



"Solutions for Your Life"

12520 Ulmerton Road
Largo, FL 33774-3602
(727) 582-2100

www.pinellascounty.org/extension

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Things To Do in the Landscape

August 2007



August is a good time to prepare for a **fall vegetable garden**. Successful vegetable gardens are not accidental. Vegetable gardens are the results of planning, constant care, and the will to make things grow. With the current emphasis on the environment you may want to consider home vegetable gardening the organic way. The information in this article should be beneficial to all gardeners regardless of methods of culture used. However, it is primarily intended to help the organic gardener with sustainable gardening methods that are also compatible with the philosophy of "organic gardening".

Organic gardening differs from "conventional" gardening mainly in the types of fertilization and pest control. The organic gardener will use natural and organic materials and methods, whereas the conventional gardener may use a combination of all materials and methods shown to be safe, effective, and non-detrimental to him or Florida's environment.

SOME EARLY PLANS

Consider the size of your family and the amount of produce you can use or may want to share. If you have not had a vegetable garden in the past, you may want to start small and not underestimate the work involved.

Choosing the Location: Select a location with good, well-drained soil near a water supply that is not shaded by tall buildings or trees. Most vegetables need six to eight hours of full sun each day. Enclosing the garden with a fence can help keep out small critters that may want to eat your tender plants.

The Garden Design: Many gardeners find it helpful to draw out on paper the location of each row and the crop or succession of crops to be planted.

Soil Preparation: It is beneficial to have the soil pH checked to determine if any amendments are needed. Some local garden centers will do pH tests for a fee or small soil testing kits are available that you can use to do your own testing. Soil pH testing is also done at the Pinellas County Extension office for a fee of \$5.00 per sample. When collecting soil for a pH test, take several small samples at a 5 to 6 inch depth and mix together. Take about one cup of this mixture and bring it to our office. Results and recommendations will be mailed to your home.

Most Florida soils benefit from applications of various forms of organic material such as manure, rotted leaves, compost, and cover crops. Now is the best time to thoroughly mix liberal amounts of organics in the soil well in advance of September planting. Spread 25 to 100 pounds of compost or manure per 100 square feet if you do not plan to use a commercial organic fertilizer. Compost can be applied at planting time. Due to inconsistent levels of nutrients in compost, applying a balanced organic fertilizer can be beneficial. Due to the increasing popularity of the "Green" movement, organic fertilizers are now available from many local sources.

For more information on vegetable gardening the organic way, please send a long, self-addressed, stamped (\$.41) envelope to "**Organic Vegetable Gardening**", 12520 Ulmerton Rd., Largo, FL 33774-3602.

This year you may feel adventurous and consider trying a few minor vegetables in your garden plot. Florida's mild climate presents the home gardener with an opportunity to grow a wide assortment of vegetables, including some not-so-well-known varieties.

Swiss chard is commonly found in gardens throughout Florida both as a winter vegetable, since it is a cool season crop, and as a summer cooking green, since it also tolerates heat very well. Most gardeners find chard easy to grow. One variety called "Bright lights" has midribs that are shades of yellow, orange, pink and red and can be a colorful addition to flower beds.

The succulent, glossy, dark green leaves, which are usually slightly crinkled, are eaten as cooked greens. Sometimes, the fleshy white leaf midribs are separated from the leaf blade and prepared much like celery or asparagus. Chard is ready to eat 50-60 days from seeding.

Kohlrabi is grown for the globe-like swollen stem just above ground level. Cabbage-like leaves on long stems arise from the top and sides of the round, root-like stem. The globe is tender and succulent, if rapidly grown and harvested, but becomes tough and fibrous with age. Remove the peel before eating kohlrabi raw or sliced and boiled or roasted. The leaves may also be cooked and eaten. Planting time is similar to cabbage, but plant spacing is about four inches. Kohlrabi matures in about 60 days when started from seeds, and 40

days started from transplants. While green varieties are most common, red varieties are popular with many gardeners.

The **leek** is a biennial that is grown as an annual for its long blanched stems. It looks like a large green onion plant without a bulb. It is attractive in appearance with a silvery base and long strap-like leaves. The leaves of some varieties are blue-green, while others are yellow-green. The leaves are flat, in contrast to the round ones of the onion, and are arranged in a fan-like manner. The thick pale leaf bases are eaten cooked or raw. The green leaves may be eaten and have a pungent odor and acrid taste and are used more for flavoring in cooked dishes. A favorite dish for many gardeners is leek soup.

Herbs are a great addition to the fall garden because the growth habits and cultural requirements are similar to vegetables. Special consideration should be given to the location and care of a few of the herbs that are sensitive to soil-moisture conditions. Sage, rosemary, and thyme require a well drained, slightly moist soil, whereas parsley, chervil, and mint give best results on soils retaining considerable moisture.

Mint spreads rapidly by means of surface or underground runners that may grow several feet from the parent plant. You may want to consider planting mints in pots that do not allow rooting into the ground to keep it contained.

The annuals and biennials ordinarily are grown from seed sown directly in place. Perennials generally are best started in plant beds or boxes using seed or cuttings, and then are transplanted into the garden or growing containers.

A few herbs, such as sage, lemon balm, and rosemary, can be propagated best by rooting cuttings. Stems from new growth are best for easiest rooting. Cut the stems into 3 to 4 inch sections, each containing a set of leaves or leaf buds near the upper end, place in pots with sterile potting soil. Keep the cuttings moist until roots form.

White flies are usually around this month. Check your citrus trees and should you find heavy populations of flying adults, wait 10 days then spray with horticultural oil or Malathion. By waiting to spray, the flies will have laid their eggs and the new larvae, which do the damage, can now be killed. Follow label directions carefully for application rates.

Upcoming Events at County Extension / Florida Botanical Gardens

(UF-IFAS / Pinellas County Extension, 12520 Ulmerton Road, Largo 33774)

Saturday, August 11, 2007 – “Rain Barrel Workshop”, 11:30 a.m. until 12:30 p.m. at Sunken Gardens, 1825 4th St. N., St. Petersburg, FL. Join Pinellas County Extension educators and learn how to set up a recycled plastic barrel to collect rain from your roof to water your garden and landscape plants.

Workshop is FREE with paid admission to Sunken Gardens. Barrels will be available for attendees to purchase. For reservations or information please call Sunken Gardens at (727) 551-3100

Saturday, August 18, 2007 – “Compost Happens”, 10:00 a.m. until 11:00 a.m. at Weedon Island Preserve Environmental Education Center, 1800 Weedon Drive N.E., St. Petersburg, FL. Think composting is a mystery? Join Pinellas County Extension Educators for this informative program to discover the basics of composting. Pinellas County residents attending the class will receive a FREE 17.6 cubic feet plastic compost bin. Quantity is limited. Reserve your space. Call Weedon Island Preserve at (727) 453-6500.

Saturday, August 29, 2007 - Living with Our Wildlife Neighbors, 6:30 p.m. until 8:00 p.m. at Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center, 3940 Keystone Road, Tarpon Springs, FL. Join Jeanne Murphy, Pinellas County Extension Wildlife Biologist, as she discusses the surprising wildlife diversity living in our own urban yards and how often these animals spur questions. What kind of animal is it? Is it dangerous and will it try to break into my house? How can I make it leave or make it stay? Find out the answers to your urban wildlife questions while also learning the secrets of co-existing with your animal neighbors. Just like you, they are here to stay. Call to register (727) 453-6800.

[For more events information:](#)

www.pinellascounty.org/events or call (727) 582-2100

Pinellas County Extension is part of a nationwide network of land grant universities providing unbiased, research-based information to America's citizens. In our state, Extension's land grant link is the University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS). Pinellas County Extension serves as a bridge between the research labs of the university and the local community by providing educational opportunities for adults and youth.