

It's time to gear up for that fall vegetable garden that you promised yourself you were going to plant. If weeds and insects have been the cause of your unraveling, there's still time to solarize the garden and still get a fall crop in the ground. Solarizing consists of covering the prepared moist garden with clear plastic. Over the next month, the soil will reach temperatures needed to destroy most weed seeds, insects and pathogens.

Some of the crops that can be planted in August include beans, broccoli, cauliflower, corn, cucumbers, bunch onions, peppers, tomatoes, squash and watermelon. You can speed the maturity time by a couple weeks if transplants are available to use instead of seeds. Seeds are planted for most cucurbits, like squash, cukes, pumpkins, and watermelon. Use seeds, also, to plant sweet corn and beans. Check out the UF/IFAS Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/VH021>

Have you ever tried growing a "giant" crop like pumpkin or watermelon? I was recently invited to admire a watermelon that weighed over 90 pounds. The operator of a local assisted living facility grows whatever his residents request. The huge watermelons have been fun for everyone there, including Florence, the resident who invited me to come take a look. Florence will have the honor of cutting into the giant watermelon which weighs more than she.

I just had to do a little research on growing these giants. The suggested cultivar that has been known to produce melons over 200 pounds is Carolina Cross. The seed is easy to find and can be purchased from Burpee or Gurneys seed catalogues or from their websites. Carolina Cross matures in 90 to 95 days, so there's still time to grow a big one.

The first half dozen blooms will be male blossoms so be patient and wait for the female flowers to appear and become pollinated. Choose just one fruit to mature and trim off all of the others. The watermelon plant will need an evenly moist soil and weekly feedings of a balanced fertilizer as it grows, and grows, and grows. Some people even build protective 'melon fences' and bitty structures to shade just the melon.

August is also a good time to tidy up worn out flower beds. Bedding plants that can take heat well include salvia, torenia, and coleus. Plant some of these in those bare spots that have appeared in the landscape. Don't neglect the bedding plants that have served you well this year. They can be revitalized now for a nice show of color into the fall months. Remove old blooms and trim back plants. Give them a little fertilizer boost to replenish the nutrients that have been used up or leached away by summer rains.

The home gardener should take time this month to check palm trees for magnesium deficiency which is common on Florida's sandy soils. Symptoms of this nutrient deficiency are readily seen on the older fronds. The leaf edges will appear orange or yellow, but the center of the leaf stays very green. Epsom Salts (magnesium sulfate) can be used to correct the problem. Read more about this deficiency in palms at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/EP266>

Let the UF Master Gardeners help solve your gardening problems. They are available at the Extension office on Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday mornings. On August 15<sup>th</sup> they will be holding a free class, Cottage Gardening, at the Columbia County Public Library in downtown Lake City at 1pm. The UF/IFAS Extension will be presenting a Make and Take Rain Barrel Workshop in Fort White on Aug 6<sup>th</sup>. Call Linda at the Extension Office for more details. 752-5384

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