

FLORAL CITY GARDEN CLUB
MARCH 2017 HORTICULTURE HINTS

WOW – many of the trees leafed out in February. Most Florida oaks shed their leaves in the spring to make way for the new ones – so you may have lots of leaf litter now. (Did you know that cypress needles and oak leaves can become mulch?) Pollen is in the air, covers puddles on the pavement and has turned the edge of the lakes electric green. If you are allergic, this is a miserable time of year.

There is no doubt spring has sprung. Time to garden in earnest. Go ahead and fertilize flowers, bulbs vegetables and fruits. DON'T fertilize the grass yet – save that for April when our local ordinance allows you to feed the grass.

You can trim back any frost damaged plants now, if you haven't already done so. Keep working on getting the weeds out of flower beds and trim perennials. When your azaleas have finished blooming, give them a haircut especially if they are getting too big for their space.

A fresh layer of mulch looks nice and helps keep the soil moist. If you see signs of fungus in old mulch, you may want to remove it, turn it into compost and start anew. If you rake those oak leaves and run a mower over the pile, you have instant mulch. Put it on 3-4 inches deep. If you put mulch around your trees, keep it away from the trunk.

Normally April and May are very dry and as the temperatures go up and the days get longer, our sandy soil tends to dry out. Also remember to water well after mulching so that the next rain or hose or sprinkler-applied water gets through the mulch into the soil so the plant roots can use it. One deep watering a week is much better than three days of “misting”.

If you are redoing a planting area (removing and replacing perennials and annuals) start by mixing some extra organics (like well composted yard trimmings) down several inches in the soil to help hold moisture in the root zone. If your compost isn't “cooked” enough, you run the risk of getting new weeds or having that material deplete some of the nutrients in the soil.

Lawns may still be cool-season weedy. If you want to get rid of those, you can use a weed killer this month, but if you wait until April, weed and feed combinations are perfect. If you want to start a new section of grass, March and April are a good time to do that. For best results, put grass in full sun areas, start by getting rid of the weeds and grass that is not healthy, till the soil a few inches down (but not under trees) and then put in sod. You will need to keep it watered through the dry season.

Spring is great for annuals too; the cool-season flowers are still with us and you can plant the first of the warm-season varieties; my favorites are marigolds and zinnias. Spring is the time to plant bulbs too like caladium, canna, and crinum. Herbs can still be planted now but most will not last through the summer. On the vegetable side of the garden, plant your tomato, peppers, melon and eggplant as soon as possible. Later on in the month and into April beans, squash and cucumbers can be started.

Are you looking for plants that fill in a space quickly? Flax lilies grow about 18-24 inches tall in full sun or shade, are cold hardy, low-maintenance, variegated foliage plants. Caladiums last from May until October, provide colorful foliage (white, green, pink, red) in the shade and come up from their tubers for several years in a row. Coreopsis is a yellow-blossomed native wildflower that will reseed reliably in sunny spots. Want to cover a fence, or hide a shed? Sky vine will fill the space in a hurry with foliage and blue flowers. Or plant Florida Flame Vine with bright orange flowers, or purple Passion Vine to feed fritillary butterflies. Get dark green foliage, white flowers and intense fragrance with Confederate Jasmine. These vines will need to be trimmed to keep them in check.

Order from the Native Plant Society plant sale by March 7 and pick up your order on March 17. Be sure to help out on our own plant sale in April.