May in the Tallahassee Garden

Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: Crossandra is among summer-friendly flowers that can be planted now.

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Right Plant, Right Place
As they decline over the next few months, replace fading winter annuals like pansies, snapdragons, and even petunias with summer-friendly choices. These include: Summer Wave torenia, zinnias, marigolds, vincas, salvias, purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), gaillardia, melampodium, crossandra, verbena, canna lilies, and society garlic. Plant these in a sunny location for best results. Society garlic has the added advantage of being deer-resistant.

Sun-loving vines that can be planted now are: mandevilla, coral honeysuckle, cross vine, trumpet creeper, sweet potato vine, hyacinth bean, and moonflower. Consider planting tropicals for great color and fast growth, but be prepared to treat them as annuals here. Try bougainvillea, hibiscus, and allamanda in a sunny location.

Plant perennial peanut (*Arachis glabrata*) if you’re looking for a groundcover for a sunny slope. It requires little maintenance once it is established. Also, this is a good time to select daylilies for planting; they are in bloom this month so you can be sure to get the colors you prefer. Be sure to choose a spot where they get at least six hours of sun and consider planting a grouping of one color for a more dramatic effect.

Vegetables that you may wish to plant this month include: sweet potatoes, melons, pole beans, butterbeans, mustard, green onions and okra. You may continue to set out tomato transplants now. Add basil and dill to your herb garden this month. Vegetables and herbs require a sunny location with well-drained soil.
In filtered sunlight you can plant elephant ears and gingers. In a shady area try begonias, impatiens, and jacobinias. Light requirements for caladiums and irises vary by type so be certain to check before purchasing.

**Water Wisely**
Temperatures are rising and May is typically one of our drier months, so it’s time to get serious about watering. Many new plants are lost because of insufficient watering. Remember that new plants only have roots in an area the size of the rootball that was in the pot. So be sure to direct water to that area. If the rootball gets too dry, the plant can wilt and even die. Water directly over the root ball every day or two. Water the lawn and other large areas in early morning when less water is lost to evaporation and more is absorbed by plants. Consider setting several straight-sided cans around your yard when you water to measure the water and make sure that you’re not watering too little, or too much. If you apply one-half inch of water per application, you may find that you only need to water the lawn or more established plants as infrequently as once a week.

**Fertilize Appropriately**
Annual flowers and roses will benefit from a monthly dose of fertilizer. Fertilize sparingly using a 15-0-15 product unless you have had a soil test showing that you need to add phosphorus. This same fertilizer can be used on vegetables and herbs too. Fertilize daylilies lightly when buds appear. Fertilize citrus this month as well as young figs and grapes.

**Mulch**
As the weather heats up mulch becomes even more important. It retards weeds and keeps the soil cool and moist. Use chopped leaves from your yard for a free and environmentally friendly mulch. If these aren’t available, you may buy pine straw or bark from local garden centers.

**Maintenance**
Deadhead flowering annuals and roses for increased blooming. Stake tall plants like shrimp plant, gladiolus, dahlias and lilies before they bloom. Finish pruning spring flowering plants like azaleas this month. Gardenias and oakleaf hydrangeas may be pruned as soon as they finish flowering. Remove seedpods from daylilies after blooming.

**Wildlife**
To attract butterflies and hummingbirds, plant butterfly bush, purple coneflower, verbena, lantana, firebush, plumbago, shrimp plant and pentas. All prefer a sunny location. Keep bird baths clean and filled, especially during dry weather.

As always, there is no shortage of projects for the landscape, but just choose those plants and tasks that appeal to you and enjoy!

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