

FLORALCITY GARDEN CLUB HORTICULTURE HINTS FOR MARCH 2019

I was reviewing old editions of Horticulture Hints and discovered that this starts the 4th year I've been writing these monthly newsletters. Time flies! Another thing I noticed is that we have had warm February days for the last few years. It really makes gardeners ready to clean up, trim, plant and fertilize. My yard has had no freezes this winter, but that doesn't mean we are guaranteed to be frost free yet. We picked the plant sale date (after the 3rd week in March) to assure that the things we sell won't freeze back as soon as they are planted.

As a result of the warm weather, the cherry tomato I planted in September is now producing a bumper crop of little sweet gems that grace our plates at least once a day. Everything else in the cool season veggie garden, except swiss chard and collards are finished. The blueberries have blossomed and the bees are hard at work, so as soon as all those little green berries are set, it is time to put up the bird net. I'm determined to eat some of that crop myself this year!

You can start on a spring/summer vegetable garden now with tomatoes, peppers, squash, beans and cucumbers. Vegetables need constant moisture and light applications of fertilizer once a month to do their best. Use a fertilizer formulated for veggies, not a high nitrogen type, or you will get lots of foliage and not much to eat. And remember to pick often to encourage continued production.

Squash, like yellow crookneck and zucchini need lots of space and cucumbers do best with a climbing support. Both depend on pollinators to set fruit. A common problem with squash and zucchini is blossom end rot which is caused by a calcium deficiency. You can avoid this problem by first testing soil pH; if it is below 6, add lime or gypsum to the soil. Read the directions on your container to determine the amount. It takes weeks for these minerals to dissolve, so starting early is the key.

The re-landscaping project in the bed in front of my house is complete. It was a big job but looks great. I don't know if it was the warm weather or the dig/divide/replant effort but my day-lilies have had a huge growth spurt just recently. I hope they blossom well in early summer. There is also a space saved in a shady section for the caladiums we ordered for the plant sale.

I'm experimenting with using in-ground clay pots for my annuals. My intent is to see if using potting soil along with targeted granular fertilizer and watering works to keep those short-lived plants colorful and healthy. It should also serve as a hint to my hubby as to what belongs there and what is a weed when he helps tidy up that planting bed. I'm hoping that it reduces the amount of dirt that gets mixed up with the mulch (and vice versa) when I "rearrange the furniture" a couple times a year, putting in a different set of blooming plants for the warm season (starting now until October) and the cool season (for the rest of the year). I also used a couple of containers for the sections on both sides of the garage door. One is in a spot that gets flooded every time it rains and the other is normally dry, but having containers set above ground, while still in spots that are reached by sprinklers, means that I can plant the same thing and get similar results. It's a symmetry thing in the landscape design. More on those topics in this month's program on container gardening.

We have good news about the Avenue of the Oaks trees again this month. Marcia Beasley and Frank Peters will be honored with an award from the Florida Urban Forestry Council as the state-wide winners in the Outstanding Tree Advocate category. The award will be presented here in Citrus County, although the date has not been set yet, it will probably be at a County Commission meeting. It would be great to have several Garden Club members attend that presentation.