

July in the Tallahassee Garden

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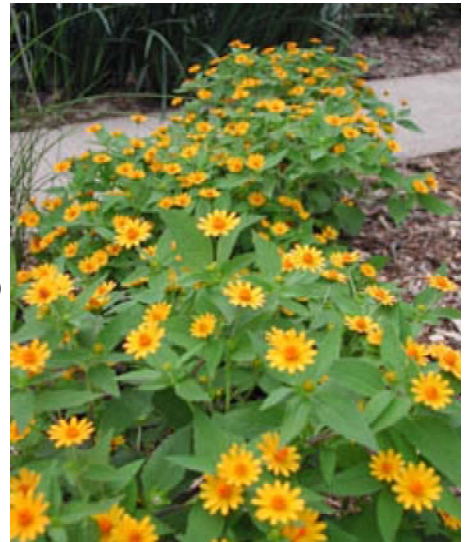
In July our weather is seriously hot and most gardeners do the least amount of gardening that we can get away with. But we can't retire altogether, because if we do the weeds will take over.

Landscape plants: It's hurricane season already, and that reminds us to look at the trees around our homes to see if there are trees or limbs that might threaten our property in high winds. Call a certified arborist to look at any that you might be worried about. Some trees are more resistant to wind damage than others, including Southern magnolia, live oaks and most palms. Least resistant are sand pine, Carolina cherry laurel, and Chinese tallow, which should be removed in any case because of its invasive damage to our wetlands and native habitats.

Shrubs: You can fertilize young shrubs on which you wish to encourage more growth for a second time this season. Apply a slow-release fertilizer on the soil surface under the branch tips. Water well. You can root cuttings from hydrangeas and many other woody ornamentals including euonymus, forsythia, philadelphus (mock orange), spirea, viburnum and pyracantha. Take cuttings from a long stem with mature new growth. Remove any flowers. Cut the stem into sections with two pairs of leaves each. Stick several pieces in a pot of moist potting soil or vermiculite. Keep them moist, in the shade. They will be ready for planting next spring.

Flowers: For late summer color plant annuals that can tolerate the heat, such as blue daze, melampodium, purslane, salvia or zinnias. In the shade plant coleus, gingers, jacobinia, shrimp plant, or caladiums. Remove the spent blooms from cannas to encourage new blooms.

Lawn care: Inspect your lawn frequently so that problems can be identified and managed early. Spittlebugs (only in centipede) , and chinch bugs or gray leaf spot fungus in St. Augustine are common problems in midsummer. Slime molds, grayish powdery growth on the grass surface, can be common in rainy weather. But they are harmless to the grass. Remember that lawns maintained with appropriate irrigation, fertilization and mowing practices are more resistant to pests than those which are not properly maintained.



Vegetables: As vegetables are harvested, remove old plant material. Plant eggplant and tomatoes toward the end of the month for a fall harvest. Choose a heat tolerant tomato. Practice plant rotation and plant in a different area of the garden so that soil borne diseases and insect pests won't build up. To root your own tomato transplants, early in the month remove suckers from your tomatoes and root in sterile potting soil, sand or vermiculite. Keep moist, out of direct sunlight and transplant in three to four weeks.

The flowers in the picture are melampodium.

Ask a Master Gardener: Master Gardener Volunteers answer gardening questions week-days from 9-4:30 at the University of Florida IFAS Extension in Leon County, (850) 487-3004.

For more information about gardening in our area, visit the University of Florida IFAS Leon County Extension website at <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu>.

Q: My house is crawling with caterpillars. What can I do?

A: Most likely they are not caterpillars at all, but are millipedes. In mid to late July we often have a population explosion of millipedes. They are not harmful and will eventually go away. In the meantime you can remove them from inside by sweeping or vacuuming. Outside sweep them off porches, patios and the sides of your house. Millipedes primarily feed on decaying organic matter.

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