

FLORAL CITY GARDEN CLUB HORTICULTURE HINTS, NOVEMBER 2018

November can be a fickle month in our part of Florida. High temperatures average about 80 and lows average about 50 degrees, BUT the record high was 93 and the record low was 23 degrees (yes a hard freeze)! November is usually the driest month of the year with less than 2 inches of rain on average. This makes for a challenging time for gardeners. One thing is sure, the plants that are still growing (unless they are established native plants) will need some watering. Both heat and cold along with dry conditions create stress for our plants.

Most, if not all of the summer bloomers have now set seeds that can be next year's starters. Harvest these seed heads, and keep them in a cool dry place over the winter, or let them fall to the ground where they were and many (especially natives) will come up again. If you want to share, you can plant those seeds now to get ready for our spring plant sale, just be sure to protect small pots from freezing.

Now is a good time to cut back dead stems and leaves from your landscape. This can reduce insect and disease damage over the winter and provides food for your compost pile. It is also a good time to divide perennials for use elsewhere in your own landscape or pot them up to share with others. Be sure to mark your pots, because some might look dead during January and February but be lovely by the end of March.

Marcie Clutter a member of the Native Plant Society and one of our favorite speakers from last year, will talk at our meeting about invasive plants – those aggressive plants that take over, often edging out plants we love. She will give us hints on what NOT to plant and how to get rid of those we did put in by mistake or ignorance. Join us on November 14th for an interesting program.

Near the end of October, my cranberry hibiscus (*H. acetosella*) sometimes called maroon mallow started to blossom. Both the foliage and blossoms are dark red/maroon and the plant provides a great contrast to all the green foliage in a garden. This plant does best in full sun. Mine started from a couple cuttings but have seeded themselves throughout the garden. They are suited to our Zone 9 weather, although they froze back with last winter's harsh temperatures. Mine grow 4-8 feet tall and tend to break their stems when they get more than a few feet tall, so I stake or cage them, but even that won't keep them upright in a strong wind. The birds love the seeds during the winter. I have not tried it, but it is reported that the leaves can be used raw in salads or as a cooked vegetable.

I am ready to start harvesting collards from my veggie patch. They keep on giving until really warm weather takes over in April. Simply cut off the outer leaves as they get big and within a couple of weeks there will be more to enjoy. Save at least 6 leaves in the center to keep the plant producing. My hubby loves them simmered with some bacon and onions, plus a little vinegar and a bit of sugar. I often have enough to share with neighbors and to take to pot-luck events. They seem to be the simplest of the cabbage family to grow. I always have some broccoli and cauliflower in the winter garden but haven't had much luck with Brussels sprouts.

Do you have grandkids or neighbor children with whom you can share your love of gardening? Here are some hints from experts at UF/IFAS. Fit the space and the tools to the kids, containers work fine for beginners. Talk about what plants need and let the kids be responsible for making sure soil, sun, water and plant food are provided. Mix vegetables, fruit (like strawberries) herbs and flowers in their garden. Use large seeded types like beans or sunflowers; mix transplants and seeds. Plant quick-results seeds like lettuce, radishes, carrots, and bush beans. Try cherry tomatoes. Plant "weird" veggies like purple beans and red lettuce. Let them get messy. Have fun!