidly on lush leaf growth of newly sprigged rather than established turf. However, excessive applications of nitrogen fertilizer can produce lush leaf growth on even established lawns. Good management practices that minimize rapid leaf growth in the lawn can lessen the chance for this disease. More information on identifying and managing this problem can found at [gray leaf spot.](#)

Enjoy the season. By following these best management practices for your lawn, you will be doing good things for your home as well as the environment.

Chowing Down from the Wild

Renee Stambaugh
Master Gardener,
UF/IFAS Extension SJC

Weed Balls, Dollar Weed Dip, Beauty Berry Jelly, Pine Needle Tea—you won't find these packaged at the grocery store. They're free for the foraging, the ingredients possibly hanging out in your garden or yard. Native Florida plants can provide you with more than a low-maintenance landscape; they can enhance your tablescape with superior nutrients and new and interesting flavors. Because nutrition is not bred out of native plants, we get a powerhouse of healthful additions for our diet.

Did you know that all native Florida grass seeds are edible? Shake them into your pocket when you take your next hike. Later you can roast them and settle in for some fine snacking. All Florida violets are edible, too. Put the pretty blooms in salads, make tea, or use them like you use other greens. Pepperweed seeds will render your pepper shaker obsolete. The dark berries from the beautiful elderberry bush have a floral, lemony taste and will stock your pantry with syrup and sweet wine. The native longleaf pine tree will supply you with a tea that is throat-soothing and delicious. The bright magenta berries on the beautyberry bush make delicious jellies and jams. This plant is so cooperative that in the fall it drops its leaves to the ground, making it super easy for you to strip the berries off the stems.



Viola



Callicarpa americana

For a beany-asparagus flavor, snap off the young leaves of the Smilax vine and eat this delicious veggie either raw or cooked. If you enjoy the flavor of sweet white radishes, the root of the Florida betony plant will grace your salad; or you can pickle it for use all year.

These are just a few of the wild edible delights waiting for your Florida foraging.

Disclaimer: Be sure to consult with your doctor before eating an unfamiliar food.

“No Shoulders” are Friends

Phil Stambaugh,
SJC Resident. King and
Bear Community

Famous political and civil rights activist Mahatma Gandhi of India once said that snakes have their place in an agricultural economy of a village but the villagers must realize it.



Snakes may instill fear in humans, but largely have been misunderstood for centuries now. The reptiles always have been elusive, mysterious, ubiquitous creatures, yet are not always visible. Most people like it that way and barely can imagine a snake near them for fear of one's life. Few would think of tangling with a snake, let alone trying to find one.

The layperson's knowledge of snakes is rooted in myth and fiction, skewing the facts of their existence and benefit due to fear of getting on the wrong side of one. That being said, these beautiful creatures are a critically important component of our ecosystem and biodiversity.

Of the 45 species of snakes in Florida, only six are venomous - and rarely seen. The rest are harmless. Even the venomous snakes are not particularly aggressive or dangerous unless provoked.

With all due apologies to Indiana Jones, snakes are one of nature's more fascinating creatures. Limbless and lithe, snakes have a cylindrical body encasing their organs, leading to nicknames like “no shoulders” or “sidewinders.” Due to their body structure, snakes inhabit a variety of environments and are able to dwell in trees or underground.

Some species, like the corn snake and green snake, are expert climbers and live in trees and shrubs. Others, like the black racer, live on the ground, taking shelter near bushes or foliage and burrow into the soil and leaf debris. Some species are aquatic. In the Sunshine State, pine flatwoods, hardwood hammocks, cypress ponds, wet prairies, scrub, marshes, and swamps are home to the diverse snake population.

For as long as they have existed, there have been far-fetched stories and unfair myths that have wrongly characterized snakes, making them perhaps the most misunderstood of all animals in the kingdom. The truth is quite the opposite. Rat snakes, for example, are masters of ridding an area of pesky rodents. Black racers and garter snakes in the garden eat insects and control other pests that harm your plants.

Snakes know more about what is happening around them than any other creature. They have no ears to listen to gossip — only direct perception. The stereotypes, however, are nonsensical, and never will a person ever meet an overtly aggressive snake. Even after years of human persecution and misconceptions about their behavior as predators, snakes actually have a vital and unique role within the food web.

With that in mind, snakes are in serious need of conservation in the state of Florida. No measure of understanding of a snake's behavior, though, prepares a person for an encounter with one. So the question remains... what to do in a snake encounter?

Herpetologists, who are experts in reptiles and amphibians, seem to agree the first thing to do when seeing a snake is not to worry. Observed from a distance, most snakes mean no harm and - like humans and other animals - won't react in menacing fashion until their personal space is invaded. Most snakes will go away on their own accord.

People would do well to learn about basic snake behavior. In most cases, ignorance and a lack of awareness of one's surroundings is the reason accidents occur in Florida. Keep our limbless friends in mind when you are enjoying the state's many activities. Just as a snake sheds its skin, we must shed our misconceptions of our friends, “no-shoulders”.

Succulents: A Thorny Issue

Dianna Christakos,
Master Gardener,
UF/IFAS Extension SJC



Mexican Cantilabra

Since moving from Maine some five years ago, I have discovered much about the do's and don'ts of gardening in Florida. Being able to garden year round carries some significant challenges. By trial and error, and some considerable expense, I found that one has to be flexible to new techniques and rules. Unable to reproduce my beautiful perennial gardens from Maine, I had to change direction.

The heat of Florida has proven to be a greater adversary than the cold. Also, in my housing complex the deer roam the streets totally unafraid since they have no natural predators. They visit nightly to sample new nursery purchases. Desperate to find plants that tolerate the heat and are deer resistant has proved to be a challenge.

Undaunted, I pressed on and bought a few succulents with thorns, like *Mammalarias*, and here begins the love story with succulents. I have planted them in

pots mainly so I can hide them from hurricanes. My Elephant Bush is over six feet tall, my Mexican Candelabra graces my front door, and my yard is filled with exotic plants of every considerable shape, color and size. I plant the ones that grow tall, like the variegated Cactus Pear, in big pots and they are amazing. And the deer do not touch them.

The story does not end here. This summer, I discovered that nearly all bloom, and what a spectacular show they put on! The smallest little cactus puts out a bloom twice its size. A Pillar Cactus is 8 feet tall and was covered with 28 blossoms. The blooms only last one day but I have actually stayed awake to see some of them open. Many are night bloomers.



Ladyfingers Cactus (*Mammalaria elongata*)

The benefits do not end there. These plants do not tolerate much water, which is a good thing for conservation. They love the heat. In addition, they are seldom bothered by pests and diseases.

So, take my word and try growing some succulents. Some varieties also do well indoors and make lovely terrariums. They are also very easy to propagate. There is no downside to growing these amazing plants!



Starfish Cactus blossom (*Stapelia gigantea*)

Photos by Dianna Christakos



Say “Okay” to Okra

Melissa Strohminger,
Master Gardener,
UF/IFAS Extension SJC

It's hot out. My garden and I are slightly wilted. Not all of the garden; not the okra. The okra is standing tall and straight, blooming and productive. Okra can really take the heat.

If you aren't from the southern U.S., you might not be too familiar with okra. The plant is an edible ornamental that is related to hibiscus and has a very similar flower. It works well in the landscape and the vegetable is versatile and nutritious. The “Clemson Spineless” is just one of several cultivars easy to grow locally. Okra can be planted directly from seed, takes full sun, and with a balanced 10-10-10 fertilizer applied every few weeks, can yield through October. It is

drought tolerant but benefits from an organic mulch to hold in moisture and should be inspected for pests regularly. The pods should be picked every few days when they are a couple of inches long or they will become woody. Even the woody pods, however, can be used as decoration or for saving seeds.

Okra can be used in soups and gumbo, roasted, fried, and pickled. There are tons of delicious, healthy recipes on the internet using okra in lots of different ways. Do some research and try a new dish. Or if it's too hot to cook, they freeze beautifully and you can use them in the fall!



References:

<https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=C941&title=Home%20Garden%20Okra>

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/vh021>

<https://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/edibles/vegetables/okra.html>

Summer Vegetable Gardening Chores

Melissa Strohminger,
Master Gardener,
UF/IFAS Extension SJC



Summer in North Florida may seem like total “down-time” for vegetable gardening, but there are a few chores that you should do to get a jump start on your fall vegetable beds or for next spring:

1. Clean up - Get rid of dead and diseased plants lingering in your garden. Mulch and spiff up where needed. Clear any areas that you may want to add as vegetable beds for fall.
2. Make notes from your spring garden - What worked well; what didn't? What do you want to add for the next season?
3. Check your garden tools - Is your spade rusty and in need of a scrub? Did you loan your hoe to a neighbor and it never came back? Are you unhappy with your irrigation situation and want to change it?
4. Turn your compost and have a pile cooking to be ready for use in your fall garden. Or start composting if you don't!

5. Plan your fall beds. Decide what can go where, determining which plants make good companions. Look into planting cover crops even in small raised beds to improve your soil for the next season.

6. Research and shop for seed and supplies. It feels like Christmas in July to make your garden wishlist!

Doing some or all of these chores will help make the “down-time” pass until you can get back to the fun that is fall vegetable gardening in Florida!

Resources:

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/vh021>

<https://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/care/planting/vegetable-gardens-by-season.html>



Horticultural Wonders

Doris Durham,
Master Gardener,
UF/IFAS Extension SJC

The Wonders of Olive Trees

At the University of Florida, olive trees (*Olea europaea*) are being explored as an alternative crop for fruit producers. About three years ago, a Swiss company planted a 4,000 tree grove of olives in Colquitt, GA, about 40 miles north of Tallahassee, Florida. Perhaps the olive business will be a new crop that will be commercially viable and sustain farming families in the future.

Olives grow in poor, sandy, well-drained soil and nutrient requirements for the olive tree are low. Too much nitrogen increases the possibility of excessive vegetative growth at the expense of fruiting.



Ripening olive fruit and foliage.
Credit: Jennifer L. Gillett-Kaufman, UF/IFAS

In addition to being researched for fruit and oil, the olive tree also makes a statement as a landscape tree with the grayish-green silvery foliage. They can grow 25-30 feet tall and wide so plenty of space must be considered. To learn more about olive production in Florida, visit *Olives for Your Florida Landscape* at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep515>.

The Wonders of Allelopathy

Some plants inhibit the growth of other plants. These plants and trees have what is called allelopathic chemicals. This chemical is found in sunflower seeds and many other plants and trees, such as the Black Walnut. Many plants store this chemical in their leaves so when the leaves fall the toxins effect plants growing nearby. The allelopathic activity of different plant parts, such as leaves, flowers, stems, bark, roots, soil and leaf litter, can vary over the course of a growing season. Some trees use their allelochemicals to pull water from the soil thereby robbing nearby plants of sustaining moisture. Pine straw works well as a mulch as the needles have allelopathic properties. For more information on allelopathy, visit *Allelopathy: How Plants Suppress Other Plants* at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/hs186>.

The Wonders of Apomixis

Apomixis seeds from a fruit bearing tree will produce a tree true to the parent tree. The apomictic seeds are not from pollination but a collection of genetic traits gleaned from cells that make up the rest of the tree. Development of the apomixis technology is in its infancy and requires much research and study. Development and use of apomixis technology would allow for clonal seed production and consistent yields of fruits and vegetables at lower costs for growers and buyers.

References: https://irrecenvhort.ifas.ufl.edu/propagation/modules/module2/tignor_outline.pdf



The Heat is On!

**Shirley Barber,
Master Gardener,
UF/IFAS Extension
St. Johns County**



Marigold 'Big Duck Gold'

The temperatures are sizzling and the humidity is intolerable, not only for humans but also for our landscapes. The quest for color in our gardens presents a challenge, as plants must tolerate heat, humidity, pests, disease, drought and incessant rain.

Color can be provided with annual bedding plants. Some of the old standbys have lost favor due to short-lived tolerance to our weather conditions. Older varieties of zinnias succumb to powdery mildew, gray mold, fungal leaf spot, blights, aphids and require constant deadheading. Marigolds are attacked by grasshoppers, spider mites, aphids, blight, crown rot, leaf spot and fungus. When the summer rains arrive, neither variety can tolerate wet growing conditions.

Fortunately, plant breeders have made huge strides in producing new varieties in a variety of sizes and growth habits. Many were declared All-American Selections® (AAS) award winners after trials throughout North America. The Profusion series grows to 12 inches and has received 6 AAS awards from 1999 through 2017. 'Magellan Coral' with its gorgeous color on 17-inch plants was announced in 2005. The Zahara series in 2010 is an outstanding compact bushy 14-inch front-of-the-border variety. The most

recent 2020 winner 'Holi Pink' and 2019 winner 'Holi Scarlet' are remarkable with stunning color, healthy foliage and bushy habit. 'Holi Scarlet' has done well in our gardens through the spring drought and recent summer rains showing no disease at this time.

AAS 2019 winner Marigold 'Big Duck Gold' is simply awesome and getting notice from visitors to the gardens! This mid-size variety displays huge golden-yellow double blooms on bushy 18-inch plants with dark green healthy foliage. This variety has thrived through the same conditions as its neighbor 'Holi Scarlet'.

Zinnias and marigolds are quite easy to grow from seed, with germination within 5 days. Varieties mentioned above are definitely worth a try. Seeds can be obtained from multiple online sources.

Visit the AAS gardens with its ever-changing display of seasonal flowers in the Botanical Gardens at the St. Johns County Extension Center. The demonstration gardens will inspire you to introduce new varieties to your garden that beat the heat.



Zinnia 'Holi Scarlet'