



Horticulture News

Butterfly Gardening

Attracting butterflies into your garden is not difficult. Butterflies are equipped with a finely tuned and highly sensitive sense of smell. If you plant the right flowers they will come and make your garden their home. Butterflies are looking for two things when they enter a garden: *nectar*, the food that adult butterflies need, and *host plants*, a place to lay eggs and provide food for the caterpillars. Both are necessary to create a successful butterfly garden. Many butterflies prefer plants that have pink, red, purple, yellow or orange flowers. Most butterflies must land in order to get to the nectar. They prefer plants with short tubular

flowers, or flowers with large, flat petals. Both butterflies, and the plants they prefer, like bright sunny areas protected from high winds. On cool mornings, butterflies need to warm up before they can become active. To do this, they often sit on a reflective surface such as a flat stone, spread their wings, and turn their backs to the sun. Their wings work like solar panels, absorbing the sun's warmth that is then transferred to their bodies. Butterflies often gather in groups on wet sand or mud, and appear to be eating. This activity is called *pud-*

dling, and they do it to obtain the minerals that are found in the soil. You can create a puddling place by putting a shallow pan in the soil, filling it with coarse sand, and keeping it moist.

Some butterflies rarely feed on nectar and will only visit a garden if it has some *extra touches*, such as rotten fruit or manure. The best fruits are those that are either soft (banana) or moist (watermelon).

Butterflies and caterpillars are insects! Use biological controls, such as ladybugs, lacewings and preying mantids, or horticultural oils and insecticidal soaps instead of pesticides.



Butterfly Garden Plants

Nectar Plants

- Ageratum
- Aster
- Borage
- Calendula
- Clover
- Dianthus
- Gaillardia
- Goldenrod
- Impatiens
- Ironweed
- Marigold
- Milkweed
- Mint
- Pentas
- Phlox
- Petunia
- Purple Coneflower

- Salvia
- Scabiosa
- Sedum
- Shasta Daisy
- Thyme
- Sunflower
- Verbena
- Zinnia

Trees

- Bottlebush
- Citrus
- Wild Lime
- Red buckeye

Shrubs

- Azalea
- Butterfly bush
- Fetterbush
- Firebush
- Hibiscus
- Plumbago
- Staggerbush
- New Jersey tea
- Viburnum

- Black cherry
- Carrot
- Cherry laurel
- Clovers
- Coffeeweed
- Dill
- Dogwoods
- Elm
- Fennel
- Hackberries
- Milkweed
- Mustard
- Native grasses
- Oaks
- Parsley
- Passion flowers
- Paw paw
- Pearly everlastings
- Pipevines
- Plantains
- Queen Anne's Lace
- Sassafras
- Senna
- Snapdragon
- Spicebush
- Tulip tree
- Viburnum
- Wild plums

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Larval Plants

- Aster

Program Announcements

Stormwater/ Landscape Program

Provide your neighborhood with information about proper landscape and pond maintenance practices that will protect Florida's natural waterways.

St. John's River Water Management/WAVE Representative Paula Staples and Rebecca L. Jordi, University of Florida/IFAS Horticulture Extension Agent will come for a free consultation.

This program must have a minimum of ten participants.

Troubleshooting Florida Landscapes

Do you and your neighbors need a personal consultation on how to solve landscape problems? Are you concerned about your trees, shrubs, or lawngrass thriving?

Rebecca L. Jordi, University of Florida/IFAS Horticulture Extension Agent and Nassau County Master Gardener Volunteers will come for a free group consultation.

This program must have a minimum of six participants.

Pruning Class

9AM Thursday
February 24th
Mr. Way's house
450368 Old Dixie Highway
Callahan



Landscape Matters

March 16th -Shade Gardening
Master Gardener Terry Collins

April 13th - Weeds of Turf
Master Gardener Richard Austin

Wednesday 10 - 11AM
Peck Center Auditorium
516 S. 10th Street
Fernandina Beach

These programs are free to the public, so please call us at **904-879-1019** or e-mail rljordi@ifas.ufl.edu if you plan to attend. If response is too small, the program will be canceled.

Invasive Plants Mexican Petunia

Ruellia brittoniana or *Ruellia tweediana*, also known as the Mexican petunia is an extremely tough, drought-resistant plant with a long bloom period. Blue, violet, red or pink flowers appear on this perennial in the spring, summer and fall. These flowers are showy, and their nectar is appealing to various species of butterflies. This plant is native to Mexico, but it has escaped cultivation and can be found invading habitats across Florida. It grows in practically any soil, clay or sand, and tolerates wet or dry conditions. The Mexican petunia is not related to the common garden petunia.



The species will grow as tall as 3 feet, while newer dwarf varieties can be kept at 8-10 inches tall. Preferred planting time for *R. brittoniana* is early spring, giving the plant time to put on its foliage growth and produce blooms during its first season. There are no insect or disease problems to speak of. Pruning is usually not necessary, unless you want to remove some of the woody stalks that develop as the plant ages. Fertilizing is usually not needed. Clumps can become invasive in good soils if not controlled. In the nursery, propagation is by seeds,

cuttings or division. Plants can be divided after the first frost. After flowering, cut back stems about half-way for a new crop! Mexican petunia is listed as a Category I invasive species by the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council. This means that it is "altering native plant communities by displacing native species, changing community structures or ecological functions, or hybridizing with natives". This warning applies to all parts of the state of Florida (and other areas with similar mild climates). Where hardy, the Mexican petunia excels at invading wetlands.

"Mexican petunia is listed as a Category I invasive species by the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council."

“To Do” List for March

Annuals: Check the soil for watering needs. Water as needed. Over-watering causes root and stem rot. Opt for drought tolerant plants such as purslane or periwinkle. Group your plants together according to their watering and light requirements. Plant dianthus, petunias, and snapdragons.

Bulbs: These will be in full bloom. To conserve the plant's energy, cut off the old seedpods after flowering. Keep the soil moist by watering when surface soil begins to be dry to the touch.

Lawns: Rake dead grass to allow new grass to grow. Complete fertilizer can be applied this month if your lawn needs it. Check your soil first. Phosphorus is one element that can accumulate in the soil.. Select a fertilizer with a such as a 15-0-15 or 16-4-8 .Follow directions on the label.

Perennials: Fertilize this month if you missed last month. Plant poinsettias in landscape during late March to early April. Cut back plants to within 12 to 18 inches of ground level. Pinch back new growth every four weeks until September 10. Fertilize monthly from May to September. Choices for planting include lantana, pentas, salvias, purple coneflowers, buddleia, and verbenas.

Shrubs: Prune and fertilize azaleas with acid fertilizer as soon as they finish blooming. Azaleas may be transplanted now as well. Overgrown shrubs can be cut back down to 12-24 inches.

Trees: Make sure your younger trees maintain a straight trunk as new growth begins. Remove or prune (called a drop crotch cut) all limbs that may be competing with the central leader.

Vegetables: Have your soil tested prior to planting your seeds or transplants. The pH and the nutrient content of the soil is an important factor in production of vegetables. This month's choices for planting are cantaloupes, watermelon and beans.

“To Do” List for April

Annuals: Check to see if any annuals need staking. Add mulch if the layer is too thin to hold in water, but never more than 2-3 inches. To prevent stem rot, make sure the mulch is kept a few inches back from the base of the annuals. Annuals to plant now include celosia, coleus, coreopsis, dusty miller, geraniums, hollyhocks, impatiens, kalanchoe, lobelias, marigolds, portulacas, rudbeckias, salvia, verbenas, zinnias.

Lawns: Wait to water when the leaves curl and turn gray-green. Water during early morning hours. Stop feeding during the very dry times. Keep your lawn mower height at the highest setting for your grass type. Sand may be applied to uneven areas of a lawn for leveling. It should not be more than 1 inch thick or it may damage the lawn. Recycle grass clippings by not catching them when the lawn is mowed. Removing the clippings carries off fertilizer that has been applied to the lawn. Removing the clippings does not cause thatch buildup if only the top third of the grass has been removed.

Perennials: This is a good time to do a little grooming to reshape perennials. If limbs with blooms are lanky or out of place, prune hard to correct the growth problems. Divide overcrowded fall flowering perennials and bulbs. Bulbs to be planted now include achimenes, agapanthus, amaryllis, Asiatic lilies, begonias, blood lily, caladiums, cannas, crinum, dahlia, gladiolus, gloriosa lily and zephyranthes.

Trees: Most older trees and palms are fine and can exist with the seasonal rains. Look for aphid, borer, and scale infestations. Caterpillars may be extra heavy this month.

Vegetables: Keep spreading herbs in bounds. You may plant anise, basil, borage, chives, dill, marjoram, mint, oregano, rosemary, sage, savory, and thyme. This month you can plant cantaloupe, collards, cucumbers, lima beans, okra, pumpkin, yams, peppers, squash and watermelon.

Selected from *Florida Vegetable Guide* by JM Stephens, RA Dunn, G Kidder, D Short, & GW Simone, University of Florida and *Month-by-Month Gardening in Florida* by Tom MacCubbin



Buddleia



Achimenes

Sincerely,



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If you would like to receive
this newsletter in color via e-
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We are on the web!

<http://nassau.ifas.ufl.edu/>

Herb of the Month Lemon Grass

Lemon grass (*Cymbopogon citratus*), a native of India, is widely used in Thai, Vietnamese, Caribbean, and Asian cooking. It has become quite popular in the United States. Most of the commercial crops for the United States are grown in California and Florida. This is a very pungent herb and is normally used in small amounts. The entire stalk of the grass can be used. The grass blade can be sliced very fine and added to soups or curries. The bulb can be bruised (press down on the bulb end of the lemon grass with the side of a large knife or pound lightly with a kitchen mallet) and minced for use in a variety of recipes.

The light lemon flavor of this grass blends well with garlic, chilies, and cilantro. To harvest, pull up a stalk firmly close to the root end and snap it off just prior to using. Lemon grass may be grown from seed, seedlings, or bulbs. Detach one or more bulbs from the host plant. Place the bulb end in rooting hormone powder, then plant in a pot filled with vermiculite, moist sand, or any seed starting material. Keep the medium moist but not soggy. Another method is to place the bulb end in a small container (such as a jar) of water and allow the bulb to root. Then transplant.



Lemon Grass