

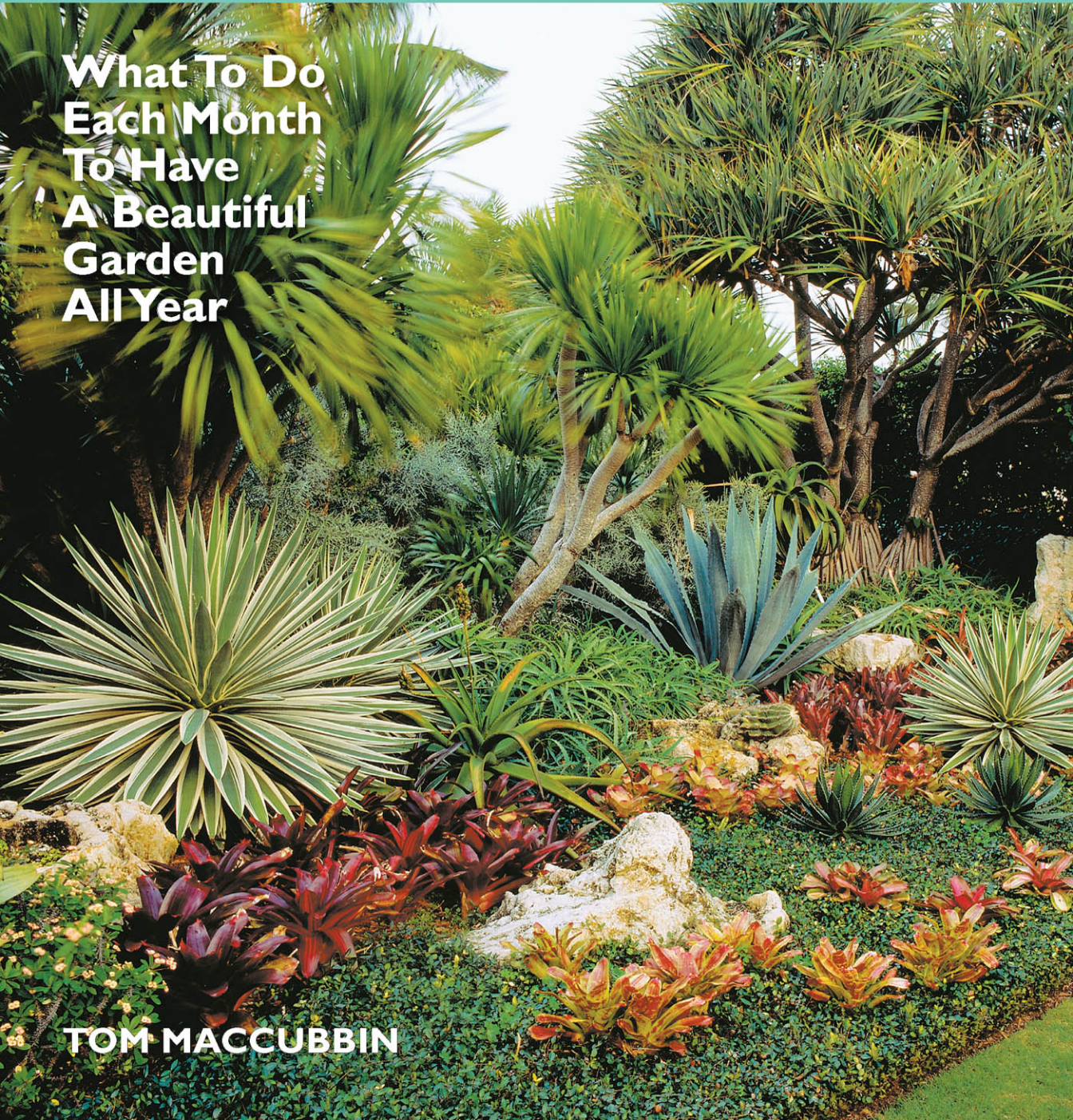
COOL SPRINGS PRESS

MONTH-BY-MONTH GARDENING

# FLORIDA

**What To Do  
Each Month  
To Have  
A Beautiful  
Garden  
All Year**

**TOM MACCUBBIN**









MONTH-BY-MONTH GARDENING

# FLORIDA

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**What to Do Each Month to Have  
a Beautiful Garden All Year**

TOM MACCUBBIN



COOL  
SPRINGS  
PRESS

*Home and Garden Experts™*

# Dedication and Acknowledgment

## **Dedication**

My adventure in horticulture started as a small child with my own garden plots being guided by my parents'—Mom and Pop—enthusiasm and love of the land on the eastern shore of Maryland. Their care of plants, love of others, and good moral examples have guided me throughout life and led me to a career in horticulture. My loving wife, Joani, shares equally in this author's successes by offering encouragement, participating in my horticulture activities, and providing lots of creativity. This book is written for the residents of Florida who gave this horticulturist and Extension agent an excellent arena in which to discover and teach the wonders of Florida plantings.

## **Acknowledgments**

This book is now ready to help you with your garden, thanks to the assistance of many.

Thanks to my professors who gave me the knowledge needed to pursue a horticulture career at the University of Maryland and University of Florida. Thanks to all University of Maryland and University of Florida Extension specialists who provided knowledge of plant culture and conducted the research needed to grow great gardens and nourish attractive landscapes. I am appreciative of the friendship and expertise of my fellow University of Florida Extension agents who shared their knowledge over the years, which has helped me understand Florida horticulture and the information provided in this book.

Much appreciation is expressed to the staff of the Quayside Publishing Group, Inc., and Cool Springs Press for their faith in me as an author of many of their Florida publications. A special thank you goes to Billie Brownell, who encouraged and coordinated the writing of this book, and then carefully read and edited the many pages, and to Tracy Stanley, who kept everything going in the right direction. Many thanks also to Cindy Laun, our design manager; Ruth Strother, copyeditor; and to Kim Winscher, layout designer.

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# Introduction





*Florida! It is my state, and it can be your state too, for great gardening. Some say Ponce de León, after discovering Florida, declared this the land of flowers. He arrived during March, at a time when many flowers were likely in bloom. We do have plenty of wildflowers and natives—Florida can fill with colorful displays of trees, shrubs, vines, and groundcovers—but this land is at its best with your help.*

Many would say we have two main seasons—spring and summer—but there is a fall and winter too. Sure, there are a few cool times, but for the most part it is just good gardening weather if you know what to do and when to do it. That is where I can help. One thing new gardeners and some experienced ones must do is properly orient their plant-care schedules. Unlike many areas of the country, we plant tomatoes in March and August. Petunias are set in the ground November through March, and herbs grow best October through May. Florida is a little different as there are twelve months of great gardening. You need a guide to know when to plant, prune, fertilize, and perform other gardening tasks.

Now, you do have to leave a few plants behind when transitioning to a generally warm climate. In most areas of the state, temperatures infrequently dip below freezing. This may mean leaving behind the tulips, crocuses, peonies, and lilacs that need the *real* cold. But then think of the fun of discovering tropical selections of tibouchinas, tabebuias, ixora, rain lilies, bananas, and gingers that grow year-round. If there is a planter's paradise, it is found in Florida.

Where are you going to live in Florida? It is a long state of some 900 miles from tip to tip. But here is the good news—gardening is similar in all portions of the state. You are going to create a great landscape, enjoy lots of flowers, and plant what you want to eat month-by-month, with just a little help from my many experiences and the proven techniques found in this book.

# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Florida. You are about to experience gardening that is different from most other states. There is frost-free growing in the southern part of the state and yearly freezes in the north. Before you begin planting, you need to learn a little about some other features of our state:

- Most of the soil is sand; gardeners often call it beach sand. The official state soil is Myakka fine sand, but there are also areas with clay, rock, and organic soil.
- May through September are very hot months; temperatures are often in the 90s and may approach 100 degrees Fahrenheit in some areas.
- January and February are the coldest months, and only the hardiest vegetables and flowers should be planted in all but the most southern areas.
- Summer is the rainy season; the rest of the months are relatively dry.

- Fall and spring are times for warm-season plantings, winter is devoted to cool-season plantings, and summer is the time for plants that don't mind the heat.
- Gardeners on the coast and in some isolated inland areas have to deal with salty water and may have to limit landscapes to saltwater-resistant plantings.
- Pest problems are similar to those of other climates, but the pests are active year-round.

## FLORIDA'S CLIMATE VARIES

Seldom will you need a heavy winter coat in Florida, and you can probably sell your snow shovel. Rarely does ice cover the sidewalks or icicles fill the trees. Most of the state is considered a subtropical climate, although a temperate zone does sneak down into the more northern regions of the state.

In spite of the great growing conditions found in most parts of the state, gardeners are still

■ *In areas that may experience a freeze, citrus can be grown in containers that can be moved indoors if necessary.*



concerned about the weather. After all, most home landscapes contain thousands of dollars' worth of plant materials that might be affected by drought, sudden downpours, and even our infrequent freezes. Gardeners tend to check the internet, paper, television, and radio daily to stay alert to changing climatic conditions. Many keep track of the rainfall and mark calendars with the daily high and low temperatures. Some consult almanacs to determine weather trends.

Luckily, the weather in many parts of the state is fairly predictable within its climatic zone. On average, spring and fall are warm and dry, summer hot and humid, and winter cool and dry. Florida is divided into three climatic zones: North, Central, and South. Each is very different from the other when it comes to expected weather. Check out the climate for your area of the state to determine the growing conditions you can expect. Take a look at our zone map on page 19 to see in which zone you live.

## **NORTH FLORIDA**

- extends northward from State Road 40.
- has about 60 inches of rainfall per year.
- is sure to get frosts and freezing weather in winter.
- has a first frost by late November and last frost during late February.
- has 350 to 650 annual hours below 45°.
- has summers that are of similar duration to those in more temperate areas but are hotter and more humid.

## **CENTRAL FLORIDA**

- lies between State Roads 40 and 70.
- has about 56 inches of rainfall per year.
- has frosts most years and some light freezes in winter.

- has a first frost by mid-December and a last frost during mid-February.
- has 150 to 350 annual hours below 45°.
- has extended summerlike, hot, humid weather in late spring and fall.

## **SOUTH FLORIDA**

- extends below State Road 70 across the state.
- has about 56 inches of rainfall per year.
- has infrequent frosts and no freezes.
- has 50 to 150 annual hours below 45°.
- has extended summerlike, hot, humid weather into spring and fall.

Our state receives a lot of rainfall, but it is not evenly distributed throughout the year. Most of the rain arrives during the summer months. Some gardeners say you can set your clocks by the daily summer storms that begin arriving off the coasts by 4:00 p.m. and are over by about 6:00 p.m. There is a lot of lightning during summer storms, so take cover at the first sign of rain.

## **WINTER HARDINESS IS STILL IMPORTANT**

Here is a good trivia question: How many USDA plant hardiness zones are found in Florida? Most gardeners would guess three, but the answer is four. Florida contains zones 8 through 11—the fourth zone occurs way down in the Keys. Check the Cold Hardiness Map to find your zone with its expected temperature variations.

Florida is full of microclimates, where the temperatures can be much higher or lower than average during seasonal weather. Cities are one big factor in determining the amount of cold and heat plants receive. City locations are often 5° to 10° warmer than country locations. Nevertheless, hardiness zones are good guides and may be used in determining what plants will grow in your area of the state.

# INTRODUCTION

## PLANNING YOUR LANDSCAPE AND GARDENS

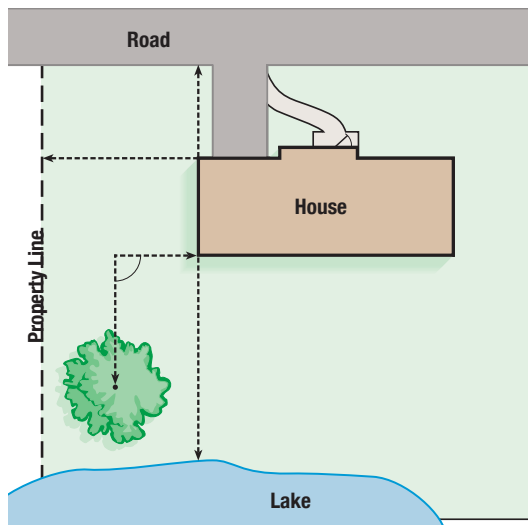
A landscape that is well planned and well planted is a wise investment. Many landscapers and real estate agents say a well-planted home can add 15 to 20 percent to the value of a property. Even more important, the landscape is a part of your home. It should be a usable area where you can relax and feel free to invite friends over to visit. Every landscape needs a plan. It's like a road map that tells you where to go. A landscape plan, often called a design (even if it's just a rough sketch on a pad of paper), helps determine how much you can grow and the positioning of the plantings.

Here are a few suggestions for gardeners who are just beginning to shape their landscapes, or those who need to make some changes:

- Sketch your homesite on paper. Use a scale that is large enough (for example, 1 inch equals 5 or 10 feet) to allow you to get a feeling for the whole property.
- Walk around the yard and notice good and bad features. Mark these on your sketch, as well as the plants you plan to keep in the landscape.
- Decide on the changes you would like to make in the landscape. Determine where you need screens, shade, flower gardens, and groundcovers. Limit turf to the area in which it is really needed. Sketch your ideas on tracing paper placed over the plan of the existing property.
- Make use of books, neighborhood gardens, and botanical gardens to obtain ideas.

Your landscape is an extension of your home. Think of it as several outdoor rooms in which you perform different activities. You may want a “room” for entertaining, one to do maintenance on equipment, and a room that is a private area. In the “family room” you might have a children's play area, barbecue grill, pool, or badminton court.

You create the walls that separate the rooms the way a builder does for a house, but instead of wood and concrete you use trees, shrubs, vines,



■ If you don't know your lawn area, measure it. Don't worry about being exact; an approximate square footage will be good enough to calculate seed and fertilizer needs.

and similar plant materials. Once the rooms are created, you will decorate with shrubs, flowers, and garden ornaments. Here are a few landscape design tips to help you with your planning:

- Use trees to frame the house, enclose the property, and create shade.
- Keep trees at least 15 to 20 feet from the house and septic systems.
- Plan clusters of plants. The magic numbers for groupings are odd numbers: 3, 5, 7, 9, and so forth.
- Plan for spots of color that can be easily seen from walkways, patios, and windows.
- Use just a few garden ornaments like sundials, birdbaths, statuary, and waterfalls. Too many will clutter your landscape design.
- Keep lower-growing plants under windows.
- Leave the front of the house “open,” planting with lower-growing plants so house and entrance can be seen from the road and sidewalks.



- Limit turf to family play areas or where green vistas are desired.
- Add walkways of mulch, concrete, or similar materials throughout the landscape. If you have trouble deciding on the shape planted areas should take, use a hose or long extension cord to outline some beds. You might try setting a few containers of plants within the beds to see how they will look before planting.

One factor you must consider in landscaping is bloom times. Determine what is going to give a good show and when. It's a common mistake to load up the late winter and spring gardens with color and forget the rest of the year. In Florida there should be something in bloom every month of the year. Many shrubs, trees, annuals, and perennials can bloom year-round. When planning your design, make sure you plan for color in every month. Flowers are not the only plants that can provide color. Look for fruits, foliage, and barks to provide color interest as well.

## PLANTING THE LANDSCAPE

One of the nice things about living in Florida is plants can be added to the landscape at any time of the year. Most landscape plants available at garden centers have been grown in containers, which makes them easy to transport and plant. There are other transplanting techniques utilized in Florida—bare root, and balled and burlapped—but they are generally limited to use by nurserymen.

When getting ready to purchase a plant, think about the size you need. Smaller plants may establish just as rapidly as larger ones, so it may make sense to plant small shrubs or trees and just let them grow.

Some of the recommended planting techniques have changed in recent years. Horticulturists are learning new tricks! One research finding is that adding organic matter to the fill soil is of limited benefit. Trees and shrubs often grow rapidly into surrounding soil and gain little benefit from organic matter additions. Only the slower-growing shrubs, vines, and groundcovers might benefit from improving the fill soil with organic matter and manures.

If you are ambitious and want to help your annual and perennial plantings get established, it is beneficial to prepare a large site. Till the entire bed and add a lot of organic matter to help especially sandy soil hold moisture and supply some nutrients for plant growth. At this time you can also adjust the soil acidity if needed. Having the right pH is especially important for azalea and blueberry plantings, which require a lower (more acidic) pH.

Another change in horticultural practice is to set plants with their rootball a little higher out of the ground than was previously recommended. Sandy Florida soil settles over a period of time, and it's normal to see a tree or shrub that is a few inches deeper in the ground than when it was planted. This encourages trunk and root rot problems in

■ *Most trees you can buy in Florida will be container grown.*



some plants. Just planting with the rootball a little out of the ground and then covering with a light mulch will help ensure survival.

## CONTAINER PLANTS ARE AN EASY WAY TO START

Container-grown plants come in all sizes, from the small annuals in cell packs to 30-gallon and larger pots at garden centers and nurseries. A plant that has a root system with soil firmly attached is easy to transport and establish in a new site.

Try to find a plant in a container that you can handle easily. The bigger the pot, the more muscle it will take to move the plant, and the larger the vehicle must be that will take it home. Now, let's begin to plant. Here are a few tips to get your new container-grown plants established quickly:

1. Find a site where the plant will have ample room to grow.
2. Dig the hole twice as wide as, but no deeper than, the rootball.
3. Position the plant in the center of the hole and at the same depth it was in the pot or with the top of the rootball 1 to 2 inches above the ground. Adding organic matter to the fill soil is optional.
4. Fill in around the rootball with soil, adding water as you plant. This will ensure good soil-to-root contact.
5. Create a 4- to 6-inch-high berm of soil at the edge of the rootball around the plant to hold water.
6. Spread a 2- to 3-inch layer of mulch up to the edge of the berm—keeping it light over the roots. (Keep mulch away from the tree trunk.)
7. If you think larger plants will be affected by winds, add stakes or guy wires to hold them upright.
8. Water the planting thoroughly.

## SOIL—FLORIDA STYLE

Understanding soil in Florida is easy: most landscapes are full of sand. But don't be too alarmed—you can grow great plants in sand. Florida also has some pockets of clay, and many areas around lakes are high in organic matter. South Florida between Miami and the start of the Keys is an area of rocky soil. Gardeners can actually grow very good landscapes in crushed rocks.

Most of our soil is loose sand, which has a number of advantages:

- Sand usually drains well, except in lower areas where water accumulates.
- Sand offers good aeration for root growth.
- Because sand offers little resistance to root growth, plants become well anchored in the ground.
- Sand makes for easy digging when preparing planting sites.
- Sand can be easily amended to improve water-holding and nutrient-supplying ability.

Here are some problems you may have when growing plants in sand:

- Sand holds very few nutrients, so the plants need frequent feeding.
- Sand offers little resistance to pests that move through the soil.
- Sand dries quickly and plants need frequent watering.
- Sand blows about during windy weather and needs to be covered with vegetation or mulch.
- Sand becomes hot during the summer if it is not mulched or planted.
- Sandy soil is not suitable for all plants.

## SOIL AMENDMENTS: ALMOST A NECESSITY

Florida's sandy soil can grow lots of great plants if you add plenty of water and fertilizer, but you can make gardening even easier by improving sandy sites with organic matter. It's almost impossible to add too much organic matter when preparing flower beds, vegetable gardens, and other planting sites. Some of the organic amendments available for use include the following:

- **Compost:** Make your own at home or pick it up at county landfills. Compost puts yard trash from your landscape to good use, returning it as an excellent soil amendment. Work 4 to 6 inches into most planting sites including clay soils. Compost produced at landfills is normally alkaline and is not recommended for use with azalea or blueberry plantings.
- **Peat moss:** Florida has local sources of peat moss that can be purchased through landscape supply companies. Canadian peat moss can also be obtained at garden centers. Work 4 to 6 inches into sandy or clay soils before planting.
- **Manures:** Chicken, cow, and horse manure are all readily available. Use about 25 pounds for each 100 square feet of bed area to be planted, or follow package instructions. Fresh manures should be composted prior to use, especially in edible gardens.
- **Leaves:** Plenty of leaves are available as soil improvements. Most gardeners use them as mulch or put them in the compost pile to decompose before adding to the garden.



- **Garden and potting soils:** Both are good amendments for small garden spots, but they can be costly to use in large beds.



- **Topsoil:** Florida does not have standards for topsoil. Be careful when ordering to make sure it's not the same sandy soil found in your yard, and that it is free of weeds.

## pH—CHECKING SOIL ACIDITY IS A MUST

One small test is often overlooked by gardeners, landscapers, and other planters, and that is a soil acidity test measured in pH units. The pH of soil runs from 0.0 to 14.0, but most are in the 4.0 to 8.0 range. Any pH below 7.0 is acidic, and pH above 7.0 is alkaline. Most plants require a pH in the slightly acidic range. Lime is used to make soil less acidic, or to raise the pH, and soil or agricultural sulfur is used to make the soil more acidic, or lower the pH. In Florida, it's best to adjust the pH *after* a soil test.



# INTRODUCTION

Why is the pH so important? The pH helps determine the availability of nutrients to plants and it affects microbial activity. Soil that does not have the proper pH may not be able to grow good plants. Some plants like blueberries and azaleas need a very acidic soil, around pH 5.0, whereas most plants require a pH of about 6.5.

Have your soil pH tested before making new plantings, and then every few years thereafter. You can perform the test with a pH kit available at garden centers. The test is also performed at many garden centers and through local University of Florida Extension Service offices. Use tables or recommendations from a garden center or Extension office to make the soil pH adjustments as needed.

## WATERING CONSIDERATIONS

Much of Florida's landscape would shrivel and dry without receiving extra water. Many gardeners are practicing dryland planting techniques to reduce water usage. They use trees, shrubs, and other plantings that, once established, need very little water besides seasonal rains. But even water-wise designs usually include an oasis for plants that need more moisture. Florida can have some dry months, and many landscape plantings are made during the spring and fall seasons, when there is little rain and lots of hot weather.

Trees, shrubs, vines, and groundcovers all need a good watering program until roots are established in the surrounding soil. It's a common saying: You don't own an azalea, magnolia, or dogwood for at least two years. It takes some time to get these and other landscape plants established. Their most important need is good watering or rainfalls.

Florida's sandy soil dries rapidly, so daily watering by hand from a hose is needed in the beginning. Some gardeners recommend watering trees once a day for months if they are planted in sandy soil that seems to wick the water away from rootballs. Most gardeners water every day for the first few weeks after planting, every two to three days for the next few months, and then as needed, using the surface soil moisture as a guide. (Feel the soil, and if the upper inch begins to dry, water may be needed.)



■ *Build a small berm around new plantings to keep the water from running off.*

Note that it is important to build berms around new plantings. Many plants are grown in highly organic soils and when set in the ground the water tends to run around the rootball. You may think you are doing a good job of watering but sometimes rootballs remain dry. When you fill a berm around the rootball with water, the moisture has to move down and through the rootball before it goes into the surrounding soil. Berms are normally left in place until the plants are established.

Once established the best watering program is one that lets the plants tell you when they need water. Spots in lawns can be used as indicators: When the



## HERE'S HOW

### TO CONSERVE WATER

- Turn irrigation systems on manually and only when the plants need water.
- Feel the soil, and if the upper inch is beginning to dry, water may be needed.
- Water between four and six in the morning.
- Apply ½- to ¾-inch of water at each irrigation.
- Water trees and shrubs that use less water separately from lawns and flower beds.
- Use sprinkler heads that keep the water at ground level and off walks and roads.
- Perform monthly tests to make sure the irrigation system is working properly.
- Use microsprinklers and soaker hoses in shrub plantings, flower beds, and vegetable gardens.
- Water before freezes are expected.
- Do not water while temperatures are below 32 degrees Fahrenheit.

Take note that Florida has watering restrictions in most areas of the state. Contact your local University of Florida Extension office or water district office to learn the rules.

blades of grass turn a gray-green color and begin to fold together, it's time to water. You can also wait until the shrub and perennial foliage shows early signs of wilting—that really won't hurt established plants. Above are some guidelines for conserving water while maintaining a well-kept landscape.

## MAKING SURE PLANTINGS ARE PROPERLY FED

Plants need nutrients for growth, especially in Florida's sandy soil. Much of the fertilizer supplied to plants is quickly gone in a month or two. It's either used for growth or washed deeper into the ground.

There is much concern about groundwater pollution today, and it's important that the right

amount of fertilizer is applied for plant growth and not much more. Many plants actually grow better on a lean fertilizing schedule—they are less likely to have insect and disease problems. Also, you won't have to mow or prune as much.

Where possible, use slow-release fertilizers to feed your plants. These supply the nutrients over a period of weeks or months. Many gardeners also like to use manure and compost that slowly release nutrients for growth. Use your plant as a guide to when feedings are needed. If it's green and growing, you can skip a scheduled feeding without affecting plant growth. Keep fertilizers off walkways and roads. Try to keep a fertilizer-free zone at least 20 feet wide around lakes. Here are some suggested feeding times for landscape plants:

- **Annual flowers:** Monthly
- **Perennial flowers:** Every other month from March through November
- **Citrus trees:** March, May, August, and October
- **Container plantings:** Every other week during warmer months
- **Deciduous fruit trees:** February, June, and August
- **Groundcovers:** February, June, and September
- **Lawns:** March and September
- **Orchids:** Every other week from March through November
- **Roses:** Monthly
- **Shade trees:** March and June for three years after planting
- **Shrubs:** February, June, and September
- **Tropical fruits:** March, June, and September
- **Vegetables and herbs:** Monthly

# INTRODUCTION

## PROPER PRUNING

All plants can benefit from pruning. Sometimes pruning is just a little guidance to keep a tree trunk straight, or pinching off the tips of shrubs to form a compact plant. It's best to learn the natural shape of a plant, and then plan its pruning program.

Not all pruning is done at the same time of the year. Plants that bloom in the spring are normally trimmed immediately after flowering. With azaleas, you have from late March to the end of June to do the pruning—if you wait any longer, you will affect flowering in spring. Plants that bloom during the late spring and summer can usually be trimmed during late winter. Don't perform the trimming too soon or you could stimulate growth that might be damaged by a late cold snap. Winter pruning is usually performed in January or February, just before new growth begins.

Some plants need constant care. Roses are always being groomed to remove old flowers and dead stems. Poinsettias are trimmed throughout the spring and summer months to develop into compact plants.

Peaches, pears, figs, and grapes get a yearly pruning. Citrus trees and most tropical fruits just seem to grow themselves with limited guidance. Check all fruit trees carefully to make sure you perform the pruning that can help promote good production.

Make sure you use sharp tools when pruning any plant. Jagged cuts only encourage pests to enter the plants. Here are a few pruning tips to help you provide the needed plant care:

- Always prune back to a bud, branch angle, or trunk.
- Remove all dead or declining limbs as needed.
- Clean pruning equipment with a disinfectant after removal of diseased plant portions and after pruning plants of other species.

- Removing just the tips of stems stimulates branching.
- Remove suckers from the base of single-trunk trees.
- Thin out crossing limbs of trees and large shrubs.
- Do not apply pruning paint or sealants to wounds.
- Prune to maintain the shape of your plant or to increase fruit production.
- Avoid pruning plants to round or square shapes unless you are developing a sheared hedge.
- Not all plants need pruning every year—wait until you have a good reason to prune before doing so.

## WINTER CARE

If your plants are chosen properly, they will need very little winter care. Most trees, shrubs, vines,

■ *Plant covers should drape to the ground to entrap heat.*



and similar plants go dormant when shorter days signal the end of the growing season.

Plantings in northern and central Florida actually benefit from getting a little taste of cooler weather as winter approaches. It slows their growth and makes them much more resistant to frosts and freezes when they arrive.

Much of Florida's real plant damage occurs when warm days are followed by sudden freezes that catch plants in active growth. Such freezes devastated home citrus plantings and many ornamentals during the 1980s. Most winter plant care in Florida means switching to seasonal varieties that won't mind the cooler temperatures. As marigolds fade, they can be replaced by petunias, snapdragons, and pansies. If you are in a really cold pocket, you must pick your plants carefully so they will survive the few days of severely cold weather that might arrive at any time during the winter.

Most gardeners keep some plantings that could be damaged by cold, usually the tropical plants that cannot be resisted at garden centers during the warmer months. Landscapes throughout the state often include hibiscus, croton, and bird of paradise, all sensitive to temperatures of 32° and below, and few planters can resist adding a stand of bananas and pineapples to the landscape. These all need cold protection or they will turn to mush upon freezing.

When cold warnings are sounded, our first urge is to encase plantings with plastic to hold in the heat. But plants are not like people: they do not give off heat. Any heat that can warm a plant must be trapped before the air cools, come from the ground, or be supplied by a heat source. Plants are often covered with plastic bags but these efforts are futile. The cold quickly passes through the thin film and the plants freeze, and if the wraps are not removed when the sun rises, the plant portions cook inside the covers.

Another common urge is to quickly harvest all available fruits from citrus trees, but citrus fruits are very hardy. Most can withstand temperatures

down to the upper 20s for several hours before they freeze. If they do freeze, you can still turn them into juice over a period of days or weeks. Here are ways to ensure winter survival of cold-sensitive plants:

## HERE'S HOW

### TO PROTECT COLD-SENSITIVE PLANTS

- Keep the plants in pots that can be moved indoors when cold warnings are sounded. You can pot some small fruit trees, including citrus and mango, or just stick to potted poinsettias, plumerias, tomatoes, and orchids.
- Dig up the plants just before the freeze and put them in pots or burlap to move into warmer locations. Many gardeners save their favorite crotons, bromeliads, and heliconias with this technique.
- Mound up soil over the lower stems of in-ground plants to protect the buds from freezing temperatures. With some plants, the tops can be removed a foot or two above the ground before the soil is mounded over the stems.
- Cover plants with cloth sheets or quilts draped to the ground to entrap heat from the soil and keep out the cold.
- Surround plants with plastic over stakes held above and away from the foliage. Outdoor-approved lights can be added inside to provide heat, but they should not touch the cover.
- Construct a plastic or cardboard windscreen several feet high and add microsprinklers to apply water to the base of the plants. To protect the lower portion of the plants, 10 gallons of water per hour must be uniformly applied to the base of the plants before temperatures reach freezing and continuing until the ice that was formed melts.

# INTRODUCTION

## HOW TO USE FLORIDA MONTH-BY-MONTH GARDENING

This book can be used as the “operator’s manual” for your garden and landscape. Each monthly chapter—January through December—focuses on the major tasks necessary to keep growing and maintaining good, strong, healthy plants in your landscape. It is both a guide for new gardeners and a resource for more experienced gardeners to expand their gardening skills and knowledge.

The tasks included in each month include Plan, Plant, Care, Water, Fertilize, and Problem-Solve. Most are self-explanatory, but note that pruning and grooming tips are covered under Care, and Problem-Solve primarily covers pest and disease issues. The major plant groups noted in the following paragraphs are covered in each of these categories; if you do not see a topic covered, then it’s not a *major* task for that month. My goal was to create an easy-to-use, year-round reference book—but it can’t cover every single thing. So use this as your blueprint to a beautiful landscape . . . month-by-month.

**Annuals** add a lot of color to our landscape.

They are intended to live one season and then be replaced (sometimes by other annuals). Learn how to start them, plant them, identify and control pests, and keep them looking beautiful.

**Bulbs** include true bulbs, corms, rhizomes, and tubers. They are perennial plants and can offer some truly amazing colors and forms. Most people think of traditional spring-blooming bulbs, but summer bulbs can brighten shady spots and give a tropical ambience to your garden. You’ll learn how to get the most from them.

**Edibles** are everywhere! Florida is blessed with a nearly year-round climate, which makes growing edibles so easy. There’s hardly a yard in Florida without a citrus tree of some sort, or an herb or vegetable patch, even if it’s in a container. Learn how to manage the citrus you already have (admittedly a challenge now) and to plant and harvest the many herbs and vegetables that grow so well for us.

**Foliage Plants** cover both indoor and outdoor plants that may be overwintering indoors. Because of Florida’s unique climate, which can be subtropical, we can move many plants that only grow indoors in other parts of the country to the outside for much of the year. Learn how to care for them.

**Lawns** are still one of a homeowner’s top desires. They provide such a lovely green backdrop to the other parts of a landscape. But lawns, as beautiful as they can be, demand attention from you. Learn when and how to water, feed, mow, and treat for pests to achieve the best-looking lawn possible.

**Perennials** are, as their name implies, plants that last. That is, they come back year after year, making them the workhorses of the garden (along with trees and shrubs—also perennial). Learn how to transplant them, deadhead them, and care for them to get the most performance from them (and the least from you).

**Roses** are America’s favorite flower, and for good reason. They provide fragrance as well as beauty. But they can also be difficult, as many beautiful creatures are. Learn all about the pruning, feeding, watering, and pest controls necessary to achieve rose perfection.

**Shrubs** are one of the expected plants in a landscape. Even if a home doesn’t have flower beds, it almost always has some shrubs. They are diverse plants that can screen, flower, have great foliage, and attract wildlife (though that can be both good and not so good). Keep them looking their best by following my monthly tips to plant and care for them.

**Trees and Palms** are the framework of a garden. Florida’s climate allows palms to grow, and we treat them like trees in the landscape. They can be stately or sized for smaller landscapes, but they are essential elements to the well-planned garden. Learn how to plant them (balled and burlapped or container—or both), prune them for strength and beauty, manage the pests that may attack them, and enjoy them.



**Vines and Groundcovers** are often utilitarian plants with great beauty. They serve many purposes from replacing lawns to softening hard structures such as fences to adding textures, height, and color to the landscape. Read about how to prune and train them, and manage their health for the best-looking vines and groundcovers possible.

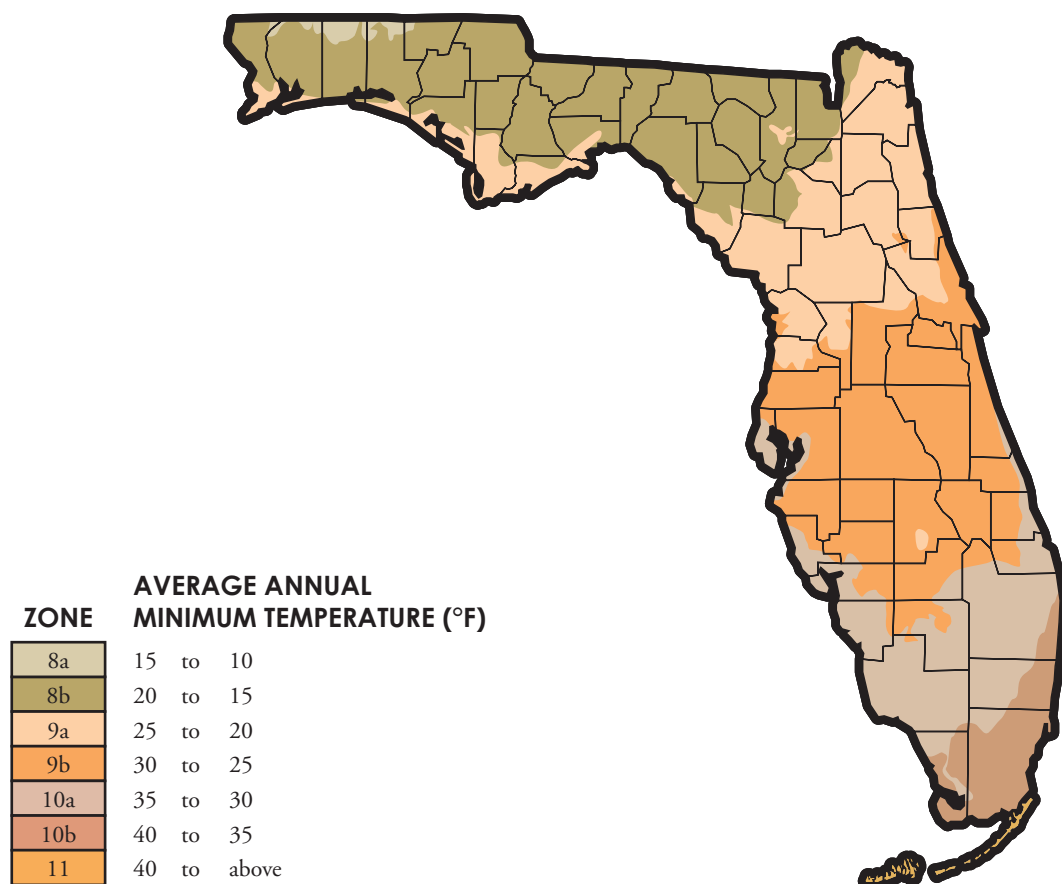
**Water Gardens** are year-round (or nearly so) delights in Florida. People love water, especially the sound of running water. Even a small water garden offers the thrill of sound to their visual appeal.

Learn the ins and outs of water plant selection, “planting,” and how to take care of them.

This is a book without a beginning or an end. You can start at any page. Just read the advice and tips in the current month, and take it from there. Because each person’s garden is a microclimate, I recommend you keep notes in a notebook or garden journal to remind you what happened in a particular month as you move into the following year. You’ll find that a year later it will be an invaluable reminder.

Now, let’s get growing!

## USDA COLD HARDINESS ZONES FOR FLORIDA



■ *USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map, 2012. Agricultural Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Accessed from <http://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov>*

# January



*Gardeners may need a jacket on a January morning, but by midday they are probably working in their shirtsleeves. January can get a bit chilly at times with an occasional frost or freeze as temperatures may dip into the 30s or below. But generally it feels like good spring weather, as described by many from more northern areas who make Florida their new home.*

*Cool-season plantings continue in all areas of the state, and residents of southern Florida can begin preparing for plantings that like the warmer weather. Gardens with crops that don't mind a chill are producing radishes, broccoli, carrots, collards, and more. In cool regions these crops can be continued for at least one more month.*

*Frosts and freezes have likely browned lawns in North Florida and burned back the temperature-sensitive ornamentals. Most should survive, with some pruning necessary when you cannot stand the brown leaves and twigs. Some colder areas of Central Florida have been affected too, but as you head south, lawns and landscape plantings are predominately green. Citrus harvest is well underway with the yellow to orange fruits decorating landscapes. Maples, Florida plums, pink tabebuias, and camellias are often in bloom, letting us know true spring weather is not far behind.*

*January is a great time to be outdoors on the warmer days when temperatures are in the 70s to plan and plant. Plants not sensitive to cold can be added to landscapes in North and Central Florida—almost any plant can be added in more southern regions. Digging is easy in Florida sands, and it is a stress-free time of the year.*

*Some might say Florida gardeners like to party because we celebrate two Arbor Days—the first arrives on the third Friday in January. Originally it was our time for planting bare-root trees to take advantage of the cooler weather with minimal plant loss. Now most are added to landscapes from containers. If you do not have room for a tree, maybe a shrub, vine, or even a few perennials would do. And, yes, we celebrate National Arbor Day in April too.*

## PLAN

### ALL

January can be a wonderful planning and planting month. The weather is invigorating and there is less stress on you and the plants. It's a good time to decide where you need new landscape plantings and then prep the sites for the additions.

Use the month of January to take soil samples for testing. When the soil is properly adjusted for your plantings, you will get the best growth. It is best to take a number of samples from each lawn, flower bed, and garden or shrub plantings to be tested. Take the samples from the surface of the soil down to 4 to 6 inches deep. About a trowel-full is all you need. Then mix them together to obtain a 1-pint composite sample for each planting area to be tested. Many University of Florida Extension offices perform soil pH tests, as do some garden centers. You can also purchase soil pH testing kits. In Florida, do not add lime to lawns without a soil test recommendation. Complete soil tests for nutrient elements can also be made through the Extension office.

January is a good time to move ornamentals to a better location. Try to get a good-sized intact rootball by first wetting the soil thoroughly before

digging. Gently form the shape of a rootball, cutting roots by hand if needed, and then lift the plant from the ground to move to a new location or into a container.

Many plants are dormant now in the colder portions of the state. Roses and some perennials may produce a few blooms and water garden plantings may be brown to green depending on your location. Foliage plants are surviving well in South Florida but in other areas they just need winter protection or a location inside the home.

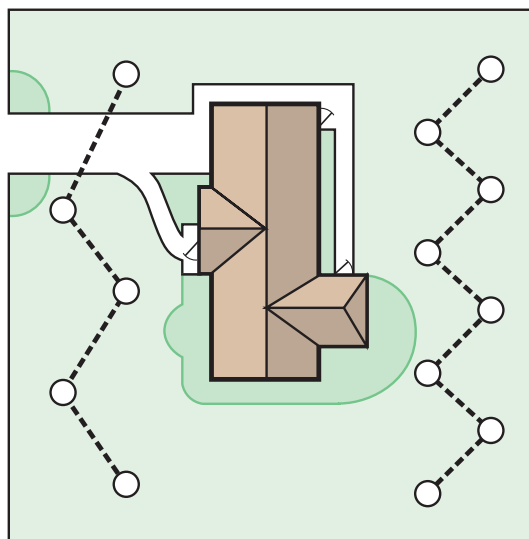
### ANNUALS

New flower beds might also be in your plans. Sometimes these can be added where turf won't grow or in those small spots that are not so easy to mow. Continue filling flower beds with the old reliables, and then add new selections. Some annuals that are winter favorites may not be completely hardy. Only pansies and violas are resistant to hard freezes. Annuals, including petunias, snapdragons, and dianthus, tolerate light freezes. The ever-popular geraniums suffer frost and freeze damage so consider providing cold protection. Lingering fall warm-season annuals are likely fading; these are still best replaced with winter annuals.

### BULBS

Don't let the New Year start without resolving to add Florida's great bulbs to the landscape. Now is the time to visit garden centers and check out displays. Be sure the bulbs are in good condition:

- Look for signs of growth indicating they are ready to sprout. Avoid bulbs in full growth at this time of year, as they could be damaged by cold.
- Check for rotten spots—they will only get bigger.
- Make sure the bulbs have sections with buds present.
- Select only the larger bulbs capable of producing a plant quickly.
- Check for insects and diseases.



■ Take soil samples from all parts of your lawn for an accurate test.



Take a look at your landscape plan, and draw bulb plantings where you need them. You may want a permanent crinum, amaryllis, or ginger planting, or maybe some gladiolus or cannas that are planted for a season or two. You may want to use them as spots of color along walkways, fillers of open areas, backdrops for flower beds, or additions to perennial gardens.

## EDIBLES

Check the vegetable garden and look ahead to the next few months. If a crop is finishing up soon, plan to replace it with another cool-season planting. The secret to providing fresh food for the table is keeping the garden full of productive plants.

If you are just now jumping into planting herbs, you are right on time. Many herbs need the cooler weather to be good producers. Most areas of the state have about five months of good herb season left. Many herbs can be mingled with vegetable plantings and flower beds. But maybe the best way to grow herbs is in containers.

Florida's citrus season is at its height, with many fruits ripening in the home landscape. It's time to finish up the navels, hamlins, and other early-fruiting oranges. The temple and murcott oranges are ready to pick too. Most of the mandarins and related hybrids are also finishing production. And for true Florida residents, the grapefruits are just starting to get sweet.

If you have room for fruit, now is a good time to decide which you would like to plant. Consider citrus as well as deciduous and tropical fruits like grapes, peaches, avocados, and mangoes. Most have attractive features and are sure to be conversation starters. Do make sure they can survive in your location. Check with your garden center and local Extension Service. Some cold-sensitive plants might grow in the warmer parts of your neighborhood or could be grown in containers to move to warm locations if winter freezes are expected.

## LAWNS

Lawn care is pretty much on hold. Some lawns are brown and most are not making much growth. Now is the time to plan where you need new turf and and look at where you experienced problems the previous



■ Lettuce, cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower are just a few of the great cool-season crops.

seasons. Sod can be added at this time of the year but if we have a freeze and the fields are brown the turf is not likely to be shipped for home use until it regreens. Also, new sod may be susceptible to winter injury. A temporary winter lawn of ryegrass can be sown but lasts only a few months. Sometimes the best answer to a lawn problem is another type of groundcover.

## PERENNIALS

How well perennial gardens do this month depends greatly on where you live in Florida. Most of the colder spots have very little color since perennials take a break for the winter. But warmer locations, including most of Central and South Florida, are still enjoying bush daisy, angelonia, firespike, jacobinia, and more. The hardier perennials can all be added to beds at this time. One job this month is to make sure cold protection is available for sensitive plants. It takes only a little extra effort to keep a prize bird of paradise or cluster of pentas from being damaged.

## TREES & PALMS

By planting trees and palms now, you may get a little shade by summer. When planning for new trees make sure you are picking the right plant for the location:

- Look at the eventual height and width so as not to affect buildings, walkways, or views.
- Consider the small-growing trees for most urban properties. Too much shade limits what you can grow.