

July in the Tallahassee Garden



Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: 'Brazilian Red Hots' alternanthera can provide quick color in a lightly shaded spot in the garden.

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Heat and humidity are the norm in July, so try to garden early in the morning or during the late afternoon and evening. Take frequent breaks, drink lots of water, and don't forget to apply mosquito repellent and sunscreen.

Right Plant, Right Place

Select crape myrtles while they are in bloom. Be sure to choose a variety that will still fit the location when the tree is mature. They range from dwarf varieties that are under five feet tall to very large varieties which exceed twenty feet in height. Possible flower colors include white, lavender, pink and red. Other plants to choose this month for a sunny location include: chaste tree, golden rain tree, hibiscus, butterfly bush (*Buddleia*), crossvine (*Bignonia capreolata*), pineapple sage (*Salvia elegans*), bee balm (*Monarda didyma*), periwinkle (*Vinca*), lantana, melampodium, zinnias, coneflowers, blue daze, African bulbine and pentas. Vegetables and fruits to plant in full sun this month include: fig trees, eggplant, peppers, cherry tomatoes, okra, pumpkins, squash and melons.

Shade loving or shade tolerant plants to consider planting this month are: hydrangeas, *Alternanthera* 'Brazilian Red Hots', *Jacobinia*, begonias, *torenia*s, coleus, Mondo grass, southern wood fern, Christmas fern, and holly fern.

Water

July is typically a wet month, but it's important to monitor the amount of rain that we receive. New plants can dry out and die very quickly under the July sun. Use your finger to check the moisture in the rootball of the new plant, not in the surrounding soil. Water early in the day to reduce evaporation. Infrequent, deeper watering is best for established plants as it promotes deeper roots. Consider using a rain gauge to measure rainfall and a

rain barrel to collect water for beds and potted plants. Plants will need frequent watering until they are well-established.

Fertilizer

Do not fertilize your lawn this month. If your lawn looks yellow, an application of iron may be beneficial. Do fertilize annuals, herbs, and vegetables monthly, and monitor for pests. Palms may be fertilized this month with a product specific to palms. Fertilize blueberries in late July using an azalea/camellia product. Always follow label directions carefully.

Mulch

Mulching is especially important in hot weather. It helps the soil to retain moisture, keeps roots cooler, and discourages weeds. Just be sure to pull the mulch away from the trunk of all plants to avoid rotting.

Maintenance

Raise the height of your mower this month, if you haven't already. The recommended mowing height for centipede grass is one and a half to two inches, for St. Augustine two and a half to four inches (depends on variety), for Bermuda three quarters to one and a half inches, and for zoysia one and a half to two inches. Cutting grass too short stresses it which makes it more susceptible to pests and disease.

Prune hydrangeas and gardenias after they finish blooming, but do not prune azaleas or camellias now, since they have already started setting blooms for next spring. Cut back leggy annuals now, and fertilize with a slow release product. Deadhead annual and perennial flowers to encourage more blooms.

Wildlife

Cultivate plants like fire bush and shrimp plant to attract birds, hummingbirds, and butterflies. Consider a brush pile to give birds and small animals a place to hide from predators. Check bird baths and other water sources often, keeping them clean and filled. Feeders need to be kept clean as well. Mold and mildew can form in a hurry in the summer.

This is the time of year when only the die hard gardeners are out there. A little work each week will keep the weeds from taking over and will prevent loss of expensive plants.

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