

August in the Tallahassee Garden



Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: Croton is among heat-tolerant plants that can be planted now.

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In the midst of the blistering summer heat I sometimes look outside from the comfort of my air-conditioned house and marvel that all my plants have not shriveled up and died. They must be tougher than me is all I can conclude.

In the relative (ha!) cool of the evening, walk through your garden and check on your charges. Are they getting enough water? Keep an eye out for marauders; correctly identify the pest and take action early before you have a big problem. Notice if the annuals need deadheading or the perennials need a haircut. Many straggly plants can be cut back and fertilized to encourage re-blooming in the fall. Some of these include begonias, coneflowers, impatiens, marigolds, salvia and zinnias. Limit the addition of new plants to those that are the most heat tolerant such as coleus, croton, lantana, melampodium, salvia and vinca.

Have the weeds taken over a bed? A day or two after a good rain, when the ground has absorbed the water and softened a little, get out and do some weeding. Pull them before they set seed and you will have fewer weeds next year. Notice, I do not say you will eliminate them. Weeds are job security for a gardener. They make sure you feel needed. Also you will burn many calories pulling and digging them.

In the vegetable garden you can begin preparing for fall planting. You may still have some of your summer crop - okra, southern peas, winter squash or sweet potatoes and watermelon. Some gardeners like a clean slate. Pull everything up and start from scratch. But you can also leave crops in some beds while preparing other beds to plant. Cool-season vegetables to plant this month from seed are broccoli, collards, bunch and multiplier onions, and turnips, according to *Vegetable Gardening in Florida* by James M. Stephens.

Also you can still plant seeds of such warm-season vegetables as beans, corn, southern peas, summer and winter squash or how about a pumpkin for Halloween! Compost, manure and leaf mold are always good to add to beds, but before you add any specific nutrients it is a good idea to do a soil sample test. Some beds that have been farmed for years often have plenty of phosphorus and potassium. Your local extension office at 615 Paul Russell Road has everything you need including instructions on how to take a soil sample and where to send it.

I recommend watching the grass grow. It is too hot to do anything else. Monitor for disease and pests and treat early. Following good cultural practices is the best way to prevent problems. Mow at the right height, three to four inches for St. Augustine and one and a half to two inches for centipede. Mow often so that you are removing no more than one third of the grass blade. Keep mower blades sharp and leave grass clippings on the lawn for fertilizer. Be careful not to over-water and over-fertilize.

After you have worked up a good sweat, go sit on the screened porch and drink some iced tea or coffee. Turn on the fan and let the cool air blow across your face while you relish that mingled feeling of tiredness and pride in a job well done.

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