Create a Tropical Paradise in Your Backyard

As climate shifts happen on the global level, local changes are also occurring; most noticeably warmer temperatures throughout the year. Sweltering summers and mild winters may mean a new palette of plants for our area. Unfortunately, it may also mean that we will lose those plants that the Tallahassee area is already on the edge of being too warm for. But the good news is that some of the exotic tropical plants of central and south Florida may be introduced to our landscapes with greater ease.

North Florida is known for our majestic live oak lined streets, dogwoods dotted throughout most yards, and swaths of brightly blooming azaleas bringing in spring and pushing away those winter greys. So with all of these old north Florida plants, how can a tropical look be introduced to our gardens? It is easier than you may think. There are many different annuals, perennials, and evergreens that will not only bring that tropical look to the garden but will also look natural among our old favorites.

The main aspects of a tropical look are big texture, big blooms, and big color. All of these can be achieved in both sun and shade gardens. The big texture may be the easiest, considering all of the options. Gingers, hostas, coleus, alternanthera, fountain grass, potato vine, Persian shield, and cordyline are just a few plants that sport those various textures involved in tropical gardening. Most of those are annuals or perennials which die down during winter. But evergreens weigh in big with the split-leaf philodendrons, fatsias, Chinese mahonias, bottlebrush, bananas, irises, agaves, and aloes! All of these grow beautifully in our area.

The big blooms of the tropics are hard to pass up for any gardener and adding them to existing landscapes is simple. With their big blooms of bright colors, tropical hibiscus may be the most popular of flowering annuals. But don't forget there are perennial versions with blooms the size of dinner plates and they come back year after year! If you are looking for a summer vine to ramble along a fence or climb a trellis then try mandevillas, allamandas or coral honeysuckles.

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and trumpet creepers which do double duty as hummingbird attractors! Other big bloomers include ixoras, jatrophas, angel wing begonias, durantas, angel trumpets, and the list goes on and on and on.

With a combination of textures and blooms, you can achieve the big color needed for that tropical feel. Try adding these plants to both existing landscapes and new beds. If you do not want to commit to a tropical feel year-round or year after year, the effect can also be accomplished through container gardening. Fill a large container with a banana, dark-leaf coleus and lime green potato vine for an instant look! The feel of the tropics can easily be brought to your back yard through the use of these and many other plant selections. Be sure to visit your local garden center for specific advice and design ideas to ensure success in creating that paradise to relax in this summer!

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