

# Horticulture News

UF/IFAS Nassau County Extension

July/August, 2007

## Tomatoes

The tomato (*Solanum lycopersicum*) is a plant in the nightshade family, native to Central and South America, from Mexico to Peru. It is a short-lived perennial, grown as an annual, with a weakly woody stem that usually scrambles over other plants.

After the Spanish conquest of South America, the Spanish distributed the tomato throughout their colonies in the Caribbean. The Spanish also brought the tomato to Europe. It grew easily in Mediterranean climates, and cultivation began in the 1540s. It was probably eaten shortly after it was introduced, though it was certainly being used as food by the early 1600s in Spain.

Because the plant was clearly similar to its

deadly nightshade relatives, it was assumed for years to be poisonous in Italy, where it was grown as a decorative plant. Eventually the peasant classes discovered that it could be eaten when more desirable food was scarce. This eventually developed into a whole cuisine of tomato dishes, as the wonders of the fruit became obvious.

The tomato is the most popular vegetable in home gardens, and in our area we have two seasons to grow them: spring and fall. The best times to set out tomato plants are mid March (after the danger of frost has passed) and

mid to late August. Plan to have spring planted



tomatoes harvested and plants pulled up by the end of June when pests and diseases become rampant. Fall plants can stay in the ground until temperatures drop and they stop producing.

Because tomatoes have disease problems, it is a good idea to choose varieties that mature quickly and have strong resistance. Look for the letters VFN or T after the variety name

to indicate resistance to verticillium wilt (V), fusarium wilt (F), nematodes (N) and tobacco mosaic (T). The popular variety Better Boy VFN for example, is resistant to verticillium and fusarium wilts and nematodes. Resistance is not the same as immunity, and plants can still get sick. Always rotate planting sites, and immediately pull up any diseased plants.

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## Program Announcements

### Neighborhood 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 fifteen (15) 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 fifteen (15) participants.

### Landscape Matters

There will be no programs in July or August.

**These programs are free to the public, so please call us at 904-879-1019, 548-1116 or e-mail [rljordi@iuf.edu](mailto:rljordi@iuf.edu) if you plan to attend. If response is too small, the program will be canceled.**

## Weed Watch - Chamberbitter

**D**o you have the weed that has leaves resembling those of a miniature mimosa tree? On the undersides are many small, round balls. It's called chamberbitter, *Phyllanthus urinaria*, and it is very common in North Florida. It germinates from early summer through early fall. Chamberbitter is very competitive in our lawns. It produces a great

number of viable seeds and it has good shade-tolerance but will grow in full sun.

Once it sets seed, control is much more difficult. To begin the battle against chamberbitter, apply a pre-emergent herbicide when the soil starts warming up, usually around the first of May. Once the chamber-

bitter weeds have germinated, a post-emergent herbicide may be necessary.



## Master Gardener Program

**D**o you love plants, trees, and gardening? Would you enjoy volunteering your time to help teach youth and newcomers in your community? Then perhaps you should become a University of Florida/IFAS Master Gardener Volunteer! It requires

75 hours of volunteer time to be given back to Nassau County Extension the first year and 25 hours every year thereafter. Ten sessions held on Wednesdays will begin in the middle of August and end in November. Textbooks will cost \$75. If you are interested and

would like an application packet please call 904 879-1019 or email [rljordi@ifas.ufl.edu](mailto:rljordi@ifas.ufl.edu). Interviews for the Master Gardener Program will begin near the end of July and selection will occur by the first week of August.



## July Checklist

**Bulbs:** Separate bulbs and give away to friends. Bulbs planted too deeply need to be removed. Transplant bulbs if the area is receiving too much water.

**Lawns:** Add iron to green up lawn but avoid nitrogen fertilization this month. “Take-all-root-rot” will be in full force during the summer - be sure to avoid over watering and over fertilizing.

**Perennials:** Cut off old flower heads, prune off dead or insect infested areas, and pinch off tips of stems to encourage denser growth.

**Trees:** Remove crape myrtle seed heads to encourage blooming through September. Remove old flower and seed stalks. Prune now for trees that flower in the winter. Fertilize palms and fruit trees.

**Vegetables:** It's too hot to be planting anything now. However, this is a good month to solarize your fall garden. Till your plot, moisten the soil, cover the ground with clear plastic. Place heavy objects around the edges to keep the plastic from blowing away. Let the sun bake your soil. It will help control fungi and nematodes. After 30 days till soil, replace the plastic and bake another few weeks. Plant your August or September garden.

## August Checklist

**Flowers:** Plant asters, balsam, begonias, black-eyed Susan, blue daze, cats whiskers, coleus, cosmos, cockscombs, dianthus, forget-me-not, gaillardia, golden globe impatiens, marigolds, melampodium, moon vine, pentas, periwinkles, petunias, phlox, porterweed, portulaca, purslane, salvia, scabiosa, strawflowers, sunflowers, tithonias, torenia, verbena, and zinnias.

**Bulbs:** Plant African Iris, agapanthus, amaryllis, cannas, crinums, daylilies, gladioli, gloriosa lilies, society garlic, and rain lilies (*Zephyranthes*).

**Lawns:** Now is a good time to install a seeded lawn. Select good quality seed such as Argentine Bahia, common bermudagrass or centipede. Initially the seeds need stay moistened but once they have germinated irrigation can be reduced. These grasses do well without heavy irrigation and high nitrogen fertilizers. They turn brown earlier than St. Augustinegrass in the winter.

**Perennials:** Start salvia, violets, ruellia, lion's ear, gerbera daisy, butterfly weed, and blanket flower from saved seeds. Let seeds dry on the plants. When pods open, dry seeds inside on screen or cheesecloth. Put into a plastic bag or a jar and label. Keep the seeds in the vegetable section of the refrigerator. Use within one year. Do not store in the freezer!

**Trees:** Cut back unwanted limbs to a branch angle or the trunk. Remove old fronds and seed stalks from palms. Do not apply paints or coverings to wounds. Remove old seedheads from crape myrtle trees to encourage additional blooms.

**Vegetables:** August plantings are especially important for corn, eggplant, pumpkins, peppers, tomatoes, and watermelons. Beware of cutworms.

*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*



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Nassau County is proud to provide you with this information. Horticulture News is a joint project with contributions by county agents and Master Gardener Volunteers.

Sincerely,



Rebecca L. Jordi,  
Horticulture Agent II



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## *Herb of the Month - Chives*

**C**hives, a member of the onion family native to the Orient, have been added to foods for nearly 5000 years and are very easy to grow.

Chives can be started from seed, which germinate very slowly and require darkness, constant moisture, and a temperature of 60° to 70° F for best results. Seeds For faster results, purchase plants or “borrow” some from a neighbor.

Chives need to be kept moist throughout the growing season. During the hot summer, choose a location where they can enjoy some shade during the day.

Divide established clumps every three years in the spring. Remove the flower heads to maintain a constant supply of flavorful leaves.

The foliage dies down in the winter. The bulbs need a cold dormant period to send out leaves again. Chives are rarely bothered by pests, and

keep their neat appearance throughout the spring, summer, and fall. Plant as a border for a flower, vegetable, or herb garden.

Harvest chives whenever you need them. Cut them back if they get to six inches. This will promote new tender growth.

If you let them grow too long, they will produce pretty lavender flowers which make an attractive garnish. Use chives in the kitchen, any place you would use onions.

