

Spring 2023, Issue 26

In this Issue

Title	Page
MGV Plant Sale.....	1
Upcoming Programs.....	2-4
Citrus.....	5
Garden Rewards.....	6
Herbs.....	7-8
Bromeliads.....	9
Mulch.....	10
AAS.....	11



**UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County
Master Gardener Volunteer Plant Sale
Friday March 31 & Saturday April 1, 2023
9 am to 2 pm**

**UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County
3125 Agricultural Center Dr.
St. Augustine, FL 32092
Cash or check only**

Veggie Garden

April is the time to plant many warm season crops including Swiss chard, beans, squash, and tomatoes

For a complete list, download the North FL Gardening Calendar:

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/EP/EP45100.pdf>

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



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PLANT TO PLATE

St. Johns County

TUESDAY

APRIL

04

9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.

3125 Agricultural Center Drive
St. Augustine, FL 32092
Auditorium
(904)209-0430

UF | IFAS Extension
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA



PLANT TO PLATE

Plant to Plate is an in person workshop that includes home gardening how-to and includes a make-and-take, how and where to find and purchase local foods, participate in a hands-on seasonal cooking experience, and how to preserve food (freezer jam) and dehydrating, while reducing food waste.

Registration: https://bit.ly/planttoplate_SJC

REGISTRATION: \$30.00
Lunch will be provided.

Questions? wendyw74@ufl.edu

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Use this link to register: https://bit.ly/planttoplate_SJC

Upcoming Programs

Green Industry Best Management Practices

This workshop is designed to provide training in Best Management Practices (BMPs) for anyone working in the lawn and landscape industry. The BMPs are focused on reducing non-point source pollution resulting from fertilizer application. At the end of this training you will be given a post-test, which if successfully passed, will provide you with a GI-BMP certificate of completion. This certificate is required in order to apply to FDACS for your Urban Landscape Commercial Fertilizer Certificate, which is required by Florida Statute for anyone applying fertilizer for profit in Florida.

Date: Thursday, April 27, 2023

Time: 9:00 am – 4:00 pm

Location: UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County Auditorium

3125 Agricultural Center Dr

St. Augustine, FL 32092

Registration via Eventbrite: <https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/gi-bmp-tickets-596799803277>

Non-refundable registration fee: \$20.00.

Bring your own lunch

Upcoming Programs

Stormwater Pondscaping

Learn how landscaping around stormwater ponds can contribute to healthy water systems. Design tips and proper plant selection will be highlighted

Friday, April 28, 2023

Time: 10am – 11am

Program Fee: \$10.00 (total is \$11.26 with Eventbrite fee)

Eventbrite registration:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/stormwater-pondscaping-tickets-576370267987>

Location: UF/IFAS Extension Auditorium

3125 Agricultural Center Dr

St. Augustine, FL 32092

For questions, e-mail terraf@ufl.edu



HLB Tolerant Citrus Trees

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



Sugar Belle mandarin cultivar. Mix of sweet Clementine and Minneola varieties. UF/IFAS File Photo.

Citrus is one of the first crops that comes to mind when considering Florida agriculture, although since the discovery of Citrus Greening disease, or Huanglongbing (HLB), in 2005, citrus production has been a struggle for commercial producers and homeowners. Researchers have been intently working to resolve this bacterial disease, which is spread by the Asian citrus psyllid by attacking the trees vascular system, ultimately resulting in a declining, unproductive tree. During decline, production slows, fruit becomes bitter, lop-sided, and misshaped; leaves become mottled, and exhibit yellow or corky veins; and twig dieback and fruit drop can occur. Visual assessment alone is not sufficient to diagnose citrus greening. For an official diagnosis, samples will need to be sent to a lab for a PCR test:

- Florida Division of Plant Industry at (800) 282-5153 or <https://www.fdacs.gov/Agriculture-Industry/Pests-and-Diseases/Plant-Pests-and-Diseases/Citrus-Health-Response-Program/Citrus-Pests-and-Diseases/HLB-Citrus-Greening>
- UF Plant Diagnostic Center at (352)392-1795 <http://plantpath.ifas.ufl.edu/extension/plant-diagnostic-center/>

HLB infects all citrus species regardless of root-stock, although typically lime, trifoliolate orange, and pomelo tend to be more tolerant. While there is no current cure for this disease, researchers at UF/IFAS have developed a variety called 'Sugar Belle'®, that is tolerant of citrus greening. Tolerant does not equal resistant, rather that the cultivar can still be healthy and productive even if infected. 'Sugar Belle'® is a cross between a Clementine and a Honeybelle/Minneola tangelo, giving it a sweet-tart flavor, and imbuing it with higher levels of vitamin C than most other citrus. Additionally, the fruit is juicy and easy to peel.

'Sugar Belle'® trees are cold tolerant to 14°F once established (recommended to provide cold protection until well-established), making them a hardy choice for northeast Florida. Depending on the season, fruit is ready for harvest from mid-November to late December, and is great for juicing or eating. With a mature size of 12 to 15 feet, they make a bountiful, small to medium-sized tree for your landscape. If you want to add citrus to your home landscape, variety selection is critical to success. Seek out HBL tolerant species from a certified nursery to ensure you are getting a disease-free tree to start.

References:

- <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/CG086>
- <https://nwdistrict.ifas.ufl.edu/phag/2017/05/19/uf-sugar-belle-citrus-variety-more-tolerant-to-greening/>
- <https://nwdistrict.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/2021/11/22/sugar-belle-mandarin-a-great-choice-for-the-florida-panhandle>

Reaping the Rewards of Your Garden

Madeline Neyens
Horticulture Program Assistant,
UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County



Squash blossoms are edible and can be prepared in a number of ways. Photo by: Katie Workman

Getting the most out of your plants goes hand in hand with finding new ways to incorporate them into your life. In addition to experimenting with more plants in your cooking, they can also take part in your artistic endeavors. It is always valuable to find a new way to use the resources around you.

Secondary edible parts of plants are the less popular portions of the same plants that are commonly grown and eaten. Usually considered to be scraps, they are thrown away and forgotten about. These include chopped broccoli and cauliflower stems, squash flowers, celery leaves, and many more. Some may be more palatable than others, so there is no shame in adding them to your compost. As always, make sure to do your research before consuming plant parts that you are unsure of.

Vegetable broth can be made by simmering various herb and vegetable scraps together. You can keep a container in your freezer to preserve these leftovers until your broth is ready to be made. This is also a wonderful way to repurpose your unused herbs and vegetables that are starting to go bad. Some good options to include are onions skins, carrot peels and greens, celery

ends and greens, garlic peels, etc. Keep in mind that the flavor of your broth will change with the type and proportion of items you include. Vegetables like broccoli and asparagus may cause your broth to be bitter, so they may not be ideal choices. Using more turnip or onion skins than anything else may cause the broth to be too sweet. Use your best judgement and include ingredients that you think you will enjoy.

Certain fruits and vegetables can be used to dye fabric, eggs, and other objects in many colors. While it can take some practice to get the desired color, it can be a fun way to use the scraps of what you have grown. A variety of warm tones can be achieved by using beets, red cabbage, citrus peels, turmeric, and even avocado pits and skins. Cooler tones can be produced from blackberries, spinach, kale, parsley, and many other ingredients. You can also experiment with these pigmented plants and create a variety of homemade paints.

Gardening can be so rewarding in the act itself, but there really is no limit on the ways it can enrich your life. Whether it is finding a fun craft to do with children or your new favorite way to eat out of the garden, these possibilities are waiting to be discovered.

Sources: https://aggie-hort.tamu.edu/newsletters/hortupdate/hortupdate_archives/2005/may05/SecVeget.html
<https://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/design/outdoor-living/growing-plants-for-dye.html>

Bountiful Basil in Your Garden

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



Sweet Basil "Genovese"

reaching up to 4 feet, while others are quite compact growing only 6 inches tall. Leaves can be either green or purple and flat or ruffled. Basil's attractive flowers can also be used for cooking and can be found in purple, pink, or white depending on the variety.

The many varieties of basil can be generally divided into four groups – sweet green, dwarf green, purple-leaf, and scented leaf.

Sweet basil (*Ocimum basilicum*) is commonly used in Italian cooking and is the most popular type in America. Sweet basil varieties like 'Genovese' and 'Lettuce Leaf' will provide you with large, sweet green leaves that are great for using in pesto.

Dwarf green basil (*Ocimum minimum*) is also referred to as bush basil or Greek basil and has much smaller leaves with more intense flavor than the typical sweet basil.

Most gardeners know about Basil. Its name comes from the Greek word for "king" – so greatly did the Greeks esteem this king of herbs. The French referred to basil as herb royale, while the Italians believe basil served the goddess Love.

All basil species (*Ocimum spp.*) belong to the Lamiaceae (mint) family. Most basil varieties are annuals in Florida, but a few behave as perennials. Basil grows well in Florida's warm climate. It can be planted from seed in early spring or fall in containers or in your herb garden. Basil prefers sun (with a bit of afternoon shade to protect it from the heat) and moist, but well-drained soil. The plants are sensitive to frost, so provide protection on cold nights. The leaves of many varieties will turn black and drop off the plant when temperatures drop below 40°F.

Basil is available in wide selection of scents and flavors due to the varying types and quantities of essential oils contained in each variety. Basil varieties can also be quite different in size and appearance. Some basil varieties can grow quite large,



Dwarf Green Basil

Bountiful Basil in Your Garden

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



Purple Basil

Purple leaf (*Ocimum basilicum*) is a sweet basil with deep-purple leaves than can be ruffled or flat. Often used as a garnish or tossed in a green salad. The hints of licorice and cinnamon flavor are mild. This basil relies on full sun for the best color.

Scented leaf basil (*Ocimum gratissimum*) includes clove basil, African blue basil, lemon basil, Thai basil and holy basil. These basils are great culinary herbs and often used in the preparation of teas. They are also attractive ornamental plants that attract pollinators.

The biggest downside to sweet basil in Florida is its susceptibility to downy mildew diseases. These diseases can be hard to recognize since the most noticeable symptom, yellowing, resembles a nutrient deficiency. The tell-tale sign of a downy

mildew disease is the presence of spores on undersides of leaves.

These diseases are nearly impossible to prevent as the spores of this fungus are easily dispersed long distances by wind. Planting basil in an area where it receives lots of sunlight and has good air movement can help, as well as using drip irrigation instead of overhead watering.

If downy mildew diseases are a persistent problem in your herb garden, consider resistant cultivars, such as Amazel Basil™, which was developed at the University of Florida. Amazel Basil™, will grow into a two-to-three-foot bush and has excellent flavor.

Basil can be bountiful in your spring to fall herb garden. You needn't limit yourself to just one variety of basil—plant as many as you like and see which works best in your garden and which flavors you like in your kitchen.



Thai Basil

Bromeliads

Patty Flourde
Master Gardener Volunteers
UF/IFAS Extension SJC

A bromeliad is a plant typically having short stems with rosettes of stiff spiny leaves. Thousands of different bromeliads come in various shapes and sizes and thrive in many light conditions. Most bromeliads are tropical or subtropical and can grow outdoors in frost-free areas of Florida. They grow well indoors as houseplants in any space that receives bright, subtle light.

Florida is home to sixteen native species of bromeliads and two natural hybrids, all of which are epiphytes. Some of the more common bromeliads found in Florida include: *Billberia* (Queens Tears and Flaming Torches), *Neoregall* (Blushing Bromeliads and Painted Fingernails), and *Tillandsia* (Air Plants). The abundant Spanish moss is a *Tillandsia* that is probably the most recognizable native bromeliad. (Luther, Benzing 2009).

The following environmental conditions promote healthy bromeliads:

Temperature: While bromeliads are tropical plants, certain varieties can be planted in the North Florida landscape. The most cold-hardy bromeliads are those in the genus *Puya*. They are capable of surviving temperatures to 20 degrees. Bromeliads with thicker leaves are often more cold-tolerant.

Light: The main consideration when choosing a bromeliad is the amount of light your planting area receives. This can affect a bromeliad's leaf color, leaf shape, and growth rate. Light levels that are too low for the variety will lead to leaves that are long, thin, and greener in color. Light levels that are too high will make leaves grow shorter, thicker, and lighter in color.

Water: Bromeliads absorb water through their leaves and the cups at the base of their leaves. Many

bromeliads are from tropical areas and prefer high humidity conditions; however, do not overwater. Most bromeliad's roots act like an anchor rather than a main source for taking in water and nutrients. Therefore, if the soil remains constantly wet, the roots will likely rot. It is important to allow the potting medium to dry before watering. Even if it appears dry on top, it may retain water further under the surface. Most bromeliads can handle drought. They will not thrive and grow in consistent drought, but they are less likely to die of drought than rotting.

Insects: Periodically clean out the bromeliad tube (tank) and use Mosquito Dunk pieces to ward off mosquitos.

It is also noteworthy that Bromeliads are extremely sensitive to copper and exposure can cause damage and even the death of the plant.



Queens Tears at UF/IFAS Extension SJC

Resources:

[Cold-hardy Bromeliads for North Florida | Gardening in the Panhandle \(ufl.edu\)](http://www.ufl.edu/gardening/cold-hardy-bromeliads-for-north-florida)

[Bromeliads - University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences \(ufl.edu\)](http://www.ufl.edu/ifas/bromeliads)

Mulch

Lana Bandy,
Master Gardener Volunteer
UF/IFAS Extension SJC

When it comes to landscaping, mulch is one of the most overlooked, but crucial, components of a beautiful and Florida-friendly design. But mulch does much more than help with curb appeal – it keeps our plants, trees, and soil happy.



Mulch plays a big role in preventing weeds and improving our soil. Mulch helps soil retain moisture, which means we can water less frequently, saving us money and conserving our valuable water supply. This is especially crucial in Florida, where we often experience drought conditions. Mulch protects plants and trees by keeping roots cool in the summer and warm in the winter. As mulch decomposes, it adds nutrients to the soil.

Given all these benefits, it's no wonder Americans spend \$1 billion a year on mulch. But, before you get started with your spring landscaping refresh, there are a few important mulch maxims to know.

Mulch should be used in home flower beds and gardens as well as around trees. After weeding the area, put down a two- to three-inch layer of mulch. Once your mulch gets below that level, it's time for a refresh. If your mulch gets "matted" (or grows into solid chunks), it's also time for a refresh, as this can keep water from soaking through to plants' roots. Rake the old mulch to loosen it and remove unusable pieces.

When mulching around trees, it's important to avoid "volcano mulching." This is where mulch is piled high against the trunk, tapering down the side to the ground in the shape of a volcano. The

mulch's moisture encourages rot and can cause roots to grow too close to the trunk, eventually killing the tree. The mulch pile can also capture rain that is meant to reach the tree's roots, and it can create a habitat for rodents.

There are two categories of mulch – organic and inorganic. Organic

mulch is made of once-living items – mainly wood. Inorganic mulch is made of materials like rubber, plastic, and pebbles. While these materials are durable, they do not help improve the soil. And if you've ever tried to keep pebbles in a contained area, you know how much work they are! UF/IFAS researchers find inorganic materials less effective in preventing weeds and controlling soil temperature, and these materials do not encourage wildlife habitats. For these reasons, they are not Florida friendly and are not recommended.

UF/IFAS researchers advise using organic mulch, such as pine bark, leaves, pine straw, wood, and grass. While all these have benefits, wood is the most commonly used. Wood mulch comes in many different sizes, shapes, and colors. While size and shape are a matter of reference, homeowners should avoid cypress mulch as well as dyed mulch. Some cypress mulch comes from trees in Florida's endangered wetlands – a sourcing practice we do not want to encourage.

With so many things to consider when selecting mulch, it's always helpful to do some research. Don't be afraid to ask your retailer about the sources of their mulch, and be sure to check out UF/IFAS for more helpful tips.

Color in the Shade Garden with Coleus

Shirley Barber,
Master Gardener Volunteer,
UF/IFAS Extension SJC



Some find it difficult to add color in their shade gardens. One must recognize foliage can offer variations of shades of green, variegation and colors pleasing to the eye. Coleus has become the go-to plant to brighten shady gardens with its variation in leaf shapes, color and size. All-America Selections (AAS) has named its first Coleus grown from seed to become an AAS Winner in 2023.

Coleus Premium Sun Coral Candy is absolutely stunning with its unique, multicolored foliage on a uniformly compact plant. This new plant with its short stature is perfect grown in containers, or as a bedding plant grown in a mass to highlight its color and form. The narrow, serrated leaves drape over the mounded plants and display bright coral-pink through the center of the leaf surrounded by green.

Coleus grows well in bright shade and this coleus is said to tolerate more sun than others, especially in regions with high humidity. Sun Coral Candy stays small at around 16 inches with dense foliage and doesn't flower quickly, making it nearly maintenance free. As a bonus, deer tend to avoid coleus.

Check out the AAS flower and vegetable displays at the Botanical Gardens at St. Johns County Extension Center where you will see a planting of Coleus Sun Coral Candy in the shade garden along the sidewalk in the Crepe Alle'. You will envision this colorful beauty in your garden.



<https://all-americaselections.org/product/coleus-premium-sun-coral-candy/>