Bird of paradise or crane flower (Strelitzia reginae) is a native of South Africa and is closely related to the banana. The herbaceous plant derives its common names from the unique flower it bears, which resembles a brightly colored bird in flight. The leathery leaves are held upright on stiff leafstalks and are about 6 inches wide and 18 inches long. The plant forms a 3- to 5-foot-tall clump that can be used as a focal point in the landscape or in mass plantings. The evergreen leaves of bird-of-paradise do not drop from the plant, which makes it an excellent addition around pools or wherever shedding leaves are an aesthetic and/or maintenance problem.

Bird-of-paradise makes an attractive landscape plant throughout Florida, although it requires cold protection in the northern part of the state. The plant will tolerate temperatures as low as 24°F for a short time; however, freezing temperatures will damage developing flower buds and flowers. To ensure flower production in north Florida, grow bird-of-paradise in a container that can be moved indoors during freezes.

The showy bloom is actually a combination of blue petals and orange sepals that emerge from a beak-like bract (modified leaf). Blooms appear intermittently most of the year. Healthy, mature plants can produce as many as three dozen flower spikes a year, which will last up to two weeks when cut.

Related Species
Bird-of-paradise is a member of the Strelitziaceae family which contains other species often seen in central and south Florida landscapes. Strelitzia parvifolia is similar to, but smaller than S. reginae. Its leaves grow to 9 inches long and are less than 3 inches wide. The flowers are bright orange with blue tongues. S. nicolai (white or tree bird-of-paradise) grows to 15-30 feet and has large, paddle-like leaves arranged spirally around a distinct stem. Its large size and white flowers resemble the traveler’s tree (Ravenala madagascariensis). However, the leaves of traveler’s tree are arranged in a flattened, symmetrical fan and the flowers lack blue petals. New shoots of traveler’s tree are produced at the base of the plant and should be removed if a solitary form is desired. White bird-of-paradise also produces dense offshoots that should be thinned occasionally.

Planting and Care
Bird-of-paradise grows in most soils, but does best in fertile, organic soils with good drainage. It is considered to be a slow growing plant. For good flower production, place plants in sunny or partially shaded locations. Plants grown in partial shade will be taller and have somewhat larger flowers. In full sun, plants are smaller and flowers are on shorter stems. The bird of paradise will tolerate light salt spray but should not be used in exposed locations near the ocean.

Bird-of-paradise tends to produce more flowers along the outside of the plant. Thus, spacing the plants at least 6 feet apart will allow adequate space for flowering.

Planting Information
The planting hole should be dug 2 to 3 times the diameter of the root ball. Make it as deep as the root ball is tall. Before planting, thoroughly water the plant and remove it from the container. Gently place the plant in the hole, making sure the top of the root ball is no deeper than the soil surface. Planting too deeply may cause a delay in flowering. Fill around the ball with soil and gently firm the soil. Water thoroughly while planting to remove air pockets. Construct a saucer-like basin around the plant from the extra backfill soil. This will hold water until it drains down to the plant’s roots.

Where the soil is hard, compacted or poorly drained, consider digging a planting hole half as deep. Mound the soil to cover the sides of the root
A plant installed in this manner might require more frequent irrigation during dry periods but is not likely to suffer from drainage problems.

**Care after Planting**

The success or failure of a new planting often depends on whether the plant receives adequate moisture during the establishment period (i.e., the first six months). Dry or soggy conditions will cause leaves to yellow and eventually die. Once established, bird-of-paradise prefers frequent watering from rain or irrigation during the warm growing season. During the winter months, plants should be watered only when the soil is fairly dry.

Mulch placed around the base of plants helps conserve moisture, stabilizes root temperature, and reduces weed infestations. Keep a 2- to 3-inch circular area around the stems of plants free of mulch. Mulches against the stems of plants may increase the chance of stem rot.

Common organic mulch materials include leaves, pine needles, bark, and wood chips. Inorganic materials like gravel and crushed stone are also suitable.

**Fertilization and Pruning**

For best growth and flowering, bird-of-paradise requires fertilization. Organic fertilizers (such as sewage sludge, manure, or blood meal), granular landscape fertilizers, or controlled-release materials such as Osmocote® or Nutricote® can be used. Spread fertilizer around plants every three months during the growing season according to the label directions. Dead leaves and old flower stalks should be removed to increase the aesthetic quality of the plant and to reduce the chance of fungal organisms building up on the dead tissue.

**Propagation**

**Seeds**

A bird-of-paradise grown from seed will take three to five years to bloom. The black seeds have orange fuzz on one end and are the size of sweet pea seeds. The hard seeds must be scarified (nicked or scratched) before they will germinate. To scarify, soak the seeds in lukewarm water for several hours, and then nick them with a knife or small file. Scarified seeds will germinate in two to three months. Another way to decrease germination time is to put un-scarified seeds in a plastic bag and place them in a refrigerator at 40-45°F for two weeks. Then scarify them.

Sow seeds in vermiculite, a one-to-one mixture of peat and perlite, or a ready-made mix, to a depth of one-half inch. The soil mix must be kept consistently damp until the seeds germinate. To ensure a moist, humid environment, cover the seed flat or container with a sheet of glass or clear plastic and place it in indirect light. Transplant seedlings individually into pots when they have two true leaves. Fertilization can begin at this stage.

**Division**

The bird-of-paradise can also be propagated by division. This method will produce mature, flowering plants in one to two years. For best results, divide clumps during late spring or early summer. Dig up and separate old clumps, dividing those with four to five shoots into single-stem divisions.

Plant divisions at the same soil depth at which they were previously grown. Keep the soil moist until roots are established (at least three months), then begin fertilizing.

**Pest and Disease Problems**

The bird-of-paradise is relatively pest free. Occasional insects include aphids, caterpillars, grasshoppers, scales and snails. A leaf borer will sometimes attack the flower bracts during August and September. Fungal leaf spot disease may also occur. None of these typically threaten the overall survival of the plant. Information and recommendations for insect and disease management are available from your local county extension office [http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/map/](http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/map/).
These programs are free to the public, so please call us at 904-491-7340 or 904-879-1019 or e-mail rljordi@ufl.edu if you plan to attend. If response is too small, the program will be canceled.

Program Announcements

Landscape Matters 10AM-11AM

Perennials
Wednesday May 8
Master Gardener Shirley Lohman

Annuals
Wednesday June 12
Master Gardener Jane Brown

Palms
Wednesday May 10
Rebecca Jordi - Horticulture Agent III

Location
Yulee Satellite Office
86026 Pages Dairy Road Yulee, FL

Plant Clinics 10AM-2PM

Monday May 6
Monday May 20
Monday June 3
Monday June 17

Bring us your tired, diseased, insect infested plants yearning to be free of problems. When possible place your plant in a plastic bag to prevent chances of spreading issues to other plants. You will receive current researched based information on proper plant care, disease management and insect control. These sessions are free to the public. No registration required. Come anytime between 10AM - 2PM for expert advice.

Location
Yulee Satellite Office
86026 Pages Dairy Road Yulee, FL

Spring Plant Sale 2013

Our biannual plant sale has Master Gardener-propagated plants, select trees and shrubs, “goodies “ for your garden, including custom painted planters and new this year, FNGLA Florida Plants of the Year. Don’t miss the best sale Nassau County has ever seen! All proceeds benefit the Nassau County Master Gardener program and their volunteer community projects in Nassau County. For more information, call the Extension office at 879-1019.

Saturday May 18 9AM-2PM
Demonstration Garden
Yulee Government Complex
96135 Nassau Place Yulee, FL

Master Gardener Program

Do 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 35 hours every year thereafter. Ten sessions held on Wednesdays will begin in the middle of August and end in November. CD Manuals will cost $55. If you are interested and would like an application packet please call 879-1019 or 491-7340 or e-mail rljordi@ufl.edu. New master gardeners will be selected in July. Classes begin in August.
Myths and folklore have been shown to have some truth and from there the telling and retelling produces some wonderful stories. Needless to say herbs are one of the best sources, and so I will tell you about some favorite herbs of mine. The facts are that I will be truthfully advising on how to grow, cultivate and enjoy your herbs, and hope you will also enjoy the myths surrounding the herbs.

An herb was classified in the fourth century botanically as herbaceous. Herbs have always been important to mankind, physically, mentally and spiritually. They seasoned and preserved food; they were used medicinally, and in worship practices. The cosmetic use was used extensively by the beautiful Cleopatra and very popular today in perfumes, creams, bath products, and the list goes on and on. Synthetic ingredients replaced many herbs in order to serve millions of people, but still today some herbs are still being used in medicine. Herbs are plants that serve and delight us. Herbs give us a quick harvest to enjoy, savor the fragrance and marvel at the blooms, and so easy to grow. A little sun, a little shade, water, fertilize sparingly and they will reward you whether planted in the ground or in a patio container. Decorate your front or back door, combining several herbs of like needs, perhaps a blooming plant for color and wait for the compliments.

My favorite herbs are sage, available in several varieties, tarragon (Mexican recommended), and the perennial favorite, rosemary. “How can a man grow old when he has sage in his garden” is an ancient proverb quoted by the Chinese. In fact sage was so valued it was said China would trade three chests of tea for a few sage leaves. Aside from
the growing old bit, sage is not just for the turkey dinner. Try it with pork, duck and sausage. Dip the leaves in batter and fry until crisp and eat. Sage likes sun but will tolerate some shade, and the bees love it.

Tarragon has become a favorite because its rich desirable flavor diffuses quickly through the other ingredients. Use it to make tarragon vinegar; harvest fresh leaves, and fill a bottle or container with your favorite vinegar. Rice vinegar will impart more of the tarragon flavor, and it works well in wine vinegar, etc.

For more ideas look on your grocery shelves, make your own……the financial savings will b huge……make one for a friend for a gift. Try tarragon in sauces, tartar, mayonnaise, salad dressings, eggs, soups, butter. Tarragon loves sun, but again tolerates shade, do not overwater, protect from freezing.

My tarragon weathered well this winter - I even had to divide it. Just in case this is not enough to encourage you to try tarragon, the roots are said to cure a toothache.

Rosemary is the easiest of herbs to grow, be sure to give it plenty of room and you will soon have enough to share with the neighborhood. The uses are many, lamb, pork, chicken, and sausage.

Rosemary can be used to scent and flavor cookies, cakes, butter, and breads. Sprigs of rosemary, tarragon and sage in a pretty vase can brighten and scent any room.

Rosemary is known as the “dew of the sea” and has been used for centuries. Rosemary was the symbol of fidelity for lovers; brides used to wear it in their hair. The Spanish revere the rosemary bush as it was said to shelter the Virgin Mary on her flight to Egypt and as she spread her cloak over the bush the white flowers turned blue. If you have aching joints or the “rhemutize” it was reputed to help the pain.

To share some more wonderful myths I will relate the story of folk from centuries ago, who in their daily walk had to pass by a scary tree. If they rubbed the bark of the tree it would sting their skin, and on the limbs were ugly twisted growths. They believed witches used this tree and so they began to shake or tap on the branches so they could pass by safely. The tree I am referring to is the witch hazel tree which is still used medicinally to produce astringent. The ugly twisted growths were harmless galls. The shaking and tapping on the tree is the origin of the expression “knock on wood” for good luck.

Fact or myth? The herb Rue, a perennial herb with lovely yellow flowers conjures up another myth, “rue the day”. The myth seems to have sprung from the definition to “feel regret or sorrow.” I planted a rue herb in my garden and told another master gardener, a Nassau County native, who has many tales of using herbs and plant. She quickly told me I must remove the plant or I would “rue the day” I planted it because it would kill other plants in my yard. I removed the plant and potted it so it would remain in its own space. I then passed it on to another master gardener, who is one of plant experts and propagates and starts many new plants in her greenhouse. This same master gardener told me recently that she still has the rue, in its pot as she is afraid to put it in the soil with her other plants. Can you believe three trained master gardeners who still are afraid we will “rue the day”? The herb can be used as a culinary but do not overuse as it could be poisonous and possibly cause a skin rash. I recommend you pot it for its beauty and not use in cooking. Some facts can be hidden in myths, I will let you decide.
Hello everybody. Welcome back to Harvest Gold. Many people these days are into heirloom plants and vegetables. In simple terms, an heirloom plant or vegetable is a cultivar that has stood the test of time, and has been passed down from generation to generation within a family or community. Heirloom plants and vegetables are open-pollinated varieties, not hybrids, and tend to be pest and disease resistant, hardy, are important storehouses of genetic diversity, and possess many other desirable qualities. These heirloom vegetables and plants were commonly grown in the past, but are no longer used much in commercial agriculture. These days, heirloom plants and vegetables are mostly found in home gardens, and are valued for the qualities mentioned above.

In my garden, I have an heirloom vegetable that I am rather proud of. I grow elephant garlic that has been passed down to me from my grandfather, Joseph Scussel. In the early 1970’s, my grandfather obtained some elephant garlic bulbs from a farmer friend of his who had been growing them for decades. He brought the garlic home, planted the cloves, and the plants grew quite well. Every spring when he harvested the garlic, he would set aside some of the bulbs to plant the following fall. After my grandfather passed away, I continued to plant a garden, and in his memory, planted his elephant garlic.

In 1986, I left home to attend school, and gave up gardening. There was one row of elephant garlic that I had left in the field and neglected to harvest. Although the field was taken over by grass and weeds, these tough little plants managed to survive, re-growing from year to year. In the early 1990’s, I returned home, and started gardening once more (if you have farming in your blood, you can never really give it up for good!). As I was preparing the field to plant again after those many years, I found about a dozen or so of the elephant garlic plants still hanging on. They were small and rather rough looking, but had survived the years of neglect. I rescued these plants, planted them in proper beds, and they came back from the brink of near extinction with a vengeance. I still grow them to this very day. If that is not a testimony to the hardiness of this tough little cultivar, I don’t know what is.

Contrary to its name, elephant garlic (Allium ampeloprasum L.) is not just ordinary garlic (Allium sativum L.) on steroids. Like onions, both are members of the Liliaceae family, but elephant garlic and regular garlic are of different species within the family. Elephant garlic is more closely related to leeks than to regular garlic. Given the right growing conditions, elephant garlic can
produce very large bulbs that may weigh up to a pound or more, and individual cloves as large as some regular garlic bulbs. It is also considered to be milder than regular garlic, and some people even eat the cloves raw, or slice them up in salads. Elephant garlic is planted in the fall, and grown and cultivated in much the same way as onions. Although elephant garlic can be planted a little earlier or a little later, I find the best time to plant it here in Nassau County is between mid-October and Thanksgiving. Elephant garlic bulbs are ready to begin harvesting when three quarters of the tops have died back. Here in Nassau County, depending on the weather and growing conditions, that usually occurs sometime between mid-May and mid-June. Garlic must be cured before it can be stored. Spread the bulbs, with tops and roots attached, in a single layer on a screen or wire frame, or tie them into bundles and hang in a warm, dry, airy location that is out of direct sunlight. When the bulbs are completely dried and the wrappers are thin and paper-like (this usually takes at least two to three weeks), remove the tops and excessive roots, leaving about one inch of stem. Store cured garlic in mesh bags in a cool, dry location.

So, what can you do with all this elephant garlic that you are harvesting? Well, growing up with an Italian mother, I can tell you the choices are limitless—I am surprised she has not made a garlic-chocolate cake yet! Just kidding about that, but you can use elephant garlic the same way you would use regular garlic. Stuff pork or beef roasts with a few cloves before baking. Sauté with your favorite vegetables. Definitely use it (and plenty of it) in your homemade spaghetti and pizza sauces. Your imagination is the limit. Just remember, elephant garlic is milder than ordinary garlic, and if you like a stronger garlic taste, use a little bit more. With elephant garlic, some people believe that its subtle flavor is its most sublime attribute, and is a very pleasant alternative to ordinary garlic.

I guess that’s enough about a plant some people affectionately call the “Stinking Rose.” But before I go, since we will soon be reaching the height of the harvest season for our spring crops here in Nassau County, I would like to share some tips for preserving the fruits of your labor.

Many of us are, or soon will be, harvesting snap beans, squash, corn, peas, butter beans, and various other vegetables, and will be canning or freezing our spring bounty to enjoy later on in the year. My mother has always found freezing to be much easier and simpler than canning. All you do is blanch and freeze. To blanch, wash and prepare the produce, cover with about one to two inches of water, bring to a boil, and cook for at least three minutes. Turn off the heat, and let cool. Pack and freeze the vegetables using the same water they were blanched in. This works very well for squash, snap beans, butter beans, field peas, and the like. (Cooking hint: Vegetables can be blanched a bit longer than three minutes in order to minimize cooking time when actually preparing your meal.)

Tomatoes, corn, and okra are prepared for freezing in a slightly different manner than the blanching method described above. For tomatoes, wash but do not peel the tomatoes.
Put the tomatoes in a pot, cover with water, and bring to a boil. As soon as the water starts boiling, cut the heat off, and let cool. When the water has cooled, discard the water, peel the tomatoes (this is the messy part), and freeze.

For corn, cut the kernels off of the cob, or cream the corn. Put the corn in a microwave safe casserole dish (a little water can be added if the corn is a bit old or dry), cover, and microwave for about ten minutes, or until the corn starts to bubble around the edges of the dish. Be sure to stir the corn a couple of times during this process. (The time depends on the size of the container. If using a small container, do not microwave as long.) Remove the corn from the microwave, let cool, and freeze.

Okra is prepared for freezing in much the same way as corn. Wash and slice the okra (or leave whole if small and tender), put the okra in a microwave safe dish without water, cover, and microwave for about 10 minutes, gently stirring a couple of times while cooking. Again, the cooking time depends on the size of the dish—do not cook as long if using a smaller dish. Let cool, put in freezer bags, press as much air out of the bag as possible without totally squishing the okra, and freeze. (Cooking hint: If you do not like slimy okra, when cooking okra and tomatoes, add a tablespoon of apple cider vinegar to the pot prior to cooking to cut down on the slime.)

Well, my friends, I guess that’s about enough for today. As we enter summer, stay cool, God Bless, and Happy Harvesting.

Peace and Goodness

Joseph
Miss Alice’s Stewed Okra and Tomatoes

Ingredients

• 1 Quart Tomatoes (Peeled and Chopped)
• 1 Quart Okra (Sliced)
• 1 Medium Onion (Diced)
• 2 Cloves Garlic (Minced)
• 1 Cup Water
• Salt and Pepper (To Taste)
• 1 Tablespoon Apple Cider Vinegar
• 2 Tablespoons Bacon Drippings (Optional)

Directions

Place tomatoes, onion, garlic, bacon drippings, water, salt, and pepper in a pot. Cook for about one hour on low heat, stirring occasionally. Add okra and vinegar, gently stir, and continue to cook on low until okra is tender. (Adding vinegar helps cut down on the slime.) Do not overcook.

Notes

This recipe is delicious made from fresh okra and tomatoes, or from okra and tomatoes that you have grown and frozen.

Recipe courtesy of Alice Marie Smith

Aunt Henrietta’s Roasted Elephant Garlic

Ingredients

• 3 Heads Elephant Garlic
• 3 Tablespoons Olive Oil
• Salt and Fresh Ground Pepper (To Taste)

Directions

Preheat oven to 400 Degrees Fahrenheit. Slice off tops of garlic heads. Place each head on a piece of aluminum foil. Drizzle 1 Tablespoon olive oil over each garlic head, letting oil run down inside the head. Sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste. Wrap heads tightly with foil, and place on a baking sheet. Bake until tender, soft, and fragrant (about 30-45 minutes). Remove from oven, and let cool. Peel off outside layers of garlic bulbs, and then gently squeeze each clove out. Spread on crackers for an appetizing hors d’oeuvre, or spread on bread as a delicious addition to any meal. Roasted elephant garlic can also be used in many different recipes.

Notes

This is a recipe that I have been making for years. The flavor is rich, sweet, and creamy. For those who love garlic, this easy recipe is sure to please. Just make sure you don’t eat it before a date!

Recipe courtesy of Mrs. Henrietta Witherspoons
Susan’s Squash Casserole

Ingredients

• 5 or 6 Straightneck or Crookneck Squash (Sliced)
• 1 Can Cream of Mushroom Soup
• ½ Cup Mayonnaise
• 1 Egg (Beaten)
• 1 Small to Medium Onion (Chopped)
• 1-8 Ounce Package Shredded Cheddar Cheese
• ½ Package Pepperidge Farm Herb Seasoned Stuffing (Or More To Taste)
• ½ to 1 Stick Melted Butter
• Small Amount of Olive Oil
• 2 Cloves Garlic (Minced)
• Salt and Pepper (To Taste)

Directions

Cook squash until tender. Drain off water. Place squash in bottom of casserole dish. Sauté onion in olive oil, with minced garlic, salt, and pepper until soft. Mix together soup, mayonnaise, egg, and cooked onion mixture. Pour mixture over squash. Cover with shredded cheese. Put ½ bag of stuffing over casserole. Sprinkle melted butter over stuffing. Bake covered at 350 Degrees Fahrenheit for approximately 30 minutes, and then uncover and bake until dressing starts turning brown. (For Broccoli Casserole, just substitute 1 large bag of broccoli florets, or 2 heads of fresh broccoli, for squash above, and follow directions.)

Notes

This Squash Casserole recipe was given to me about 19 years ago by a friend. I cook it for every holiday and family gathering, as it is always requested by the family. My daughter Carly, who is a very picky eater, simply loves this dish. This recipe can also be made with squash (or broccoli) that you have prepared and frozen.

Recipe courtesy of Susan Smith
Miss Alice’s Spaghetti & Meatballs

Ingredients

• 1 to 1½ Pounds Boxed Spaghetti

Meatballs

• 2 Pounds Ground Chuck or Ground Round
• 1 Cup Seasoned Bread Crumbs
• 1 Cup Parmesan Cheese
• 4 Medium Cloves Elephant Garlic or 5 Cloves Regular Garlic (Crushed)
• 2 Eggs
• 1½ Tablespoons Garlic Salt
• 2 Teaspoons Fresh Ground Black Pepper

Sauce

• ¼ Cup Olive Oil
• 2 Onions (Minced)
• 4-5 Medium Cloves Elephant Garlic, or 6 Cloves Regular Garlic (Crushed)
• 1 Bell Pepper (Finely Chopped)
• 2-15 Ounce Cans Tomato Paste
• 2-12 Ounce Cans Tomato Sauce
• 1 Quart Homegrown Frozen Tomatoes, or 1 Large Can Tomatoes (Mashed)
• 4 Cups Water
• 2 Tablespoons Garlic Salt
• 2 Tablespoons Fresh Ground Black Pepper
• 2 Tablespoons Italian Seasoning
• 2 Tablespoons Fresh Minced Parsley (Or 1 Tablespoon Dried Parsley)
• 6 Tablespoons Fresh Oregano (Or 3 Tablespoons Dried Oregano)

Directions

For meatballs:  Put all ingredients for meatballs in a bowl. Mix well by hand. Shape into walnut sized balls. (Shape by rolling balls in palms of hand—wet hands to keep meatballs from sticking.) Fry until brown in enough olive oil to halfway cover meatballs, turning as you fry. Drain on paper towels when finished frying. Set aside.

For sauce: In a large sauce pan, sauté onions, bell pepper, and garlic in ¼ cup olive oil until tender. Add tomato sauce, tomato paste, tomatoes, water, 3 Tablespoons Fresh Oregano (or 1½ Tablespoons Dried Oregano), 1 Tablespoon Italian seasoning, parsley, garlic salt, and pepper. Stir, and cook on high until sauce boils. Turn heat down to low, and simmer for about 10 minutes. Put meatballs in sauce, and continue to simmer for about 2 hours, stirring occasionally. (If sauce gets too thick, add a little more water.) About 15 minutes before sauce is cooked, add the remaining oregano and Italian seasoning.

Prior to sauce being done, cook spaghetti according to directions on box. Drain spaghetti. Remove meatballs from sauce, place in dish. Mix spaghetti in sauce (or top spaghetti with sauce on plates—I mix my spaghetti in the sauce). Serve topped with meatballs and Parmesan cheese, with garlic bread on the side.

Notes

My mother, Bessie Scussel, is the inspiration for this recipe. Being married to my father, an Italian, the pasta had to be perfect! Although I am not sure if I use exactly the same ingredients in the same amounts as she did, my children say it is just as good as their grandmother’s. Of course, I don’t cook anything as good as my mama.

Recipe courtesy of Alice Marie Smith
Imagine my amazement when I saw this multicolored duck for the first time, preening himself on the cement return on the retention pond behind my house! This is a Wood Duck, which is medium-sized (as ducks go) and, is classified as a perching duck. They live in Florida year around, but are not frequent visitors to “my” pond!

The adult male has very distinctive multicolored iridescent plumage and red eyes, with a distinctive white flare down the neck. I only observed the male, but the female is less colorful and has a white eye-ring and a whitish throat. Both adults have crested heads.

These birds feed mainly on berries, acorns, and seeds, but will also eat insects.

Wood Ducks breed in shallow lakes or ponds, and creeks in eastern North America and the west coast of the North America. They usually nest in cavities in trees close to water, although they will take advantage of nesting boxes in wetland locations, if available. Unlike most other ducks, the Wood Duck has sharp claws for perching in trees and can, in southern regions, produce two broods in a single season—the only North American duck that can do so.

Females typically lay between 7 and 15 white-tan eggs that incubate for an average of 30 days. The day after they hatch, the young climb to the nest entrance and jump to the ground. The ducklings can swim and find their own food by this time. Amazing!
May Checklist

Citrus: Depending on citrus fertilizer label, apply fertilizer every six weeks or as directed. Check for citrus insects; apply ultra fine or all season horticulture oil before 10 am and in early evening if insects are detected. Check for disease; apply fungicide just at new leaf flush or after bloom drop. Maintain 2-3’ unmulched area around citrus trees.

Fruit: Weed as needed. Apply 6-6-6 or 8-8-8 fertilizer if appropriate. Check irrigation to ensure it is working. Make repairs.

Flowers: Annuals to plant this month are celosia, coleus, coreopsis, crossandras, gaillardias, gazanias, hollyhocks, impatiens, kalanchoe, marigolds, nicotianas, ornamental peppers, pentas, portulacas, salvia, thunbergia alata, torenias, verbenas, periwinkles, and zinnias.

Herbs: Anise, basil, bay laurel, borage, caraway, cardamom, chervil, chives, coriander, culantro, dill, ginger, horehound, lemon balm, lavender, marjoram, Mexican tarragon, mint, parsley, oregano, rosemary, sesame, and thyme can be planted now.


Lawns: Check St. Augustine for chinch bugs. It is the beginning of mole cricket season for bahia, Bermuda, and zoysia lawns. The mole crickets have been busy laying eggs which will start hatching this month. Fertilize with 15-0-15 or 16-4-8 this month. Water restrictions (city water or wells) allow odd numbered houses to water Wed. & Saturday; even numbered houses – Thurs. & Sunday. Non-residential properties water on Tues. & Friday. Remember small amounts of fertilizer work best. Too much nitrogen can attract insects and disease.

Trees: Some magnolias may drop their leaves during the spring months. This is normal, as they replenish foliage. Palms should have a “palm special” fertilizer applied over the root system under the spread of the fronds. The configuration should be 8-2-12-4 (N-P-K-Mg). Ideally this would also include manganese, boron, sulfur, etc. with appropriate formulations. Use slow release fertilizer if pH is acid, use quick release for alkaline or high pH soils. Many palms are deficient in potassium, in spite of using palm fertilizers. Apply Muriate of Potash to correct this deficiency.

Vegetables: Scout for insects and hand remove if possible. Check the underside of leaves for eggs and aphids. Remember some insects are predators. These predators are important part of keeping the pests from totally taking over vegetables. Vegetables to plant this month are lima beans, eggplant, okra, Southern peas, and sweet potatoes.

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
June Checklist

**Citrus:** Depending on citrus fertilizer label, apply fertilizer every six weeks or as directed. Check for citrus insects; apply ultra fine or all season horticulture oil before 10 am and in early evening if insects are detected. Check for disease; apply appropriate fungicide. Weed as needed.

**Fruit:** Summer pruning to include water sprouts, and fire blight infected wood. Be sure to clean pruners between cuts using alcohol, bleach or Lysol on the blades to prevent transmitting diseases. Apply 6-6-6 or 8-8-8 fertilizer to pears and plums. Apply azalea fertilizer to blueberry shrubs at 1/2 lb per 3’ of shrub. Weed as needed.

**Flowers:** If growth appears too slow and the foliage turns yellow, they may need fertilizer. Too much growth and a lack of flowers indicates the plants have all the nutrients they need and you can reduce nitrogen. Globe amaranth, melampodium, pentas, portulaca, purslane, salvia, zinnia, lantana, buddleia, daylily, verbena, purple coneflower, plumbago, and sun coleus can be planted in full sun. Plant agapanthus, blackberry lily, clivia, gloriosa lily, achimenes, crinum, and iris.

**Herbs:** Bay laurel, culantro, ginger, horehound, lavender, mexican tarragon, mint, parsley, oregano, rosemary, sesame, and thyme can be planted now.

**Roses:** Continue spray program. Apply liquid fertilizer. Cut and remove spent blooms. Check for spider mites. Water, water, water.

**Lawns:** Keep mower blades sharp (once a month is a good rule). Mow the lawn on the highest height for each species – never cut it too short.

**Perennials:** Some pests to check for are grasshoppers and katydids. Both may be chewing holes in plant leaves. Try to handpick them from the plants, or if needed, use a synthetic insecticide as instructed on the label for chewing insects.

**Trees:** Pests may be noticed in many trees. Their damage is minimal and sprays are seldom needed. Look for aphids, borers, mites, etc.

**Vegetables:** June is not the best month to be starting a garden or planting new crops. Wait until August before putting in new plants. You may still plant tomatoes in containers if you want something to harvest. This is a good month to solarize your garden to fight against nematodes and disease causing fungi.

*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*
Dill dates back to 3000 B.C. and has a wonderful colorful background of uses. Bible reference states dill was used as payment for taxes, and ancient Egyptians recorded it as a soothing medicine. The Greeks knew dill “stayeth the hickets” (hiccups), while lesser mortals infused it in wine to enhance passion. Early settlers brought dill to North America where it became known as “meeting seed” because children were given dill seed to chew on during the long sermons. Imagine what children of today would do if dill seed were substituted instead of their favorite candy or chewing gum.

Dill is the kissing cousin of fennel, both in the umbelliferae family, and both look identical while growing. The difference ends there as the taste is completely different. Dill has a distinctive aromatic flavor while fennel has an anise or licorice taste. Dill seeds are widely used in pickling as well as flavoring in soups, fish dishes and breads. Like fennel, it is extremely easy to grow and is better grown in cool weather. It will tolerate full sun or partial sun/shade, and makes a lovely feathery texture in your garden. Try adding the feathery stems in your cut flowers arrangement for a long lasting kitchen bouquet. Try this super-simple prepare-in-advance recipe for lemon-dill green beans.

### Lemon-Dill Green Beans

1 lb green beans, trimmed
2 tbsp good-quality olive oil
2 tbsp lemon juice
3 cloves garlic, very finely minced
1 shallot, finely minced
Salt to taste
1/2 cup thinly sliced red onion
1/4 cup thinly sliced red pepper
1/4 cup roughly chopped fresh dill

In a large pot of boiling salted water, blanch the beans for about 5 minutes, or until just barely tender-crisp. Immediately plunge into an ice-water bath to stop the cooking process, and set aside. While the beans are cooking, whisk together the olive oil, lemon juice, garlic and shallots in a small bowl until combined. Add salt to taste. In a large bowl, combine the beans with red onion, red pepper and dill. Pour the prepared dressing in, and toss to coat. Let stand for at least 20 minutes before serving (but preferably overnight) so that the flavours have some time to mellow and combine. Serve cold or at room temperature.