



September 2010

VERDANT BYTES



A Newsletter from the Miami-Dade County
Extension Office for local gardeners, arborists and landscapers



Low-input gardening and landscaping for Miami-Dade

Upcoming newsletters will cover a diverse array of topics from plant selection and care including irrigation, landscape design, emerging and ongoing weed and pest problems and growing your own fruit and vegetables. Underlying all of this, and part of Miami-Dade County's commitment to sustainability, will be an emphasis on a low input approach to landscaping and gardening.



What's meant by 'low-input'? It's adopting frugal habits when it comes to using water, fertilizer and pesticides. This not only saves you time and money, but conserves water, prevents needless soil and water pollution and lessens the risk of pesticide resistance.

But how am I saving time and money? By not spending money on fertilizer, pesticides and water that isn't needed, as well as avoiding the expenditure of time and money to correct problems caused by inappropriate watering, and/or over/ misuse of fertilizer or pesticides.

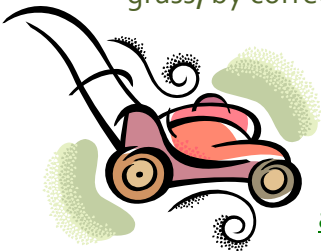


I'm all for conserving time, money and the environment – how do I start? Based on how much time and money you can afford to spend on your yard make informed choices when selecting what you intend to plant. You will find lists of [shrubs, trees and bedding plants suited to Miami-Dade on our web site](#). [Contact the Miami-Dade Extension Office](#) with further questions about plants of interest: their size and how they'll grow; sun, shade, soil and water requirements plus potential pest and disease problems.

How about growing your own fruit and vegetables? More and more Miami- Dade residents are enjoying their yards by saving money and eating healthy, growing their own fresh fruit and vegetables . Locally we can start planting out cool season vegetable transplants in October and space needn't be a problem. A sunny patio or balcony and room for two or three 5 gallon containers and you're in business!



I'm not interested in trees and shrubs so how do I save anything? If most of your yard is turf grass, by correctly maintaining your lawn you will be saving time and money. Judicious use of fertilizer and water will lessen the need for controlling weeds, pests and disease and avoid problems that could require the hefty expense of replacing part or all of your turf. If you're considering laying new sod, maybe it's time to reduce the area devoted to turf grass. There are several alternatives to consider.



Pest Up-Dates: Timely information regarding pests affecting Miami-Dade gardens and landscapes.

Since March of last year, county residents have been reported palms, trees and shrubs 'covered in snow', and black sooty mold. This is all due to a **whitefly** (different from the species infesting local *Ficus* where there is no black sooty mold). First found on gumbo-limbo it has a wide host range; other trees (including mango and avocado), shrubs and palms. Or has the problem been inside your home? If you've seen



numerous, small, black, flying insects, they could be white-footed ants – we're now coming to the end of swarming season.



Citrus trees are making a comeback but citrus canker is still with us – Persian and key limes are most commonly seen locally, the latter being highly susceptible. Copper based fungicides can provide protection. Before purchasing a citrus tree familiarize yourself with citrus greening. Unlike citrus canker this disease eventually kills the tree – there is no cure.

The local **mango** season is winding down and there have been complaints of fruit becoming prematurely soft around the seed, at the tip or near the stem where it can also appear

discolored. This is not a disease but a disorder to which certain varieties are susceptible (e.g., Haden and Keitt). There has also been an increase in the incidence of small often hard mangoes that either fall from the tree or fail to develop. This is most likely the result of last winter's cool temperatures resulting in poor pollination. For more information on pest update topics contact the [Miami-Dade Extension Office](#).

Plant of the month Featuring low input plants for Miami-Dade landscapes

Senna polyphylla desert cassia and *Poitea carinalis* carib wood

As an introductory offering for this first issue of our newsletter, two plants have been chosen. Both are small flowering trees from the Caribbean Basin belonging to the Fabaceae (bean

family). **Desert cassia** is the more familiar, a tree or shrub (8-12') from Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. It features compound leaves with tiny leaflets producing a lacy open canopy. Late fall into winter it is covered in masses of bright yellow flowers. Drought tolerant and not particular as to soil as long as it is free draining, it is ideal for a dry sunny spot in a small yard. Inclined to become shrubby, it often sprouts



from the root crown – this growth should be removed to maintain tree-like form. The national tree of Dominica, **carib wood** grows to 15-20' with arching/weeping branches and a light airy canopy. From late winter to early spring it is briefly deciduous, becoming ablaze with deep crimson pea-like flowers followed quickly by the emergence of new foliage. To maximize flowering do not water once the tree is established and restrict fertilizers to those with little or no nitrogen (N). A useful little street tree – although flowering is brief, those in a given area tend to flower synchronously.



At this time of year..... A landscape to-do list for late summer

- ❖ With the height of hurricane season just around the corner are you at risk from dead or overhanging tree limbs?
- ❖ Resist the urge to hurricane prune palms – only remove fronds that are totally brown; those that are still green should only be removed if they pose a definite hazard.

- ❖ To maximize flowering, pruning of short-day plants such as poinsettias and bougainvilleas should be completed by the first week of September.
- ❖ To help ensure flowering of fruit trees such as lychee and mango do not apply nitrogen containing fertilizer after the end of August.
- ❖ Are you thinking about a vegetable garden? With planting time in October you should already be deciding where, what and when you are going to plant.
- ❖ Herbicide application to turf grass should be limited to small spot applications, otherwise remove weeds by hand. Current temperatures are well above the threshold (85°F) at which there is a risk of herbicide damage to your lawn.
- ❖ Are you stressed out from yard work? Or maybe you've just moved and aren't sure how to assess your landscaping options. Check out this new Miami-Dade Extension publication on [reducing present and future garden stress](#).
- ❖ If you're wondering how else Miami-Dade Extension helps county residents call, or use the link at the foot of the page to our website – there's assistance with food, nutrition, health and managing family finances, plus an active 4H youth development program. Boaters, anglers and those who care for our marine environment will find information and activities within the local Sea Grant program.

ⁱLook for the next issue of 'Verdant Bytes' during October

The Miami-Dade County Extension Office, a division of Miami-Dade County Consumer Services Department, is located at 18710 SW 288 Street, Homestead FL 33030, and can be contacted at 305 248-3311 or by e-mail: dade@ifas.ufl.edu . Web site: <http://miami-dade.ifas.ufl.edu/>