

August Gardening Tasks

We can experience some of the hottest days of summer in August, but maybe we will be lucky this year. Who knows? Stranger things have happened recently where our weather is concerned. August is that 'in between' month for growing vegetables, so some extra decent time to work in the garden might really pay off.

Right now you can set out the last plantings of your warm weather crops as well the first plantings of some cool weather crops. As one season of growing winds down, we are transitioning right into the next one. Remember to rotate crop families for cultural insect and nematode control. This means that you should only plant the same family vegetables (like peppers or tomatoes, broccoli or cauliflower) in the same spot in the garden every third season. Keep changing so soil pests won't build up populations.

The warm season vegetables that you can plant for a final 2012 crop are snap beans, lima bean, sweet corn, cucumbers, southern peas, peppers, tomatoes, pumpkins, squash, and watermelon. Knowing which vegetables to grow is only the start, however. Plant varieties will not perform the same under different growing conditions and we all know that Florida has high heat and humidity. The University of Florida has done research to find which varieties will produce the best in our Florida climate. To be successful, grow varieties that are recommended by that research.

The first of the cool season vegetables can now be started, also. The plants to begin seeding out now are collards, bunching onions, shallots and turnips. The first of broccoli and cauliflower can also be set out. Wait another month for bulbing onions, cabbage and Brussels sprouts. For more information on plant families and recommended varieties, read 'Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide' at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/vh021> or stop at the Extension office for a copy.

Besides working in the vegetable garden in August, there are other gardening chores to do. Pinch back the growing tips of mums and poinsettias now so they have time to branch out and set buds for later. If the oldest fronds on your palms are yellowing, they probably are in need of magnesium, an important element for palms. Epsom salts from the drug store will remedy this deficiency.

Perennial and annual flowers should be deadheaded (old blooms removed) to clean them up and get another possible flush of blooms. A plant lives to produce seeds, so if you keep plucking off the faded blooms, the response is often more bloom production. Take off only the old blooms if you deadhead crepe myrtle or other woody plants because pruning wood stimulates unwanted plant growth. Contact the UF Columbia County Master Gardeners with your gardening questions at 752-5384.