

FLORAL CITY GARDEN CLUB APRIL 2017 HORTICULTURE HINTS

Our plant sale is just around the corner. Be sure to pitch in as much as possible to make this a successful fundraiser. You can also help the club by buying plants for yourself at the sale.

We are just back from a trip to South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana. There are a lot of plant comparisons to make, with some plants being totally foreign to what we know here and others that are old friends. They are into fall now, so some things are familiar, but out of order. We saw coastal forests that remind me of northern California and Oregon; high desert landscapes that seem like Arizona, New Mexico and west Texas; scrub forests where the trees only get 15-20 feet tall; and savanna with grassland and broad rivers. They have lots of strong winds near the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, so there are areas that host dry-land plants, with lots of succulents and a plant assemblage called fynbos which consists of reeds, heathers and proteas (all beautiful but very different). We went to the national botanical garden in Capetown South Africa and got lots of good pictures, so maybe we will have a program on African plants in the fall.

The driest time of year is upon us, after an unusually dry winter, so some plants may be showing signs of stress. This will hit potted plants the most, be sure to keep them watered regularly. If a pot totally dries out, try adding a drop of two of dish detergent to the watering can and stir the soil in the pot as you add water. Or drench the soil by dunking the pot in a large container of water; then remove the saucer after all the water has drained through.

Another approach to dealing with the dry season and rapidly draining sandy soil is to plant an arid garden using plants that love full sun and dry conditions. Think cactus like Turk's Cap, golden barrel, and prickly pear; desert rose; ponytail palm and other types of agave; rosemary, Madagascar Periwinkle and Coreopsis.

Some flowering plants, including annuals, perennials and shrubs need to be deadheaded. This practice, removing blossoms after they start to go to seed, will force the plant to re-bloom instead of thinking its job of propagating itself is done. Daisies, roses, geraniums, crape myrtles, day lilies, butterfly ginger, cosmos, narrow-leaf zinnia, and torrenia are just some of the plants that benefit from deadheading.

The Extension Service/ Master Gardener program offers plant seminars every month and they come to each local library to make those presentations. This month's topic is turf grass. The Floral City Library hosts this Master Gardener talk on Wednesday April 5 at 2pm.

Do you do companion planting in your garden? The idea is to put certain plants near others as a benefit to one or both. This can be for natural pest control, shade or support, natural feeding or hosting beneficial insects. For example, plant basil near tomatoes, peppers, oregano, asparagus and petunia because basil attracts butterflies, and repels mosquitoes, thrips and flies. Or plant beans near beets, cabbage, carrots, corn, cucumbers, marigolds and strawberries to provide natural nitrogen-fixing fertilizer to the companion plants. Plant melons and squash near corn so the vines reduce weeds and corn provides shade and some support for the vines. Many herbs repel pest insects, and snails. On the other hand some plants don't mix; keep beans away from garlic, onions, shallots or fennel. The list goes on...

A long-time friend and Master Gardener recently moved out of state and left behind lots of her potted plants. What a wonderful gesture of her friendship was the carload of plants she left with me. Sharing your plants is the ultimate gift!

GET OUT THERE AND GARDEN!