

March in the Tallahassee Garden



Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: Mandevilla is a vine that thrives in the summer heat and humidity.

Elizabeth Schmidt is a Master Gardener volunteer with the University of Florida IFAS Extension in Leon County, <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu> Send your gardening questions to Ask-a-MasterGardener@leoncountyfl.gov

Thursday, May 5, 2011
Tallahassee Democrat

Plant

It can be challenging to find plants that will survive the heat and humidity of a Tallahassee summer. Some good choices for sunny areas include melampodium, butterfly bush (*Buddleia*), pentas, skullcap (*Scutellaria baicalensis*), yellow bells (*Tecoma stans*), salvias, and angel's trumpet. Hardy, low-maintenance perennials to consider are purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) and daylilies. When choosing daylilies, select early, mid and late season bloomers for continuous color. Yellow African bulbine (*Bulbine frutescens*) is another great choice for season-long yellow and orange flowers. It is drought-tolerant once established, has attractive bright green blade-like foliage and looks great in a bed or border.

It's time to replace your fading winter and spring annuals with summer-friendly varieties. Trailing torenia and narrow-leaf zinnia (*Zinnia angustifolia*) are among the best. Ornamental peppers can also be a standout in a flowerbed with their tiny multi-colored peppers which last all season. Other possibilities include blue daze, portulaca, and verbena.

If you are interested in native plants, oakleaf hydrangeas (*Hydrangea quercifolia*) and Southern magnolias are two good choices. Plant hydrangeas in part sun, part shade for optimal flowering. They have beautiful white panicles which can be left to dry in place after they fade. Southern magnolias can range from twenty-five to sixty feet or more tall, depending on the cultivar, so choose accordingly. Plant in full sun to partial shade.

If you need vines, consider mandevilla, hyacinth bean, scarlet runner bean, and butterfly vine (*Mascagnia macroptera*). Among tropical shrubs to try are firebush, cestrum, thyralis, Turk's

cap, hibiscus, and allamanda. Many tropicals are treated as annuals here but will bloom constantly until the first frost. Others, such as firebush, will come back reliably each spring.

For great foliage color, try caladiums. They come in a wide range of color combinations, and varieties are available for sun or shade. They're a great choice in areas that are not sunny enough for most flowering plants. Plants that provide foliage color in sun are crotons and sweet potato vine. For shadier areas try coleus, stromanthe (*Stromanthe sanguinea*), Persian shield (*Strobilanthes dyeranus*) and shell ginger (*Alpinia zerumbet*).

Continue to set out tomato transplants this month. Choose sturdy plants with no flowers or fruit and plant in full sun in well-drained soil. Water well and mulch. Plant warm weather herbs like basil and dill now.

Maintenance

Prune spring flowering shrubs, such as azaleas, this month before new buds begin to set for next year.

Newly planted shrubs and trees can dry out in a hurry when temperatures rise. Don't depend on lawn irrigation systems. Water the root ball of plants by hand or consider soaker hoses or a micro-irrigation system. They are generally more efficient for watering beds and borders. Don't overwater your lawn. Water deeply once per week during dry spells.

Lightly fertilize vegetables, herbs and annuals monthly. Fertilize daylilies when buds appear. Fertilize citrus and palms this month with a product specific to each. Fertilize young figs and grapes. Typically, mature trees and shrubs do not need to be fertilized. Overfertilizing encourages excessive growth and results in more trimming and pruning for you. If you haven't fertilized your lawn this spring, you may still fertilize now with a 15-0-15 product. Make sure that half of the nitrogen is in slow release form.

Be on the lookout for pest and insect damage as temperatures heat up and insects become more active. A weekly walk through your landscape can head off more severe damage later. Use greener solutions first (insecticidal soap, horticultural oils) before resorting to regular pesticides.

Mulch is important this month as weed germination and growth increase. Bare soil equals weeds.

There is much to do before the dog days of summer descend but a little planning and prevention now will pay off later.

###