

FLORAL CITY GARDEN CLUB
HORTICULTURE HINTS
OCTOBER 2018

Fall in Florida is the time to fertilize. Lawns can be given a feeding to last until the spring, just be sure that at least 1/3 of the nitrogen source is labeled "slow release". Remember that the numbers on the package describe the amount of N (nitrogen) P (phosphorus) and K (potassium) in the mix. Don't wait too late to apply this grass food and if it turns very dry, be sure to give the lawn a few waterings after feeding. Shrubs, like azaleas, gardenias, ligustrum and loropetalum should be fed in the fall too with slow release fertilizer. Palms have special needs, so look for a special palm mix (8-2-12-4). The last number indicates the amount of Mg (magnesium) which helps keep the fronds from turning yellow.

Vegetables and herbs for fall include the cruciferous veggies (cabbage family) which includes cauliflower, broccoli, kale, and collards. Other fall/winter veggies include carrots, beets, turnips and onions. Few of these will grow well in plain sand, so adding organic matter to the soil really helps. Lettuce can also be started in October, at least you will get baby greens before a frost, and maybe full-grown leaves if the winter stays mild. Basil, chives, dill, garlic, parsley, oregano, rosemary and mint are common herbs that can all be grown here. Frost can damage leaves or kill plants, so you might want to plant herbs in containers or give them some protection in the winter. It is not too late to plant a few warm season flowers, including sunflowers, zinnia, marigolds, pentas, salvias and angelonia. A little feeding helps vegetables, herbs and flowers too.

Do you use grasses in your landscape? Some of my favorite grasses include Muhly grass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*) and purple fountain grass (*Pennisetum*). The Muhly grass puts on a spectacular show in the fall of blossoms that look like a pink cloud at the tips of the thin round stems. It is a Florida native that grows in full sun to part shade and is not too particular about how much water it gets. You can cut it back severely in late winter or early spring. Large clumps can be divided to spread the beauty. Individual plants grow to 2-3 feet tall and wide. Purple fountain grass grows in smaller clumps from 2-5 feet tall. It also likes full sun. The leaves are burgundy and it produces a seedhead that gradually fades from burgundy to beige. It too can be cut back in the spring. Some varieties seed themselves and may become somewhat invasive, but other varieties don't reseed. Ask your garden center which is which.

Looking for an easy front porch container or centerpiece for Halloween? Purchase a pumpkin of the appropriate size for your project, cut the top off, hollow out the seeds and fill the container with potting soil. Then plant a variety of succulents for a small centerpiece. Make several as favors for a fall dinner party and stick a place card in to show guests where to sit. For the front porch, plant a potted mum in the cavity for the quintessential fall arrangement! Remember that your "pot" won't survive for long without rotting, so wait until a few days before you want the show to be at its best to put this together.

Don't forget to keep your garden pollinator-friendly. Avoid pesticides because they don't discriminate on what they kill. If you feel you must use a pesticide, read and follow directions. Plant flowering shrubs, annuals and trees to provide nectar and pollen for these bees, butterflies, birds, wasps, flies, and beetles. Plant bee balm, salvia, milkweed, blanket flower, coreopsis, beach sunflower, blackeyed susans, porterweed, firebush, pentas, beautyberry, hollies and golden dewdrop. Put up a bee box for solitary bees to use for nesting. Plant shrubs that birds can safely nest in. Keep a water source around, remembering to empty and refill it often to avoid making mosquito havens. Not only will these critters thank you, you are creating habitat for the same ones that make food for us by pollinating crops.