

June & July Gardening in North Florida

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June brings more heat, and usually, more rainfall to north Florida. If it doesn't bring rainfall, be prepared to water many of the plants in your landscape and garden. When temperatures are well up in the 90's, it may take no more than two days for plants that have been recently planted to wilt. And if we go several weeks without rain, even well-established shrubs will start to wilt. Some plants will thrive in the heat and humidity of summer. Other plants will melt in it. It's important to understand the difference and not struggle to grow plants that will not tolerate Florida summers.

The petunias, snapdragons, and other spring flowers that can't tolerate the heat need to be removed from the garden now. Tibouchina, globe amaranth (gomphrena), melampodium, pentas, portulaca, purslane, salvia, narrow-leaf zinnia (*Zinnia angustifolia*), lantana, butterfly bush (buddleia), daylily, verbena, firebush, rudbeckia, plumbago, and 'Summer Wave' torenia are among flowers that can take the summer heat in full sun. Zinnia and cosmos seeds can be sown in full sun. For partially shaded areas, try 'Mona Lavender' plectranthus, angelonia, and 'Summer Wave' torenia. For shaded areas, impatiens, caladium, jacobinia, Persian shield, and coleus can be planted. Gingers such as *Curcuma* (hidden gingers), *Hedychium* (butterfly gingers), and *Zingiber* (pine cone gingers) can be planted in shade also. Colorful foliage plants such as alternanthera (Joseph's coat), ornamental sweet potato, and sun coleus croton can be used in full sun.

Mow your lawn at least weekly. Sharpen the mower blade at least monthly. Don't encourage additional growth in your lawn now with fertilizer unless you just planted it from plugs and you're trying to get the plugs to spread. If your lawn is too yellowish, use just iron instead. Use ferrous sulfate at the rate of 2 ounces in 3-5 gallons of water per 1,000 square feet of lawn. Or, use a chelated iron source from your garden center, following package directions. Iron will green up your lawn without stimulating excessive growth that will cause you to mow even more. Keep the iron off driveways and sidewalks as it will temporarily stain.

Summer can bring lawn pests. Spittlebug damage may develop in centipede lawns, particularly as we move into July. Spittlebugs are small dark brown to black insects with two orange stripes across their back. A few spittlebugs do little damage. But, when spittlebug populations become excessive, damage shows as yellow or reddish streaks down the grass blades. The blades eventually turn brown, and the whole lawn takes on a brownish cast. Application of an insecticide labeled for lawns may be necessary if damage becomes extensive. But, if damage isn't significant, don't spray. You will kill beneficial predators, making further pest problems more likely. If you do spray, follow pesticide label directions and precautions carefully.

Chinch bug damage may occur in St. Augustine grass lawns. Damage appears as straw-colored areas in full sun. The tiny insects, only one-fifth inch long when full grown, are black with white wing patches on their backs. The immature insects are bright red. If you see significant damage and significant numbers of the insects, a lawn insecticide may be needed. Only spray the affected areas and ten to fifteen feet around them.

Gray leaf spot fungus can also develop in St. Augustine grass lawns, especially if rains are very frequent and the grass is in the shade. If damage becomes significant, several applications of a lawn fungicide labeled for gray leaf spot may be necessary.

If rainfall is abundant you may see slime molds in your lawn. Slime molds often appear as gray, yellow, pink, or purple fungal growth on the surface of the grass blades. Slime molds are not really disease-causing organisms at all. They don't do any damage to the grass. Slime molds are just primitive fungi that live in the soil. When the weather is moist and warm, the fungi send their reproductive growth, flowing up and over anything at ground level, including grass plants. Because no harm is done to the grass, no fungicides are recommended. If the color or the density of the fungi is objectionable, just remove the fungi by mowing, sweeping, or hosing the grass with a strong stream of water.

Plant hydrangeas for summer color and rich foliage texture. Plant them where they receive morning sun and afternoon shade. Don't plant them in full sun or in too dense of shade. There is a new cultivar of hydrangea called 'Endless Summer'. Most hydrangeas flower on old wood, so they should be pruned as soon as they finish flowering so that the buds can form for next year. But 'Endless Summer' flowers on both old and new wood.

Crape myrtles are coming into bloom now. It's an excellent time to select colors and cultivars of crape myrtles for your home landscape. But don't forget to consider the differing growth habits of the various cultivars. Select a cultivar with the appropriate mature size for the site. Small trees, less than twenty feet include Apalchee (lavender), Dynamite (red), Pink Velour, Sioux and Osage (all pink). Larger trees include Basham's Party Pink and Muskogee (both lavender pink), Arapaho (red), and Fantasy (white). Semi-dwarf types, with a mature height of five to twelve feet, making good patio trees, include Acoma (white), Tonto (red), Hopi (pink), and Caddo (bubblegum pink). Dwarf cultivars, less than five feet, include Delta Blush (light pink), New Orleans (purple), and Petite Red Imp.

Bulbs or tubers which can be planted include agapanthus, blackberry lily, clivia, gloriosa lily, achimenes, crinum, flag iris, Louisiana iris, and Japanese iris. Gladiolus bulbs may also be set out now. They only require nine weeks to bloom from time of planting and make great cut flowers.

Keep spent blooms on roses and butterfly bushes cut. Understand that cutting flowers not only gives you cut flowers for the home, it is good for the plants and will give you more flowers in the long run.

Poison ivy is out in full leaf now. So now is a good time to work on its control. Carefully directed sprays of glyphosate herbicides will help considerably. Don't spray when rain is expected within six hours. Keep the spray off the leaves or green bark of desirable plants, though, so that the desirable plants will not be damaged. Glyphosate is not a selective herbicide. They will be absorbed by green tissue on any plant. For larger vines growing up trees, carefully cut the vines at their base. The portion that's up the tree will die. As the base of the vine resprouts over the summer, spray the sprouts.

Most of your vegetable harvest will come to an end by July. Then it's a good idea to remove old plant debris so as not to leave diseased or insect-infested plants in the garden area. If you've had nematode problems in your vegetable garden this year, you may wish to try soil solarization. After removing all the plant debris, till the garden area thoroughly. Moisten the soil well and cover with clear plastic film. Seal the edges with soil. Leave the cover on for six weeks. The buildup of heat under the cover may reduce the nematode populations.

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