

FLORAL CITY GARDEN CLUB MAY 2017 HORTICULTURE HINTS

With 90+ degree days in April, combined with the normal spring dry season, you may be spending the early morning hours with a watering can trying to keep your garden friends from wilting. Do you have a rain barrel? This can be an attractive way to fill that watering can. A friend made one for me as a retirement gift several years ago and it has been a part of my landscape ever since. Of course, we need some rain to refill it!

You can make your own rain barrel with an empty food-grade plastic 50- to 60-gallon barrel. Rinse out the barrel with ½ cup of bleach diluted in 5 gallons of water. Plan where you will put it; under a downspout from a gutter is the first essential. It also needs a level/stable base; putting it up on concrete blocks or pavers (or some other strong material) will help if you want to be able to fit your watering can under the spout. You will also need an overflow pipe that carries excess rainwater away from the barrel and the foundation of the house. Cut out the center of the twist-off lid; fit a piece of screening over the barrel and secure it under the lid. Drill 1-inch holes for the overflow (near the top and on one side) and for the spigot (on the front and high enough to fit your watering can). Use a metal spigot secured with PVC cement or silicone glue. You can direct the overflow with PVC pipe (straight out, with a short elbow down or a long elbow down to reduce splash). Now the fun part – paint whatever pattern you want on the outside with latex or acrylic paints! A full barrel weighs about 500 pounds! More information at <http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu/barrels.htm>

Mothers Day is coming up. I recall when I was growing up in western New York state, that Mother's Day was really the start of the growing season. We always spent the Saturday before Mother's Day at local nurseries picking out the annuals to plant in my mom's garden. She loved pansies and clematis, among many others. The original Jackson and Perkins rose nursery was nearby and we would add one rose to her garden each year. I think that the Peace rose was her favorite. Too bad that many of the northern plants we grew up with won't grow here in the summer (or in some cases at any time of the year.)

I cringe when I see “crape murder” , when people cut back their crape myrtles to stubby trunks in the spring. Then they get lots of spindly growth, especially if the variety is a large-growing tree. In addition to having many different colors; White, pink, lavender, red, coral, there are natural sizes for these trees. Some are shrub-sized when mature, 8 to 10 feet tall without trimming, while others are in the 15 to 20-foot range and some get to be 30 feet tall. If you are picking a new crape myrtle for your yard, shop while they are blooming and check the nursery tag for the mature height so you get the color and size you want. Be sure to plant in a full sun area, or you may end up with leggy plants that are subject to mildew. I have one 20-foot plus white crape myrtle tree in the front yard that has a single trunk, beautiful shape and the characteristic peeling bark on bare winter branches that has I have never trimmed. There are two multi-trunk, bright pink 10-12 foot tall crape myrtles in the back yard that get thinned to avoid crossing branches but little else. Right plant – right place.

Cool season herbs may be wilting in this heat. If you want to cut them back, you get to harvest a lot at once and the plant may or may not make it through the summer. You can dry the herbs you harvested and keep them in a dark place for use when the fresh plants aren't producing. The trick is to get them to dry before they mildew. If they do not get crumbly within a two of three days, hasten the process in the oven on the lowest temperature with the door cracked open. Or you can chop the fresh leaves and mix in a little water, butter or oil and freeze the mixture in ice cube trays for summer cooking.