

FLORAL CITY GARDEN CLUB HORTICULTURE HINTS FOR MAY 2018

What a difference in rainfall so far this year as compared to 2017! None of the established plants look wilted, and lake levels have not dropped significantly. The wildflower seeds I sowed in November are up and blossoming nicely without supplemental water.

I went to my first FFGC convention last week. The speakers were all excellent; the flower show was amazing and hearing about what other clubs are doing was inspiring. We submitted three applications for awards this year and we won in every category in which we entered! Two of those were forwarded to the Deep South region and we won there too!! There are dozens of categories for awards, so it was a matter of figuring out where our activities best fit the scheme of things. Our roadside cleanup efforts as an Adopt-a-Highway group fit the category of Community Service. The memorial garden fit the City/Park Planting category. The Butterfly Garden fit the Conservation Award category. For the Deep South awards, the same garden fit the Historic Trails award, being adjacent to the Withlacoochee State Trail which was once a railroad. There is even a little money attached to some of the awards. I think we will apply for the gateway garden and our decorate the town project for next year.

I (well it was really both of us) finally have finished cutting back all of the freeze-damaged plants in our yard, leaving huge open spaces in the planting beds. So it was time to buy more plants! I concentrated on blooming types that are natives, or butterfly and hummingbird favorites or reliable summer annuals. This round of purchases included Rudbeckia (Black-eyed Susan), Gaillardia (Blanket Flower), Pentas, Angelonia, Echinacea (Cone Flower), Cosmos, Zinnia, Melampodium, Gazania, and Plumbago.

The 3-year old blueberry plants are thriving. There were hundreds of berries on each plant when we left for our two-week trip to Europe. Some of the berries were nearly ripe when we got back and we picked a handful for the taste treat. When we got back from the convention a week later, there were only a few berries left. The birds and squirrels must have had a feast. A major disappointment that calls for some netting next year to protect the harvest for human consumption.

Have you noticed the peach orchard that went in at the curve just at the end of the avenue of the oaks? I hope they have success. We tried some when we lived in Inverness and had problems with wildlife getting to the fruit just as it got ripe and with fungal infestations on the trees.

We have a couple tomatoes on our plants and lots of blossoms on the bush beans and other tomato plants. There are some tiny zucchini and yellow squash on the vines. The lettuce seeds we planted in late November survived the freezes (mostly by not sprouting until February) which gave us lots of great salads until the end of April. Many people give up on vegetable gardens in the heat of summer. If you do, that's a good time to try a cover crop or a plastic cover. A cover crop adds nutrients to the soil and helps reduce the amount of nematodes in the soil. The plastic only helps with nematodes. Sunn hemp (*Crotalaria juncea*) is a good cover crop. Sow the seeds thickly, water it until the plants are established and wait for a couple of months while it grows 3-4 feet high. Then, before it flowers, till it in or mow it or just pull the plants and spread as mulch in the area. If you want to reduce nematodes without planting a cover crop, break up the soil, water well and cover with clear plastic, anchored at the edges and leave it on for six to eight weeks.

Our garden club year-end luncheon is Friday. The following Friday is the District V meeting at Citrus Hills. Then the summer hiatus until our September 14 meeting. Horticulture Hints will continue via e-mail.