

## May in the Tallahassee Garden



Photos by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: *Caladiums* and *Strobilanthes*.

Katherine LaRosa is a Master Gardener volunteer and a member of the University of Florida IFAS Leon County Extension Advisory Committee , <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu>

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**M**ay is typically a dry month for us. The March and April drought, along with April's higher temperatures, has already stressed plants. So proper irrigation practices are critical now.

Many newly installed plants are lost each spring because of insufficient watering. Plants installed this spring will need special attention with almost daily slow soakings directed directly over the rootball of the plants. Trying to water the plants with a sprinkler system which covers a large area usually doesn't adequately wet the rootball and wastes water.

Established plants don't need frequent watering. Only water them when they show signs of wilt. But when you water, do it deeply, applying three-quarters of an inch of water. Two steps will help you irrigate wisely. First, use a rain gauge to keep track of rainfall in your yard. Second, determine how long it takes your sprinkler or irrigation system to apply three-quarters of an inch of water by checking with the rain gauge or straight-sided cans. The goal is to water deeply enough to thoroughly wet the root zone, a depth of six to eight inches.

Shrubs and Trees: If whiteflies are a problem, spray with insecticidal soap according to label directions. Never spray when a large number of adult whiteflies are present. Instead, wait ten to twelve days until most of the adult whiteflies have disappeared. This allows the eggs to hatch and the young to be killed by the spray before they can cause much damage. Pruning of spring flowering shrubs should be completed as needed this month. Young crape myrtles can be fertilized now.

Annuals and Perennials: As cool-season annuals like pansies, snapdragons, and petunias begin to suffer in the heat, replace them with heat-resistant summer flowering annuals such as impatiens, coleus, salvia, marigolds, torenia, verbena, and ornamental peppers. Sow seeds of cleome, cosmos and zinnias. Also plant buddleia (butterfly bush), purple coneflowers, *Scaevola aemula*, (fanflower), melampodium, chrysanthemums, narrow-leaved zinnias, angelonia (summer snapdragon) and gaillardia. Plant globe amaranth in the hottest, driest part of the landscape. Use Strobilanthes to add colorful foliage in shaded areas.

Bulbs, Corms, Rhizomes and Tubers: Plant elephant ears, caladium tubers, dahlias, ginger, crinum, iris, society

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garlic, red-hot-poker, daylilies and canna lilies. Planting in heavy shade should be avoided because it will cause thin, spindly growth and poor foliage color and flowering. Plant ornamental sweet potatoes in hanging baskets and containers or in the ground at least three feet apart.

Lawn Care: Fertilize your lawn, if needed, using a fertilizer such as 15-0-15, 15-5-15 , or similar analysis. Use at the rate of ½ pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. This would be 3 1/3 pounds of 15-0-15 fertilizer per 1,000 sq. ft. If the 15-0-15 fertilizer has at least 7.5% water-insoluble or slow-release nitrogen, then you can use 6 pounds per 1,000 sq. ft. Be sure to water in well. To avoid stressing your grass, mow centipede grass no lower than one and one-half to two inches. St. Augustine and bahiagrass generally should be cut to a height of three to four inches.

Edibles: Plant sweet potatoes, melons, pole beans, southern peas, butter beans, peanuts, mustard, green onions, and okra. Fertilize all vegetables monthly, or if using slow release fertilizer, apply as directed. To prevent blossom-end rot in tomatoes, try to maintain consistent moisture levels. Keep fruits (except citrus) well mulched, especially figs and blueberries. Fertilize citrus this month. Fertilize young figs and grapes monthly through July.

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