

Yes, it's hot out there, but don't neglect your landscape and gardens this summer. There are a number of things to do in the yard if you work during the cooler morning and evening hours.

Plant some colorful flowers to replace heat stressed plants and spark some new life into your summer landscape. Butterfly lily, gladiolus, and Society garlic are bulbs that can be planted this time of year. Annuals to plant in July include celosia, torenia, ornamental pepper and coleus.

Coleuses are very easy to grow in North Florida. A few years ago, coleus was primarily a shade loving plant. But new cultivars have been developed that thrive in full sun. Coleuses are admired for their beautiful colored foliage ranging all the way from bright yellow to pink and purple. Heights range from several inches to several feet, and many plants have interesting ruffled leaves.

Several of the newer varieties released by UF can be purchased as Proven Winners at retail stores. Big Red Judy has rich, red leaves and can grow to four feet. It grows well in either sun or shade. Another striking plant is called Electric Lime. This bright lemon-lime coleus also does well in sun or shade and makes a beautiful pot plant for patios. Pineapple splash is an interesting plant that gets two feet tall. Its bright yellow leaves are splashed with dark red streaks.

Coleuses will not live outside through our North Florida winters, but you can easily take cuttings and start new plants to bed out in the spring. Cut a four to six inch shoot off of a growing branch. Remove the leaves from the lower half of the cutting. The cuttings can be rooted in a vase with two inches of water, or they can be inserted into an evenly moist potting medium. Keep cuttings watered and in a few weeks there will be enough root mass to pot the plants or bed them out.

These colorful plants will thrive in slightly acidic soil which is kept evenly moist. They should be fed regularly with any balanced bedding plant fertilizer. Pinching out the growing tips will encourage the plant to bush out with more lateral branches.

Your vegetable garden can use some extra attention, also. Dispose of overripe produce and plants that have stopped producing. If you are prepared to water during dry spells, you can plant watermelon, peppers, okra, southern peas, and eggplant.

Now is the perfect time to prepare that worn-out spring garden for fall it's planting. By solarizing the soil now, you can kill insects, weed seeds, pathogens and nematodes. It will give you a great head start on growing that great fall crop of vegetables. Directions for solarizing gardens soil can be found at <http://solutionsforyourlife.com>

If you've been thinking about planting some palms, the rainy summer season is a good time. There are many different kinds of palms that are cold hardy and can be grown easily in the northern part of the state. Large palms are ideal for street plantings and large lawn areas. Smaller species with dense foliage can be used as borders or screens. Unique palms with striking foliage work well as a specimen or focal point in the landscape. To help you choose a cold hardy palm for a tropical look, go to <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/EP359>

The UF/IFAS Master Gardeners can help you with gardening problems. Call them at 352-5384 on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday mornings. Call for information on our upcoming Butterfly Gardening class and our Composting Workshop.

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