



Winter 2025, Issue 33

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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>

UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County
**Florida Arbor Day
Tree Giveaway**

January 17th
10:00 am -12:00 pm



St Johns County Master Gardeners will distribute bareroot tree and shrub saplings at these locations:

Giveaway Locations:

- Anastasia Island Branch Library
- Bartram Trail Branch Library
- Hastings Library (temporary location: 400 East Harris Street)
- SJC Extension Office

Trees Offered:

- Red Buckeye, *Aesculus pavia*
- River Birch, *Betula nigra*
- Persimmon, *Diospyros virginiana*
- Eastern Redcedar, *Juniperus virginiana*
- Arrowwood, *Viburnum dentatum*
- Rusty Blackhaw, *Viburnum rufidulum*

Celebrate Florida Arbor Day with UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County Master Gardener Volunteers!





UF | IFAS Extension
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

An Equal Opportunity Institution.



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

Upcoming Programs: Located at SJC Extension

Green Industry Best Management Practices

This workshop is designed to provide training in **Best Management Practices (BMPs) for professionals 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: Tuesday, January 21, 2025

Time: 9:00 am—4:30 pm

Location: UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County Auditorium

3125 Agricultural Center Dr

St. Augustine, FL 32092

Registration via Eventbrite: Non-refundable registration fee: \$28.52

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/1109244984609?aff=oddtcreator>

Bring your own lunch



Upcoming Programs: Located at SJC Extension

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.

**Presented by Terra Freeman, UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County
Horticulture Extension Agent**

Date: Friday, Feb. 7, 2025

Time: 10 am to 11:00 am

Location: UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County Auditorium

3125 Agricultural Center Dr. St. Augustine, FL 32092

Preregistration on Eventbrite: (includes Eventbrite fees): \$12.51

Eventbrite registration link:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/1141302088269?aff=oddtcreator>



Upcoming Programs: Virtual

Florida-Friendly Landscape Principle #1: Right Plant, Right Place

Navigating Plant Selection for Your Northeast Florida Garden: Learn how to select plants that match your garden's conditions, saving time, money, and resources by exploring the Florida-Friendly Landscaping principle of "Right Plant, Right Place." Discover a curated selection of native plants that are ideally suited for Northeast Florida's climate.

**Presented by Terra Freeman, UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County
Horticulture Extension Agent**

Location: Virtual/Zoom

Date: Tuesday, Feb. 11, 2025

Time: 10 am to 11:00 am

Location: Preregistration on Eventbrite: (includes Eventbrite fees): \$12.51

Eventbrite registration link:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/1143148190009?aff=oddtcreator>



Upcoming Programs: Located at SJC Extension

Growing a Backyard Food Forest

Discover how to transform your backyard into a thriving, edible paradise! Learn how to select and integrate a diverse range of fruit and nut trees, berry bushes, and vegetables to cultivate a beautiful, bountiful, and sustainable backyard food forest that will provide you with fresh produce for years to come. Whether you have a small suburban yard or a larger rural property, you'll leave with the knowledge and inspiration to create your own lush and productive ecosystem right at home.

Presented by Terra Freeman, UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County Horticulture Extension Agent

Location: UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County Auditorium

3125 Agricultural Center Dr
St. Augustine, FL 32092

Date: March 12, 2025

Time: 10 am to 11:00 am

Location: Preregistration on Eventbrite: (includes Eventbrite fees): \$12.51

Eventbrite registration link:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/1143178580909?aff=oddtcreator>



Upcoming Programs: Virtual

Gardening with Herbs in Northeast Florida:

Cultivate Flavor and Fragrance in Your Northeast Florida Garden! Join us for an enriching program where you'll gain insights into the science of herb gardening. Learn about best practices, recommended site conditions, and seasonal herb choices to ensure your herb garden flourishes in our unique Northeast Florida climate. Program highlights include:

Site Conditions: Discover the key factors that create the ideal environment for your herb garden to thrive.

Gardening Practices: Master the techniques that will set your herb garden up for success, from soil preparation to pest management.

Seasonal Herb Planting: Explore which herbs to plant during each season and maximize your harvest throughout the year.

Harvest and Storage: Learn the art of harvesting herbs at the peak of flavor and preserving them for later use.

Presented by Terra Freeman, UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County Horticulture Extension Agent

Location: Virtual/Zoom

Date: March 26, 2025

Time: 10 am to 11:00 am

Preregistration on Eventbrite: (includes Eventbrite fees): \$12.51

Eventbrite registration link:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/1143166444609?aff=odtdtcreator>



Upcoming Programs: Located at SJC Extension

Fairy Garden Workshop

Are you looking for ways to bring more magic to your garden? Join us to learn how to make and take care of your own fairy garden! We will cover how to create, plant and maintain a miniature garden. Plants and decorations will be provided, all you need to bring is creativity!

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

Date: Thursday, March 20, 2025

Time: 10 am to 11:30 am

Location: UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County Auditorium

3125 Agricultural Center Dr. St. Augustine, FL 32092

Preregistration on Eventbrite: \$28.52 (includes Eventbrite fees)

Eventbrite registration link:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/1141326350839?aff=oddtcreator>

Wisteria Wyles

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

When looking for a lush, perennial vine for your garden, it is easy to be enticed by the gorgeous, fragrant blooms of Wisteria. Wisteria blooms in large clusters, similar to grapes, and are most often found in shades of lavender, although sometimes in white.

When selecting your wisteria plant, it is important to understand the differences in the species; keeping in mind that availability in the nursery trade does not always equate to wise choices for our garden. Wisteria is a genus of plants that includes several species of similar looking vines; however, not all are suitable for our Florida ecosystem.

Both Chinese Wisteria (*Wisteria sinensis*) and Japanese wisteria (*Wisteria floribunda*) are introduced species that escaped into natural areas and have become invasive across the east coast, including all regions of Florida. They grow rapidly and shade out other plants, leaving the ecosystem unbalanced. These long-lived vines (living up to 50 years) can do a lot of damage to our native forests when they shade out smaller trees and plants. Fortunately, there is a native, well-behaved wisteria that is a lovely option for your garden.

American Wisteria, *Wisteria frutescens*, is a Florida-friendly vine that grows up to 20 feet high and 10-15 feet wide, and is distinguished by shorter, denser flower clusters (5-10 cm long). Both Chinese and Japanese wisteria have longer flower clusters (up to 50 cm long). In northern Florida, Chinese wisteria tends to bloom from March to early April. Japanese and American wisteria bloom a bit later, from April to June.

For successful establishment, plant your wisteria in full sun and in moist, well-drained soil. 'Amethyst Falls', a beautiful native American wisteria cultivar, has deep purple flowers and, while less fragrant than the invasive wisteria, will not take over your garden. This variety will produce a heavy flush of 4- to 6-inch blooms in the spring, followed by lighter, repeated blooms in the summer. 'Amethyst Falls' can easily be trained to an arbor or trellis. Another benefit to growing American wisteria is that it supports local biodiversity by serving as a host plant to many species of butterflies and moths, including the silver-spotted skipper and long-tailed skipper butterflies.



'Amethyst Falls' American Wisteria (*Wisteria frutescens* 'Amethyst Falls') in the Gulf Coast Research and Education Center Teaching Gardens

Cold Protection

Sarah Tomlinson

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

“Are frost cloths really necessary?” “Does Florida even get that cold?” With freezing temperatures on the horizon, making sure your landscape is ready to handle frost is important for winter gardening.

Preparing for a Freeze

Potted plants that are light enough to be moved should be moved indoors or into a protected area that can trap warmth. Potted plants that are too heavy to be moved, along with your landscaped ornamental plants, should be insulated to protect against a freeze. This can be done either by using mulch or a frost cloth (lightweight towels, blankets, or quilts can also be used). When using a frost cloth, be sure to drape the cloth over the plants you want to protect and extend it down to the ground. This will help trap the heat from the soil. If the plant is too tall to be covered completely by the cloth, wrapping several layers around the base and surrounding soil will help keep the root system warm. Reducing radiant heat loss and protecting the plants roots are the most efficient and effective ways to prevent cold or frost damage to your plants.

Mitigating Cold Damage

If an unexpected dip in temperatures caught you off guard, no need to panic. Wait until the weather warms up in the springtime to prune off the cold damaged parts of your plant. The new growth will sprout below the damaged parts, so you’ll be able to tell where to prune. After a freeze, it’s important to check the soil around your plants to see if it has dried out or if it needs to be watered. Watering your plant with room temperature water will help provide the root system with much needed warmth. Healthy plants will recover from cold damage faster than diseased or malnourished plants.

It is also important to note that plants should not be fertilized in the late fall or winter. This is because the nitrogen in the fertilizer will encourage new leaves to sprout, which will be particularly susceptible to cold damage. This is also true for newly pruned plants, as they will also put out new growth during the cold weather. Pruning should wait until spring to avoid cold damage to the plant.



Oregano

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

Origanum is derived from the Greek word for “beautiful mountain”, a reference to the usual habitat and attractiveness of the marjoram. All 43 species are perennials native to the Mediterranean region of Europe where it has been used for food and medicine for thousands of years. Some species of the genus *Origanum* are known as oregano, while others are known as marjoram.

Oregano was a popular culinary herb during the Classical Greek and Roman period. It spread throughout Europe during the expansion of the Roman Empire. It was considered an important medicinal plant during the Medieval period. The herb was introduced to Asia through trade. Oregano was introduced into the United States during the wave of Greek and Italian immigration at the turn of the 20th century. It became a mainstay in Italian American and Greek American cuisine. It gained mainstream popularity after World War II when soldiers returning from the Italian campaign in Southern Europe had developed a liking for the flavor of oregano used in local cuisine. Thus, foods like pizza and pasta became common foods in every corner of America.

In Turkish cuisine, oregano is used to flavor meat, and throughout the Middle East it is used in a spice blend known as Za’atar. It is a staple herb in Italian cuisine where it is used in a variety of sauces and pasta dishes and creates the distinct “pizza flavoring”. It is used in Greek cuisine such as the grilled meat skewer “souvlaki”. Oregano can be used to flavor eggs, breads, and vegetables, especially eggplant, beans and zucchini.

There is much confusion of names among the multiple *Origanum* species and other plants that contain the same fragrance oils. Most have small, round, opposite leaves and a low spreading habit, though a few are

erect and can be 2 - 3 feet tall. Flowers are small, pink to white, in 1-inch spikes and are attractive for pollinators. Certain species of *Origanum* have little or no fragrance but make nice ground covers. When buying oregano for culinary uses, break off a leaf, tear it, then sniff for a distinct fragrance.

In Florida, oregano is a perennial, hardy from Zones 5 to 10. It can be grown in the herb garden, rock garden, as a ground cover or in containers. It has a spread of 18 inches, likes full sun and well-drained soil. Harvest leaves as needed for cooking. Continual harvesting will keep the plant vigorous and promote new growth. Oregano may be preserved by hanging branches in a dark, dry place until leaves are dried. Remove dry leaves from branches and either leave whole or crush. Store in airtight containers.

There are other plants known as a type of oregano, such as Mexican oregano and Cuban oregano. These 2 types of “oregano” share some of the same essential oils as those of the *Origanum* genus. Mexican oregano (*Lippia graveolens*) is also known as Puerto Rican oregano or Jamaican oregano. This plant grows as a shrub, 3 - 4 feet tall, with small olive-green leaves and tiny cream colored flowers spring thru fall. It is hardy in Zones 9 - 11. The leaves are used in Mexican and Caribbean cooking.

Cuban oregano (*Plectranthus amboinicus*) is also known as Mexican mint. Cuban oregano is neither Cuban nor oregano. It is native to southern and Eastern Africa. World trade spread the herb to Europe then came to the Americas during colonization. The plant has soft succulent green or variegated green leaves and has a low, spreading habit. It’s considered a tropical plant so will not tolerate frost. It likes part to full sun and well-drained soil. Its fragrance is pungent compared with other varieties of oreganos.



Share the Stoke

Rose Stewart
Master Gardener Volunteers
UF/IFAS Extension SJC



Stokes' aster attracts butterflies like this black swallowtail.
Photo credit: Mary Derrick, UF/IFAS Extension.

Stokesia laevis is a versatile, showy wild-flower whose flowers have been observed changing colors, from white to purple, throughout the day. 'Alba' and 'Silver Moon' varieties shine their white blooms like the proudest flower in the garden—well, maybe, besides the 'Mary Gregory' variety which produces stellar beautiful yellow flowers. With names like Klaus Jelitto, Peachie's Pick, and Honeyray Purple, you expect to see this flower "sharing the stoke" with free-spirited insects in the garden.

They do best in Florida zones 8-9a, in partly sunny spots with well-drained, acidic soil. You can deadhead (pinch off the spent flowerheads) to encourage more stoked flowers. Stoke's Aster plants grow

around 2 feet tall with flower petals as big as 4 inches across that appear on and off throughout the Spring season. A rosette of thick, narrow, greyish leaves are usually around 8 inches long. Though Stoke's aster flowers are normally blue-lilac in color, they are also available in deep blue, purple, rosy-pink, silvery-white, or even yellow. Flowers grow as large as 4 inches and bloom off and on throughout the spring.

If you have to pick one of the flowers in order to share the stoke, you can expect the clipping to hold up about a week after cutting. Stoke's Aster is named in honor of the English physician and botanist Jonathan Stokes, who became well known when he used fox glove to treat heart failure.



'Mel's Blue' Stokes' Aster. Photo credit: Mary Derrick,
UF/IFAS Extension.

New Year's Resolutions

Patty Flourde
Master Gardener Volunteers
UF/IFAS Extension SJC

It is time again to think about whether or not you are going to attempt to take on a New Year's resolution. While you may have tried and failed in previous years, this year can be different. First of all, do not jump at the standard resolutions such as hitting the gym more often or resisting those candy bars at the checkout isle. Instead find something that will not only make you healthier but also happier.

If you are drawing a blank as to what this could be, here are a few proven gardening ideas that will not only help you shed a few pounds, but give you a more positive outlook on life.



1. Start an annual flower garden in your backyard. Cool season annuals suitable for planting right now include snapdragons, petunias, and geraniums. These annuals will provide a vibrant color palette during the cooler months. For more information, go to <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/MG319> Gardening with Annuals in Florida.

2. Take a class at your local extension office. There is a wealth of knowledge at the extension office! Classes can range from various gardening tips, introduction to beekeeping, nutrition

and health, and Florida Friendly Gardening, just to name a few. For more information go to: stjohns@ifas.ufl.edu

3. Set a weekly weeding schedule. Weeding can be a daunting task, but if you set a goal of weeding 20 minutes a week in your yard, it will make a significant difference! It will help prevent weeds from growing large enough to produce seeds, which in return will help reduce your weed population and bring a smile to your face.

4. Become a Master Gardener Volunteer. If you love gardening, this may be a wonderful opportunity to give back to your community. The Florida Master

Gardener Volunteer Program is an outreach program composed of UF/IFAS Extension certified volunteers who are trained to provide research-based horticultural education to Florida residents. Volunteer opportunities include community gardening, youth education, public outreach & education, and helping residents in our plant clinic.

Do not put it off another day, get going on New Year's resolution ideas in your garden. It will be a new year and a new you!

Dear Master Gardener Volunteer

Tanya Ghanjanasak
Master Gardener Volunteer
UF/IFAS Extension SJC

Dear Master Gardener,
It's been so cold out! How can I tell if my plant just got cold, dormant, or is dead?

Wilting Beauty

Dear Wilting Beauty,
Winter can be rough on plants, and let's face it, on us too. One day your greenery is thriving, and the next, it's looking like it just pulled an all-nighter in the frost. But before you panic and start writing plant obituaries, let's figure out what's really going on. Knowing the difference between cold-shocked, dormant, and dead plants can save you a lot of heartache—and maybe some unnecessary trips to the garden center.

Cold-Shocked Plants

Cold shock happens when plants get an unexpected chill, and you might notice leaves turning brown or black, wilting dramatically, or dropping altogether. The good news? Your plant is not necessarily done for. To help a cold-shocked plant recover, move it somewhere warm and cozy. Don't start pruning the leaves right away; give it some time to stabilize. Skip the plant food for now and keep its soil evenly moist while it basks in some gentle warmth. With a little TLC, your plant might just survive a little frostbite.

Dormant Plants

Dormancy is like your plant's version of hibernation. It's not dead; it's just taking a well-deserved winter nap. This is especially common for deciduous plants, which shed their leaves to save energy. The stems might look sad and twiggy, but scratch beneath the bark, and you'll likely find green, living tissue. Caring for a dormant plant is simple: let it rest. Reduce watering, but don't let the soil dry out completely. Hold off on fertilizer until you see signs of new growth. And if

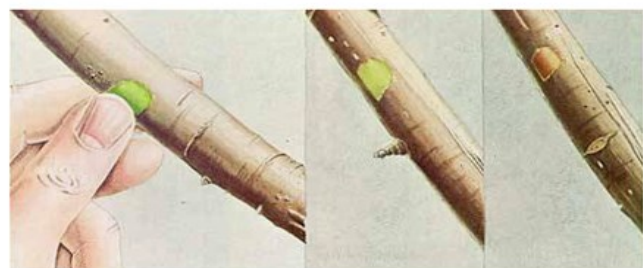
your plant is outdoors, leave it where it's cool but protected from harsh conditions. Dormant plants don't need a lot from you right now—they'll wake up when they're good and ready.

Dead Plants

Alright, sometimes the worst happens, and your plant has officially kicked the bucket. But how can you be sure it's really dead and not just pulling a dramatic stunt? Dead plants have brittle stems that snap like dry spaghetti, no green under the bark when scratched, and roots that are either mushy or black. Before you toss it, try the scratch test: gently scrape a small section of bark. If it's green underneath, there's still hope. Bend a stem—if it's pliable, your plant might just be in recovery mode. Check the roots too. Healthy roots are firm and white, while dead ones look like something out of a swamp. If all signs point to "nope," it's time to say goodbye. But hey, every ending is a chance for a new beginning—composting that plant means it can give life to something new in your garden.

Winter plant care doesn't have to be a guessing game. With a little patience and observation, you can decode your plants' winter behavior and keep your green thumb in top shape.

Happy gardening!



Bright Green:
Alive

Dull Green:
Poor Health

Brown:
Dead

Photo credit: <https://www.wilsonbrogardens.com/scratch>