



The Cutting Edge

Master Gardener Vision “*to be the most trusted resource for horticultural education in Florida*”

2266 N. Temple Ave., Starke, 904.966.6299 Email: lcompton@ufl.edu

Ah, Spring!

I was sitting on the back deck the other night, enjoying the evening smells and sounds, when I heard something I haven't heard in years on my property— a whippoorwill! How delightful to hear that sound again, and, for me, a sure sign of spring! Whippoorwills and bobwhite quail used to be plentiful in Florida, but they are declining in numbers and researchers have been unable to find a specific source of the problem. To learn more about quail, see the “Do You Know?” section on page 2, along with the planting calendars on pages 2, 3 and 4. If you went to the Kanapaha Spring Festival this year, you saw lots of bromeliads— maybe you even bought some! Take a look at pages 6 and 7 for more information on different types of bromeliads that will do well in your house or landscape. Now that spring is in the air, we are bound to see some aphids taking advantage of that lovely new growth on our plants. Check out the article on page 5 for more info on these plant pests. And our Master Gardener Spring Fling and Plant Sale will be on Saturday, March 21st. Read more about it on page 8. And remember: “To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow”.
Happy Gardening!

Laurie

Lyreleaf Sage

You more than likely have lyreleaf sage (*salvia lyrata*) growing in your lawn right this minute! This wildflower makes a great evergreen groundcover, with somewhat ajuga-like foliage and showy blue flowers in spring. It will reseed easily in loose, sandy soils and can form a solid cover with regular watering. It even takes mowing and can be walked on.

The exposed lower lip of this and other salvias provides an excellent landing platform for bees. When a bee lands, the two stamens are tipped, and the insect is doused with pollen. As winter turns to spring these purplish plants send up flower stalks which split into three stems, each with multiple long, thin, small light violet/purple flowers. Being in the mint family, the flower stem is square. Young lyreleaf sages have a weak, somewhat minty flavor when young. It is good in salads or in cooked dishes where a bit of mint flavor is wanted. After it flowers the dried plant can be used to make a weak mint tea.



Like all mints, it can be very invasive. To control it, mow before it goes to seed.

Laurie

What to Plant in April

Spring is here, so it is pretty safe to go ahead with spring planting. Annuals to plant include alyssum, baby's breath, coleus, portulaca, and sweet William. For bulbs try allium, Amazon lily, caladium, canna, crinum, and blood lily. If you like herbs, plant some that love the heat, like basil, oregano, sage, Mexican tarragon and rosemary. April is a busy time in the vegetable garden and a transition time between cool and warm season vegetables. You can still plant collards, mustard and turnips, but also try beans, sweet corn, cucumbers, eggplant, okra, southern peas, peppers, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, squash, tomatoes and watermelon.



Sage

What to Do in April

As cool season crops come to a close, consider allowing some of the cold crops like broccoli to go to bloom. The flowers are great at attracting bees which help in the pollination of your crops. In addition to honeybees, bumblebees are also good pollinators and will fly when it's colder so they are a plus for early spring gardens. Start fertilizing citrus trees using a citrus fertilizer. They are heavy feeders and most people have a tendency to under-fertilize. That doesn't mean over-fertilize them! Just follow the label directions. Fertilize lawns when they begin to grow; mid April is usually a good time. Choose a lawn fertilizer with little or no phosphorous, unless a soil test indicates a need for it.



Bolting broccoli

Source: http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/lawn_and_garden/calendar/

Wildlife Calendar April

- Bobwhite quail nest now through September.
- Hummingbirds feed on blooms of columbine, buckeye, and others.
- Beginning of sea turtle nesting season on Florida beaches..
- Grosbeaks, warblers, tanagers, orioles, and thrashers begin returning to North America

Source: http://www.wec.ufl.edu/extension/wildlife_info/happenings/april.php

Did You Know? Bobwhite quail are the only native quail in the east.

Its whistled "bob-white!" call is a familiar sound in spring in farmlands and brushy pastures. The birds are heard more often than seen; although not especially shy, they often keep within dense low cover. During fall and winter, bobwhites live in coveys, averaging about a dozen birds. At night they roost on the ground in circles, tails pointed inward, heads pointed out. Quail have disappeared from much of the northern part of its range, and has declined seriously even in more southern areas. The causes for these declines are not well understood. At northern edge of range, many may be killed by unusually harsh winters, but this does not explain its widespread vanishing act.



Bobwhite Quail

Laurie

What to Plant in May

Replace cool season plants with those that can take the heat. Bulb-type plants for May include achimenes, allium, alstroemeria, daylily, gladiolus, walking iris, and watsonia. Don't forget perennials for adding easy color. Salvias, coneflowers, bulbine, stokesia, gaura, firecracker plant, firebush and firespike are all great at providing color and are less maintenance than many annuals. Southern vegetable favorites that can be planted in May include southern peas, sweet potatoes and okra.



Achimenes

What to Do in May

Prune back tall growing perennials to control height. This also helps to remove aphids on plants like guara; the plants will flush back out and re-bloom. Harvest blueberries in May and June. Visit some of the U-pick growers if you are not growing your own. Refer to www.floridaagriculture.com/consumers/upick.htm to find local growers. Harvest peaches, nectarines, plums and strawberries as soon as they are ready to beat the birds and other critters. . If you didn't do it in April, apply a lawn fertilizer (not a weed and feed) without phosphorous unless a soil test indicates the need for it. *Source http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/lawn_and_garden/calendar/*



"Flordabest" Peach

Wildlife Calendar May

- Painted Buntings nest through summer in northeast Florida.
- Bald eagles begin migrating north.
- Alligators begin to court and make loud resounding 'bellows'.
- Soft-shell and alligator snapping turtles complete egg laying.
- American lotus bloom at Paynes Prairies State Preserve

Source: http://www.wec.ufl.edu/extension/wildlife_info/happenings/



Florida Soft Shell Turtle

Did You Know? The Florida softshell is the largest of the New World softshell turtles but has the most Old World characteristics: relatively large size, tolerance for brackish water, and longitudinally wrinkled carapace. Resembling big leathery pancakes, the adults are brownish-green or tan with blotches on their skin. Their shells are covered with skin, and are soft around the edges. Their noses are long and round. When they swim, they stay underwater and stick their nose up to breathe, like a snorkel. These turtles are capable of pharyngeal breathing, meaning they can bypass lung breathing by taking in oxygen and releasing carbon dioxide through a membrane that lines the throat, creating a direct gas exchange within the water. Other reptiles and amphibians are capable of similar gas exchanges. Pharyngeal breathing is very important as a hibernation strategy. *Source: Smithsonian Zoological Park*

What to Plant in June

Keep replacing cool season plants with ones that like the heat. Annuals for June include blue daze, celosia, exacum, hollyhock, impatiens, kalanchoe, and milkweed. To keep your annuals blooming nicely, fertilize monthly with a standard fertilizer with nitrogen and potassium, but low phosphorous (middle number) or use a slow release fertilizer that will last all summer into fall. Bulb-type plants for June include Aztec lily, daylily, gladiolus, and walking iris. Vegetables to plant include lima beans, eggplant, okra, peanuts, southern peas, and sweet potatoes.



Kalanchoe

What to Do in June

Side dress vegetables with a 6-6-6 or 10-10-10 to keep them productive by placing fertilizer in a band 1” deep and 6 to 8” away from plants. Keep lawn fertilizers away from the root zone of palms. Control lubber grasshoppers when they are young. They will congregate on a plant when young and can be handpicked and dropped into soapy water or rubbing alcohol. Plant or plug lawns now to fill in cold damaged areas. Do not plant new sod on top of old sod. This is a bad practice that will lead to disease problems.



Young lubber grasshopper

Source: http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/lawn_and_garden/calendar/

Wildlife Calendar June

- Red bats and Seminole bats give birth.
- It's the height of the gopher tortoise breeding season.
- Snook begin moving into inlets and passes.
- Tarflowers bloom in flatwoods
- It's breeding season for laughing gulls, least terns, oystercatchers, and black skimmers. They nest on spoil islands, undisturbed beaches, and even rooftops when their preferred habitat is unavailable



Tarflower

Did You Know? Tarflower (*Bejaria racemosa*), is a beautiful plant of Florida's scrub and pine flatland areas. It's a large wildflower or good-sized shrub in the Ericaceae, or heath, family. The flower is distinctive, with its 7 pinkish white petals, completely free (i.e., not joined together), arrayed around those central pistils. The common name gives a good idea of its strategy to deter nectar snatchers (ants, houseflies, etc., who might be tempted to take its nectar without “paying” for it—that is, without performing the pollination services for which plants evolved their nectar-facilitated reproductive strategy): it traps free-loaders with a sticky secretion from the hairs on the stems.

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/IntoNatureFilms/posts/1648350768710617>

What's Buggin' You

Attack of the Aphids! Aphids, also known as “plant lice” may infest almost any plant. They are commonly found on camellia, crape-myrtle, gardenia, hibiscus, oak, oleander, ornamental grasses, palm, rose, as well as nearly all annual and vegetable plants. There are many different types of aphids: crape myrtle aphids, melon aphids, peach aphids and brown citrus aphids, coriander aphids and wooly oak aphids, to name a few. All aphids have one thing in common; piercing-sucking mouthparts that damage the plant by sucking the plant juices. Some aphids can transmit plant viruses that are Actually more harmful than the feeding damage.



A colony of cabbage aphids on cabbage.



Adults, nymphs and cast skin of the crapemyrtle aphid

All aphids are soft bodied pear-shaped insects generally less than 1/8 inch long. They may be green, black, brown, pink, yellow, blue or creamy-white in color. Most are wingless but when colonies get overcrowded or host plants get eaten up, winged forms are produced which establish new colonies. Usually found on stems or undersides of young leaves, most aphids feed on new plant growth, making the leaves curl or crinkle and flower buds may become hardened, causing the flowers to be distorted.

These pests are unique in two ways: almost all are females that reproduce without mating, and most give birth to live young instead of laying eggs. Aphids reproduce rapidly and there are many generations per year. Each female aphid produces 50 to 100 daughters during her life span and each daughter can reproduce within 6 to 8 days.

Aphids as well as soft scales, mealybugs, and whiteflies excrete large amounts of feces (often called honeydew) which provides an excellent medium for the growth of a black fungus called “sooty mold.” Besides being unattractive, sooty mold may interfere with photosynthesis and slow plant growth. Sooty mold usually weathers away following control of an insect infestation. Ants feed on the honeydew and when ants are observed, plants should be examined closely for these sucking pests.



Sooty mold

Some beneficial insects that will help control aphids include lady beetles (adults and larvae), hover fly larvae, assassin bugs, ambush bugs and spiders. Homeowners can remove aphids and keep populations below damaging levels by spraying their landscape plants with a forceful stream of water. Use a garden hose with an adjustable nozzle and spray undersides of leaves and stems when the aphids appear. Soaps are available that are formulated for controlling insects and related pests. If one of the commercial soaps is unavailable, 3 tablespoons of dishwashing liquid (not one containing a degreaser or automatic dishwashing soap or detergent) per gallon of water may be applied as a foliar spray to woody plants. Use 2 tablespoons for bedding, foliage and flowering plants. Repeat at weekly intervals as needed. Soap is effective in controlling aphids, safe for people and the environment.

Laurie

Bromeliads



Aechmea chantinii

If you haven't considered bromeliads for houseplants, or in the landscape, maybe this article will inspire you to try them! Bromeliads are standouts for their bold, often colorful leaves, the exotic flower spikes that many produce, and their easy maintenance.

Most bromeliads are tropical or subtropical and can be grown outdoors in frost-free areas of Florida. The potted bromeliads in my garden, which are mostly bilbergia, neoregelia and achmea, stay outdoors during the winter with no ill effects. However, the recommendation for North Florida is to grow them in containers and bring them in when frost threatens. Bromeliads can be grown indoors as houseplants in any space that receives bright, diffused light but not direct sun, including covered porches.

One of the main things to consider when choosing a bromeliad is the amount of light your spot receives. The amount of light can affect a bromeliad's leaf color, leaf shape, and growth rate. Light levels that are too low for the variety leads to leaves that are long, thin, and greener in color. Light levels that are too high makes leaves grow shorter, thicker, and lighter in color. Bromeliads come from a wide range of environments, from areas with deep shade to full sun, so chances are good that you can find one suitable for your site.

Moisture is also important. Bromeliads absorb water and nutrients mainly through their leaves and through the cups at the base of their leaves. Many bromeliads are from tropical areas and prefer high humidity conditions. However, take care not to overwater since they don't like wet feet.



Ananas comosus variegata



Aechmea Del Mar

Compared to other garden plants, bromeliads have limited root systems that serve mainly as anchors for the plant. In their native habitat, many bromeliads grow on trees as epiphytes, or air plants, taking their moisture and nutrients from the atmosphere and the debris that decays in their "cups." They are not parasites and will not harm the plants to which they are attached. It is best to provide them with a loose, well-drained potting mix, for example: one part peat, one part bark, and one part coarse sand.

Although the bromeliad is a fairly pest-free plant, scale and mealy bug insects can sometimes be a problem. If you're growing bromeliads outdoors, you should periodically flush the natural cups

that collect water at the base of the leaf rosettes. These can be a breeding ground for mosquitoes. There are thousands of different bromeliads that come in an array of shapes and sizes and work in many light conditions, so you're bound to find a variety that can work for you.



Bilbergia nutans

More than 28 different genera have been named so far, including these garden favorites:

Aechmea (page 6): Often called urn plants because of their upright, vase-like shape. The leaves are typically colorful and have small spines along the edges, and the plants can produce colorful flower spikes that can last from a few weeks to six months.

The Del Mar cultivar has bright light green leaves that are broad and leathery, but the most stunning characteristic of the Del Mar is its flower spike. The flower spike is hot pink rising above the foliage in the middle. On the end of the flower spike are brilliant bluish-purple bracts. This cultivar grows to about a foot high and thrives in light shade



Cryptanthus bivittatus 'Ruby'



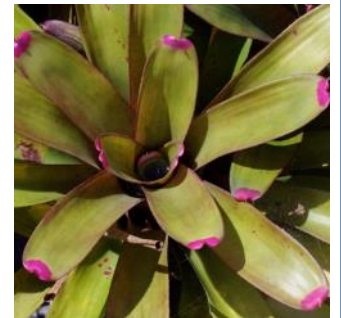
Guzmania Hilda

Ananas:(page 6) This genus has thin leaves and includes the commercially grown pineapple plant, *Ananas comosus* 'Smooth Cayenne'. Other popular cultivars include *A. comosus* 'Sugar Loaf', which is smaller than 'Smooth Cayenne' and produces extremely sweet, juicy fruit, and *A. comosus* var. *variegata*, which has creamy white and pale green striped leaves and has fruit that starts out bright pink

Billbergia:(page 6) These bromeliads have a tall, narrow vase shape, spiny-edged leaves and are widely grown by gardeners. They can spread easily through garden beds if grown in the right conditions. They can also be grown in trees, which is how they are found in nature.

Cryptanthus: Plants in this genus are commonly known as earth stars because of their flat growth and wavy-edged leaves. They are popular with many bromeliad enthusiasts, with more than a thousand hybrids. One of the most widely grown is *Cryptanthus bivittatus*.

Guzmania: Common as houseplants, *Guzmania* bromeliads typically have smooth, green leaves and showy flower spikes. Some species are hardy enough to be grown outdoors in frost-free areas.



Neoregelia:



Tillandsia

Neoregelia: These bromeliads are grown primarily for their showy foliage with bright colors and interesting patterns, and they are among the most widely hybridized types of bromeliads. Small flowers appear inconspicuously inside of the leaf cup when the plants bloom. These bromeliads are sometimes called "painted fingernail" for the pink markings on their leaves.

Tillandsia: Including Spanish moss, ball moss and the pineapple, this genus is the largest, most diverse and widely distributed genus in the bromeliad family. Most of these are epiphytes, meaning they draw moisture from the air and often grow on other plants. One popular species is *T. cyanea*, which produces pretty flower spikes and is often sold as a gift plant.

2016 Master Gardener Spring Fling and Plant Sale Saturday, May 21st, 9 am to Noon

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