

Local Gardening Info Sources

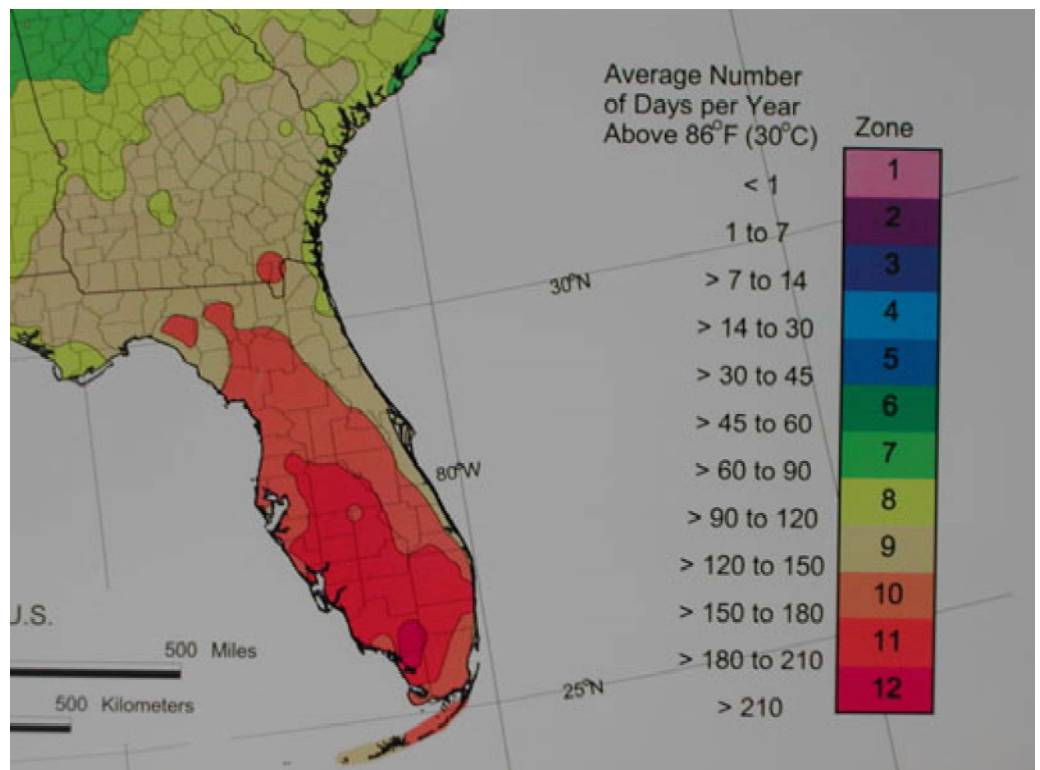
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If you're reading this column, I need to know. You see, I'm in the business of giving local gardening information, and I need to know if locally written garden columns are being read. If you do regularly read the columns that I write or that I place here from other north Florida extension agents and gardeners, I want to know. Please drop me a brief e-mail message at davidm@mail.co.leon.fl.us or send me a brief note to 615 Paul Russell Road, Tallahassee FL 32301. Though I can't reply to all your e-mails, I promise to read them.

Gardening information is everywhere these days, because gardening is so popular. The problem is that much of the information is useless to you because it's not appropriate for our climate and area. There are millions of dollars wasted every year in Tallahassee because of people buying the wrong plants, fertilizers, pesticides, and services. That's not to mention the environmental pollution that occurs because of soil erosion and because of incorrect use of fertilizers and pesticides. Many of our lake problems stem from us using too many of the wrong types of fertilizers and pesticides and landscaping with plants that escape our yards and become invasive in and around the lakes.

Though garden magazines can be interesting, most are written for a nationwide audience. There are exceptions, though, such as the Florida Gardener or Southern Living, which has different editions for each state. When reading syndicated garden columns in newspapers, check to see where the writer is from before relying on specific plant information there. Garden shows on television can be intriguing, but again, many of the plants



mentioned may not even grow here. You may get some good design ideas from these sources. If you're an experienced gardener, you may know which of the information is applicable and which is not. But if you're a novice at gardening, you can easily be misled by the pretty pictures.

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The gardener has to be careful about commercial sources of information, too. It should come as no surprise that a person or company who is selling something may be a little biased about its products. Still, Tallahassee is blessed with some very good local nurseries that are generally reliable sources of information. It's the knowledge of the sales people and the people who order the plants and products that make the difference. Many of our local nurseries also offer Saturday morning classes on special topics, utilizing the expertise of employees or local gardeners who have become experts in certain areas.

In the large chain stores, you have to be more careful because the plants and products may be the same here as in the Atlanta or Tampa stores if the plants are bought through a regional office. The experienced gardener will know what grows here and what won't. They will know when they're getting a bargain in a chain store and know when to avoid certain plants or products. But the novice usually doesn't. If you're a novice, your success will depend on the knowledge of the sales person helping you. So ask plenty of questions.

The best way to become a better gardener is to find sources of local gardening information and learn all you can. There's no substitute for the power of knowledge.

Visit our website, <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu> as a starting place in accessing unbiased gardening information for our area. On the bottom of the home page are links to gardening information at the University of Florida, University of Georgia, Auburn University, and Mississippi State University. Generally, the information on these university extension websites is localized for different regions of the state, so you can find information that pertains specifically to our area.

It is difficult to find garden books written for our area. Before buying a garden book, make sure that it is either written specifically for this area or that it has plant lists that indicate where the plants grow. Garden books that try to cover the whole nation usually are not very reliable in terms of specific plant information. Regional books, such as the Southern Living Garden Guide, are much more likely to hit closer to home. The Garden Guide to the Lower South, available at some local nurseries, is another good guide in terms of plant lists.

Remember, let me know if you want to continue to see locally written garden columns in this newspaper. If I don't hear from you, I may decide that I'm wasting my time amidst all the competition.

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