

## Learn from Extension Demo Gardens Saturday



*Larkspur.jpg photo to be credited to David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: Larkspur is among the types of flowers planted from seed in the fall for spring bloom in the demonstration garden on the grounds of the UF-IFAS Leon County Extension Center .*

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April 22, 2004

On Saturday, April 24, starting at 10 a.m. , the University of Florida IFAS Extension in Leon County gave a tour of the demonstration gardens on our grounds at 615 Paul Russell Road . This is about ¼ mile east of the fairgrounds on Paul Russell Road .

Just a few years ago, these grounds were something that we had to apologize for as we taught people about landscape gardening. Our landscape often served as the bad example or the way “not to do it”. We clearly didn’t practice on our grounds what we preached. Now we receive compliments on the gardens and use them as an example to show what we’re trying to teach. In 2003, the Leon County Master Gardeners were awarded the Florida Master Gardener Award of Excellence for Demonstration Gardens at the annual Master Gardener Continuing Education conference in Gainesville .

The gardens feature large landscape beds of flowering annuals, perennials, groundcovers, ornamental grasses, shrubs, and trees. The purpose of the gardens is to teach principles of environmental horticulture, such as proper plant selection, proper planting, mulching, use of micro-irrigation, and proper pruning. The gardens also illustrate the benefits of grouping plants with similar cultural requirements and foster an appreciation of how to use colors, shapes, and textures in the garden. Most plants are labeled with names. There are also signs promoting the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods principles for an environmentally-friendly landscape.

Though the gardens are open to you at any time, on Saturday, Master Gardeners and I will be leading tours at 10 o’clock , pointing out certain plants that are in bloom now, and answering questions. The gardens have been planted and maintained by the Master Gardeners, volunteers that Extension intensively trains to help us teach environmental horticulture principles to other gardeners in the community.

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Saturday's tour was especially helpful to those of you who would like to have more color in your landscape at this time of year. Once the azaleas have finished their show of color, there's often a lull in color while we're waiting for the flowers we plant in spring to grow. In our demonstration garden, we plant for spring in the fall. The pansies which we planted last November are still flowering and have been joined by a tremendous display of color from other cool-season snapdragons, petunias, and dianthus. We're constantly trying to convince gardeners to plant more in fall rather than waiting until spring, and we can show you the reason in the gardens.

You can see a lot of flowers that were planted from seed, directly in the ground, in November. Bachelor buttons, sweet peas, larkspur, California poppies, and Shirley poppies were all beautiful at this time. And all these flowers were planted from seed packets costing only about two dollars each.

We use a micro-irrigation system in the garden so that we water efficiently. It's a relatively inexpensive system that you can buy and install yourself. We fertilize only as needed and with a no-phosphorus 15-0-15 fertilizer with slow-release nitrogen, to reduce water pollution. We rarely use pesticides, only as necessary, and then use ones that have the least adverse environmental impact, such as soaps, oils, or systemics. So, come let us demonstrate some of what we try to teach through our newspaper columns. Meanwhile, if you would like to see some of the flowering plants from the gardens, visit <http://horttips.ifas.ufl.edu/flowers/Flowers/flowers.htm>

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