

FLORAL CITY GARDEN CLUB HORTICULTURE HINTS APRIL 2018

What strange weather we've had over the past few months! cold January, very warm February, chilly March, let's hope now that it is spring on the calendar we have weather to match. I have trimmed back (or pulled out) the frozen plants and am ready to replant with hardier items. Plants that died include tropicals like Ti Plant (Cordyline) and one of my variegated Golden Dewdrop bushes (Duranta) although two others are coming back, Copper Leaf (Acalypha) and a Cranberry Hibiscus. Plants that froze back to the ground (and show signs of coming back) in my yard include: Hibiscus, Porterweed, Firespike and Firebush (Hamelia). Several palms had a major setback too. And this is in an area very close to the lake, so we normally have warmer winter temperatures than inland areas.

On the bright side here are plants that fared very well: Loropetalum, Coontie, Ponytail, Hawthorne, Muhly grass, Crepe myrtle, Liriope, Mondo grass, Camellia, Gardenia, Azalea, Asiatic jasmine, Wisteria, Coreopsis, Passion vine, Resurrection fern, Agapanthus, Bush Daisy, Rose, Tea Olive, Viburnum, Cast iron plant, Plumbago, Iris, bromeliads, Butterfly milkweed and all the winter annuals. Broccoli thrived and is now finished. Collards keep producing, but may get pulled to make way for summer veggies. Lettuce seeds that were planted in late January are now providing lots of salad greens. The blueberries loved the warm February by blossoming and didn't freeze since, so we will have ripe berries in April!

It is time to perk up the landscape with fertilizer and water for annuals, perennials and shrubs. Use the homemade "Miracle Grow" from the recipe we put together at the March meeting for almost any plant. You can use granular, slow-release fertilizer too. Warm season annuals, herbs and vegetables can be planted now. Our lawns can use fertilizer now too, along with a little extra water if the dry season (April – May) lives up to "normal".

If you are still shopping for plants after our plant sale, carefully select healthy specimens that fit our climate. The big box stores have a huge variety of plants that come in good condition from their growers. Some are suited to Central Florida and some would do better in other parts of the country. Look for plants that are well rooted but not pot-bound (it is OK to peek – just tip the pot and gently pull on the foliage). If the roots are white or light brown, that is good. If the root ball extends out the bottom of the pot or the roots totally fill the pot space, with little visible soil, that is NOT good. The soil needs to be damp, neither dry nor soaked. If the plant has weeds as companion plants in the pot, you will be planting more than you are paying for; expect extra work to keep the weeds down after planting. Look for insects and mold and don't bring hitch-hikers home.

A recent trip to north Georgia reminded me that daffodils and tulips are blooming in the Middle South, but we can't grow them here. Other plants that grow from bulbs and do well in Central Florida include Caladium, Canna, Amaryllis, and Amazon lily, Blood lily and Rain Lily. You can pick a variety of these plants and have blossoms/color nearly all year long.

I had an opportunity to visit Leu Gardens in Orlando in early March. It was definitely worth the trip. The garden showed the impact of Hurricane Irma (downed trees) followed by the winter freezes (damaging tender plants) throughout the garden, but the camellias were putting on a show. Many of the roses were in bloom and the rest were putting out lots of foliage. Another attraction was a display of many giant Lego structures that related to the garden (butterflies, birds, flowers, gardeners).

Think about all of the programs and activities we have had during this garden club year and tell us how you rate each one on the evaluation form at the April meeting. At the same time, let me know what programs you would like for 2018-19 by completing the program questionnaire. Thanks for your input. It really helps to plan our calendar! Happy spring!