

## FLORAL CITY GARDEN CLUB MAY HORTICULTURE HINTS

Whoever said April showers bring May flowers didn't live in Florida. In order to keep the late winter/ spring bloomers and potted plants going, we need our watering cans and sprinklers. Warm season annuals need to be planted now and kept well watered until the summer rains start. Try marigolds, torenia, salvia, zinnia, coleus, periwinkle, caladium, sweet potato vine, persian shield and melampodium. Perennials for planting now include pentas, firebush, lantana, bush daisy, plumbago, and black-eyed susans. Especially during the dry season (April/May) you need mulch around your plants to keep the soil moist and cooler to encourage the new plants to get their roots well established before the summer heat.

My trip to Europe reminded me about what spring looks like in a cool northern climate – the pale yellow-green of new leaves on the deciduous trees popping out; cherry, apple and plum trees blossoming in pink and white; canola (rapeseed) fields all brilliant yellow; tulips, hyacinths, narcissus, daffodils and other bulbs in every color of the rainbow; plants I didn't recognize and then there were the April showers (even a late April snowstorm).

The collards were chopped down last week even though they were still producing because I have enough in the freezer to last until November. The lettuce bolted while we were away despite being watered regularly so those bitter leaves have been pulled out. I cut back the old pepper plants to encourage some new foliage and fruit. The green beans are producing heavily, so I need to check every other day for the newly long and skinny beans which are my preference. The zucchini plant has several tiny fruit on it; that and the cucumber are blossoming profusely so I hope the bees will find the plants that need pollinators. Some of the cherry tomatoes are turning orange so it won't be long before we have fresh tomatoes. Okra plants are up and the eggplant is almost ready to flower. The new peppers have small to medium fruit set and should continue for a few months. If you have space for a big veggie garden, try squash in the spring, watermelon and southern peas (blackeyes, crowders, and such) in the spring/summer along with the okra and eggplant. Tomatoes will be done by July because it is too hot.

The roses are almost finished with their first flush of blossoms, so the “higher maintenance” varieties need to be deadheaded. Later in May they will get fertilized again. The best roses in my small rose garden are Knockout reds in both upright and spreading habits and Belinda's Dream a large blossomed pink.

Other plants that started to bloom in April are porterweed, Lily of the Nile, salvia, society garlic, Gerber daisies, and firebush. The wisteria was a disappointment, with just a few flowers before the leaves came out. Still going strong from last month I have flowers on bush daisies, pansies, petunias, snapdragons, blue-eyed grass, hibiscus, ground orchid, peace lily, penta, firespike, plumbago, coreopsis, and periwinkle. It looks like the sunflowers, passion vine, cosmos, gardenias and marigolds will start blossoming soon.

The butterflies are increasing in numbers and variety and I saw my first hummingbird of the season on April 26 around the firebush.

I must have done a good job of crushing lubbers, because I haven't seen any of the black/yellow/red critters in the last few weeks. The pest target right now is snails in the veggie

garden which gets watered every other day. The pick and squish method works best for me but I've heard that a buried bowl of beer attracts them , they can't climb out and they drown.

Lawns that haven't been fertilized yet need it now, using a slow-release type of fertilizer. Then wait until after the summer rains which would just wash it all off and into the ground past the roots or into the lakes which surely don't need fertilizer. Don't mow too short – 3 inches tall is good for St. Augustine so it can thrive and overcome some of the weeds. Be watching for chinch bugs in sunny parts of the lawn and read the labels on any insecticide you use.

You can prune azaleas and camellias now if they need it. Wait until gardenias finish blooming to cut them back. It is also not too late to trim poinsettias to keep them from being leggy. Look for trees that might be dangerous in the summer storm season and get them trimmed soon.

The landscape design committee has chosen gardens for awards that will be presented at the luncheon. Come and recognize the folks in our community with super gardens/landscapes of many varieties. Some are beautifully designed, some are specialty gardens, some are prolific examples of horticulture.

Summer gardening tips will continue by e-mail. Remember to work outdoors in the cooler mornings and evenings when the weather gets really hot. Protect yourself from the sun's burning rays and stay hydrated.