



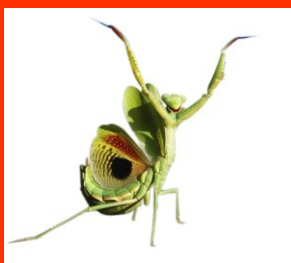
# Backyard Gardener



UF/IFAS EXTENSION, VOLUSIA COUNTY OCTOBER 2014

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## Fall Vegetable Gardening in Central Florida

Joe Sowards

UF/IFAS Extension, Volusia County Extension

For folks who have been in Florida a while, you probably already know this; fall is a great time to grow a variety of fruits and vegetables. You should see our “work-in-progress” garden here at the Extension Office. It is part of our larger project to completely re-landscape the grounds here. It will truly be an educational and demonstration landscape where people can get all kinds of ideas about how to become more “Florida Friendly” in their own landscapes.



The “edible landscape” part of our landscape is not only productive but it, as with the rest of the landscape, is a place where you can visit to learn about various growing methods including hydroponic vegetables, raised beds, traditional row crop gardening and much more.

There are many interesting varieties of common vegetables such as green rad-

ishes, purple kohlrabi, striped tomatoes and purple beans, just to name a few. Already, we are ready to harvest our first crop of Romaine lettuce that was grown hydroponically. It took 3 weeks from the time it was planted to harvest! We are also harvesting zucchini, Bibb lettuce and soon will be harvesting radishes, beets, cucumbers, tomatoes and various types of squash.

We are still actively building more planting beds and will be planting more of everything in addition to herbs. We will also be demonstrating various ways to protect your crops in the event of cold temperatures. Also, there will be low-volume irri-



gation throughout. So, you see, fall vegetable gardening can be quite productive.

Vegetable gardening in the fall is easier

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because temperatures are cooler (obviously), pest pressures are reduced and rainfall is usually more predictable (although you wouldn't think that this year!). Plant availability is usually pretty good and many seed suppliers now sell fruits and vegetables specifically for fall gardens.

### **Variety is.....**

The number of different things that can still be successfully planted in the fall garden is vast. Ideally, you should start planting the fall garden in late August/



early September but, you still have plenty of time to plant lots of things. The list includes: broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, Chinese cabbage, collards, kale, kohlrabi, lettuce (all kinds), mustard, onions (bulbing), peas,

radish, spinach, strawberries, turnips, beans, cucumbers, squash, tomatoes and peppers. Keep in mind, tomatoes and peppers will definitely need protection from cold temperatures (below 40 degrees). It isn't difficult as long as you can do something to trap ground heat such as a sheet or plastic and something to keep the protective cover off the plants. If you grow hydroponically, plants will grow much more quickly and that allows you to "cheat" the seasons so, even when colder weather arrives, you may have already produced a crop. With our example, Romaine lettuce reached harvestable size (from an ordinary store-bought transplant) in just 3 weeks. That is less than half the time it takes to produce Romaine lettuce growing in conventional ways.

### **Rules Still Apply**

Of course, the basic rules of vegetable gardening still apply. Good soil, good drainage and plenty of sun are still required, just as with any other vegetable garden. Weeds can still be a challenge as Florida has many species of weeds that thrive in cooler weather as well. Florida betony, chickweed and other "winter weeds" can compete for water and nutrients so; keep an eye out for them. There are still a few insect pests you will have to monitor. Practice I.P.M. (Integrated Pest Management) and inspect your garden daily. Also, keep an eye out for fungal diseases and remove any infected leaves or plants before they infect the rest of the planting. Even though pests are somewhat

reduced when compared with the spring garden, that doesn't mean they still aren't around.

### **So, You Think You Don't Have Enough Room**

Consider gardening in containers. Containers are great because, if there is going to be a frost or freezing temperatures that might damage some tender plants like tomatoes, peppers or squash, you can bring them inside or cover them more easily. If the vegetables are in large, heavy pots, consider putting them on some kind of a roller than can be wheeled into the garage or patio where they are protected. When the weather warms up the next day, roll them back out.

Also, consider raised beds, they can be built in manageable sizes (generally, no wider than 4 ft.) and are also easy to cover when needed. Raised beds are a great way to overcome drainage problems or bad soil. They are easier to tend and, since they are usually (should be) filled with some kind of high quality artificial growing media, they have fewer soil-borne diseases and no nematodes.

Here is a tip for raised beds: plant the beds by using square foot gardening techniques. These are highly productive systems where plants are planted closely together. This makes maintenance easier and virtually eliminates weeds since there is neither room nor sun to let them grow. The University of Florida has a number of web links that can give you directions about planting the garden utilizing square foot gardening. [http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/hot\\_topics/lawn\\_and\\_garden/square\\_foot\\_garden.html](http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/hot_topics/lawn_and_garden/square_foot_garden.html)

Another option is hydroponics. There are a number of different hydroponic systems available and some can even be made at home. We have many of them on display here, at the Extension Office. Hydroponics seems complicated but, they really aren't. As long as you obey a few rules, it can be easy and rewarding. For example, in our vertical tower system, we are growing 64 heads of Romaine lettuce, 8 heads of leaf lettuce, 4 red



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cabbage, 4 green cabbage, 4 broccoli and 4 collards all in about 10 square feet! There are no weeds and most of the plants are elevated to where we won't have to bend over to harvest them. We have other examples of floating hydroponics, deep water culture and even lettuce and Swiss Chard growing in coffee cans, hydroponically. The plants are clean too since they aren't growing in soil. You can learn more about building a simple floating hydroponic garden at: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/hs184>



### Conclusion

The Florida Friendly Landscape is a way to create and maintain landscapes that use less water, less fertilizer and fewer pesticides. These are noble goals in light of looming water shortages throughout the state and the condition of our surface water bodies. Conserving and protecting our water resources is our most important goal. To me, the highest expression of "Florida Friendly Landscaping" would be to add an element of productivity to the landscape. Plant a vegetable garden. Create a raised bed or invest in a simple hydroponic garden. Instead of planting a crape myrtle, plant a peach or nectarine tree! Instead of a viburnum hedge, plant a blueberry hedge. Have a trellis covered with beans or squash instead of allamanda. You are only limited by your imagination. Our demonstration garden is a good place to start getting ideas about how you can not only have a more "Florida Friendly" landscape but, one that is, at least, somewhat productive too!

## Know Your Plants

Mary Wright

UF/IFAS Extension, Volusia County



This is the first of a new series, "Get To Know Your Agricultural Extension Agency Plants". Each newsletter, we will highlight an over looked plant; one you view every time you are visiting the Extension Agency but really don't "see" it.

The next time you park out front and walk through the main door, look to your left. There are three stately palms running parallel to SR44. The palm closest to the parking spaces is a graceful slender palm but do you know its name?

This is The Ribbon Palm - *Livistona decipiens*. This beautiful palm can be found growing from the Keys in Zone 11 all the ways up to Gainesville - zone 9A/8B. It can survive down to temperatures of 20 degrees so it is a good choice for Central Florida. The palm prefers full sun and can tolerate some shade. It will grow in a wide variety of soil conditions except soggy wetlands. And good news - members of this genus cause minimal to no allergies.

It is recommended to plant in groups of three to be more visually appealing. You will see The Ribbon Palm used all over South Florida as a beautiful background tree, along roadways and flanking entrances to developments.

The next time someone asks you, "What is a good palm to plant here?" you can tell them - *Livistona decipiens*, The Ribbon Palm!





## Musings About Geraniums

by Marty Borkosky

As we know them, the geraniums we grow as bedding plants are really not geraniums at all. Botanically, they are *Pelargoniums*. This is a distinct genera that is different from the true geraniums. And no matter what we call them, they are beautiful and getting more so all the time with propagation. They are among my favorite plants.

Today when I was working outside, the last day of August, I was thinking how many people think they will not last more than one season. Not true – with proper care in the late, hot, rainy days you can pull them through. It is true they are not happy and don't bloom well at this time, but they can make it.

If they are in pots do not let them sit in constant moisture from the rains. Take away the saucers (and stand them on their sides so the mosquitoes don't accumulate in them). (Push them back into the shade). When it is cool and dry you will need to use the saucers again.

They are strong plants. Up North people pull them from the gardens, knock off the dirt and dry them in their cool basements. They look dead but they will rejuvenate in the spring. They are sturdy and I have had them live through light snow sprinkles.

At this time they can look pretty bad. The bugs and fungus have done a number on them. The trick is to spray them with a product you would use for roses.

When I was working with them, I realized geraniums like to be clean. Take off the dead leaves and blooms. Get the weeds out of the pots and they will perk up. Water them, and give them some long lasting fertilizer and push them back out of the hot sun until it gets cooler.

Another thing I noticed this year is their growth pattern. I purchased about a dozen plants last year from the same vendor and planted them in the same location but used various pots I had available. I noticed that the plants in the bigger pots grew much bigger than the smaller pots. It seemed they grew in proportion to the size of the pots.

I would be remiss not to tell my "Girl Scout" geranium story.

Unbeknownst to me, when we lived in Warren, Ohio in the early 50's and 60's, a major revolution was going on in the geranium culture. A Mr. Behringer was working with the French type geranium called the 'Irene' Geranium. (a forerunner of our plants now.) He was a major supplier to California nurseries for this particular plant. Upon his death, David Adgate of Warren, (Elm Road Greenhouse) acquired the 'Irenes'.



As a neophyte gardener (and mother) one of my joys was to visit this nursery and purchase flowers. I was a very good customer I thought. I wanted to give my young Girl Scout Troop a love for pretty flowers too. I arranged a tour for them when the nursery was bursting with the lovely geraniums. Years later I went back to Warren for a visit and wanted to see if the nursery was still there. It was and I went in. I said to them, "remember me? I used to come in all the time." They answered, "Oh yes, you were the one that brought in all those kids." You can't win I decided (and I thought I was a really good customer!).

Fast forward to the 2000's; I found this book, "The Joy of Geraniums" by Wilson. (It is still there at the Ormond Beach Library.) In the book I found the history of the early geraniums. As I read I put it all together.

It is indeed a small world.

## **We Get Questions In The Clinic**

### **When to fertilize crepe myrtles:**

Until crepe myrtles reach maturity, they will benefit from annual fertilization. With very young trees, you may wish to fertilize twice a year and then cut back to once a year when they have begun flowering well.

The first annual fertilization should be done in early spring just as the new leaves are emerging. If it is fertilized a second time, do this two months later. Use a complete fertilizer which contains nitrogen and potassium. A fertilizer with 4-1-2 or 2-1-1 ratio should provide adequate results, but having your soil analyzed at the extension center would allow you to select the fertilizer that provides exactly what is needed. Using a slow release fertilizer will provide nutrients over a longer period of time. This will prevent overly succulent growth that may be more susceptible to insects and diseases.

**Squirrels eating the berries off my cedar tree** and breaking off the branches and strewing them on the ground.

The squirrels are using the tips of branches to line their nests and they love cedar berries. To discourage their activity, there are several solutions both good and bad.

Shooting or trap and release is useless because new squirrel families will just move in and take over. You can put out ears of corn, which they like better, and put them on fence posts. But remember that bears like ears of corn as well.

Now here's one that has some possibilities. Find somebody who has indoor cats. Beg or borrow some used cat litter and strew it on the ground under the tree. This is as good as a 'no trespassing' sign to your squirrels.

### **Jade plants have brown spots on the leaves:**

It is important to note that a jade plant is spotty to begin with, but larger brown spots may indicate a larger health issue.

There are two insect infestations common to the jade plant; red spiders and root mealy bugs. Use a magnifying glass to scout the plant. You may use an insecticide as long as it doesn't contain pyrethrin. Neem is one insecticide used in controlling spider mites and mealy bugs.

Another health issue is oedema. Oedema is a condition that means the plant is receiving too much water. In jade plants it is presented as wide brown spots and can indicate over watering or excessive rain if the plant is outdoors. Wait until your plant's leaves become thin and wrinkled before watering. Add water until it drains out the bottom of the pot. Then wait a minute and water again. Then allow the pot to drain for 15 minutes.

And yes, remove leaves that are obviously dying.

### **My house was built on muck and my plants are not doing well.**

First of all, getting a soil test done at your local extension office will help you to know what nutrients your garden needs.

Also, you may consider hydroponics or raised bed gardening for growing vegetables. *Continued on Page 6*

## **We Get Questions In The Clinic** *(Continued From Page 5)*

### **My trumpet plant leaves are turning yellow and falling off.**

Trumpet (*Brugmansia*) plants naturally lose some leaves as the plant produces new green leaves through the seasons. Like an evergreen they shed the older leaves so new ones can grow and replace them. Leaf drop can be caused by too much sun. *Brugmansias* like a bit of shade.

*Brugmansias* need a lot of water in spring and summer to produce flowers. But don't over water. Don't let them sit in water. This causes bacterial leaf spot to form. Use a fungicide (copper fungicide) to help keep it under control and keep it from spreading.

**Note:** Using a copper based fungicide can also cause leaves to drop. Better to pick off contaminated leaves and destroy them.

If there is excessive amount of leaf droppage you may be giving the plant too much nitrogen.

A pest infestation can cause leaf droppage. A miticide can be used to control broadmites and spider-mites.

You can also help your *Brugmansia* plants by keeping all leaves and fallen blossoms picked up and put out with the trash.

I have noticed the Carolina wren going up and down my trumpet plants looking for insects. It's better to pick off and pick up contaminated leaves and destroy them and let the wrens do their job than to use chemicals that would be harmful to them and the environment.

Bordeaux mix can be used to control anthracnose, a fungus (also found on tomatoes which are also in the *Solanceae* family).

## **October Calendar of Public Events**

Topic	Date	Location
Volusia Men's Garden Club—Bromeliads	October 1st	New Smyrna Beach Library
Herbs (1.5 CEU)	October 2nd, 1-2:30 pm	DeBary Hall
Ormond Beach Library Plant Clinic	October 6th	Ormond Beach Library
Fall Vegetable Gardening	October 8th	Daytona Beach Library
Garden Tools—Selection, Use, and Care (1.5 CEU)	October 11th, 10-11:30 am	DeBary Hall—Joe Seward
Blue Sage Garden Circle—Bulbs	October 13th, 7-7:30 pm	Speaker Howard Jeffreid
Sugar Mill Garden Q&A	October 15th	Sugar Mill Garden
History of Gardening (1.5 CEU)	October 16th, 1—2:30 pm	DeBary Hall—Howard Jeffreis
Medicinal Herbs (1 CEU)	October 16th, 1-2:00 pm	Ormond Beach Regional Library
Plants for Fall Into Winter (2 CEU) \$5.00	October 18th, 10-12N	Ag Center
Master Gardener Plant Clinic	October 21st	New Smyrna Beach Library
Wildflower and Butterfly Gardening	October 30th, 1—2:30 pm	DeBary Hall—Howard Jeffreis

**For more details Master Gardeners should check the VMS calendar.  
The general public may contact the Volusia County Agricultural Center**

**Volusia County Agricultural Center**

**3100 E. New York Ave. (S.R. 44), Deland, FL 32724**

**West Volusia... 386-822-5778   Daytona Beach... 386-257-6012   New Smyrna Beach... 386-423-3368**

## Discover Bromeliads

Marty Borkosky

What are bromeliads you say? They are beautiful, tropical plants native to the Americas from Eastern Virginia to the tip of Argentina. Only one species has been found outside of the area and that was on the western coast of Africa. Experts suppose that it was spread there by ocean drift long ago.

Bromeliads you may be familiar with are the pineapple (*Ananas bracteatus*) native to the coastal areas of Brazil; Spanish Moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*)



that is seen growing on trees all over the deep South and the tiny funky souvenir plants found for sale in local stores (Tillandsias). They grow in our area.

They are a fascinating group of colorful plants that has more the 3000 species with many more cultivars. With their tropical appearance and lovely leaf colors, and the many that have beautiful bracts and inflorescence, (flowers) they are perfect for our area if the location is right.

The first plants were introduced in Europe approximately 500 years ago, although the early civilizations of the Inca, Aztec, Mayan and others used them extensively. The first to arrive in Europe was the pineapple and it became a sensation. The next to arrive was the Guzmania. By the late 1800's breeders began hybridizing plants for the wholesale trade. A lull arose during World War I but a resurgence in popularity began after World War II.

Some bromeliads grow in trees, attach themselves but do not feed off of the tree (epiphytic). Others grow in soil (terrestrials) and use their roots in the same way other plants do. Some use their roots partly for support and cling to rocks and cliffs (saxicolous).

The plants for the most part are pest and disease free. Many have beautiful bracts (flowers) that will last from 1 month to 6 months. Not many plants can do that.

Again, the most important thing is to get them planted in the right location. I have had great luck with them. I grow them mostly "au natural" with rain taking care of most of their needs. I supplement when it is dry because it is important to keep their "tanks" full of water. Our yard is beach side under oak trees and pine trees and mostly sandy soil based, that has been blessed with all the oak leaves. In most areas we have dappled light and shade.

Growers say they will do better and the colors will be brighter if they are fertilized with a long term fertilizer. (I have very seldom) Never give bromeliads anything with copper fertilizer in it. Even planted near anything copper like around a copper birdbath can kill them eventually.

Different groups have different light requirements. Not many will take full, hot, blazing sun, but fortunately the largest group prefer dappled shade and some full shade. Light affects their leaf coloring and size and bloom times. Location, location, location.

Since the plants are such a large diverse group, they have different temp requirements. Our zone is 9B and does experience frosts. However you can always display your plants in pots so they can be moved. I have never lost a plant in 12 years planted in the ground. (Another option would be to use frost cloths over the beds.)



The mother plant will bloom one time and then start growing pups. Most of the time they will grow into a clump and can be cut apart to start new plants.

We have many bromeliad nurseries in Florida and you will see more and more at the garden stores. They are a terrific, tropical plant.



## Buddha Belly Plants

Myrna Moore

**Family:** Euphorbiaceae (yoo-for-bee-AY-see-ee)

**Genus:** *Jatropha* (JAT-roh-fuh))

**Species:** *podagrica* (pod-AG-ree-kuh)



*Jatropha podagrica* has more interesting and descriptive names, Buddha Belly, Bottle plant, Gout plant, and Purging nut to name a few. Buddha Belly's are succulents and native to dry or semi-moist tropical climates. The plant's knobby, swollen, upright trunks grey caste color has a look of peeling paint and can reach heights of 2-3 feet with a large bottle like caudex. The trunk is normally unbranched unless the tip is injured or pruned. The leaves are large up to 12 inches in diameter and resemble maple leaf. If left to grow in shade the leaves will grow even larger. Their flower has a coral colored cluster on a long stem. They can bloom all year round but more profusely in spring and summer. These plants can bloom in the winter but as they are deciduous the bloom stem stands alone. They can be grown inside but in zones 9 through 11 are best grown in the garden. Partial sun and well drained soil are preferred but these plants are easy and will tolerate full sun to shade. Propagation is by seed, which are produced as part of the flower clusters The seed pods are initially green and as they ripen turn a slightly brown color and then explode and many seeds become airborne. Seeds germinate easily and can be found several feet's away from the plants. Butterflies and hummingbirds are attracted to these plants as the nectar is ambrosial. Butterflies often prefer Buddha Belly to other butterfly attractive plants. But as is the case with all Euphorbiaceae the rest of the plant is poisonous.

I have this plant in my garden but prefer to grow them in pots. The literature says they grow up to 3 feet but someone forgot to tell one of my plants. It is over 4 feet and still growing. The leaves are very attractive and large but if you remove the leaves before they become too large you will get small clusters of leaves just at the top of the trunk which allows the flower clusters to be more visible. The seed pods do explode and it is interesting as to where the plant will appear. I have found them growing inside a brick with no sun or soil. I propagate my seeds now as my neighbor's all want a Buddha belly. The easy way to capture the seeds is to wait till the pod is almost ripe and then place a knee high hose (stocking) over the stem and pod. Once the pod explodes the hose keeps the seeds contained until they can be sowed. Winter months have caused damage to some of my plants so I have some that are branched instead of singular and upright. Usually they only branch a few times again by the literature but one of mine has six branches and counting. Buddha's are easy and fun and tolerant of salt and abuses but do not overwater. Remember they are succulent and thrive on neglect.



## Building a Strawberry Barrel

Nancy Plyler

From *DIY Projects for the Self Sufficient Homeowner*

As it is time to plant strawberries thought a strawberry barrel might be of interest to gardeners. A barrel can provide enough space to grow the equivalent of 12 feet of strawberry plants and can be easily done. With a barrel strawberries can be grown in a small space.

Tools and Materials needed for one barrel:

Large, clean barrel, 55 gallon plastic or wood

Pry bar or jigsaw

3" diameter hole saw

Drill

4" diameter PVC pipe

Window screen or hardware cloth

Gravel

Potting soil mix

Strawberry plants



### 1. Preparing the barrel

If the barrel has a lid or closed top remove it with a pry bar. If the barrel does not have a lid, cut a large opening in the top with a jigsaw. Beginning about 1 foot above the ground use a hole saw to cut 3" diameter planting holes around the barrel about 10" apart. Stagger the holes diagonally in each row and space the rows about 10" apart. Leave at least 12" above the top row of holes. Flip the barrel over and drill about a half dozen 1/2" diameter drainage holes in the bottom

### 2. Prepare the watering pipe

Cut a section of 4" diameter PVC pipe to fit inside the barrel from top to bottom. Punch or drill 3/4" diameter holes in the pipe every 4 to 6" all the way around. Cut a section of window screen or hardware cloth to fit inside the bottom of the barrel and place it inside. Cover the screen with 2" of gravel or small rocks.



### 3. Begin to fill the barrel with soil.

Position the pipe in the center of the barrel and fill with the pipe with coarse gravel. Begin to add soil to the bottom of the barrel, packing it firmly around the watering pipe in the bottom. Add water to help the soil settle. Continue adding soil until you reach the bottom of your first row of planting holes.

### 4. Add soil and plants.

Carefully insert your strawberry plants into the holes, spreading the roots into a fan shape. Add soil on top of the roots and slightly water. Continue to add soil and plants, packing soil gently and watering after each planting until you reach the top of the barrel. Do not cover the watering pipe. Plant additional strawberries on top of the barrel. Insert a hose into the watering pipe and run water for several minutes to give the barrel a good soaking.

