



Gardening Uncovered: Spring Planting

By Jason Aguilar

We made it through February with its unpredictable weather, and March is moving along nicely. I'm looking forward to April. Historically, one of the driest months in Central Florida, April does not yield many showers. Temperatures are just right to get outside, so let's talk about all the things we can do for our landscape.

What should I plant?

This is the time of year I want to see pretty colors, so I look for annuals such as coleus. Coleus is a colorful plant that can thrive in shade and has varieties that love the sun too. Coleus work well with a combination of bedding plants. One thing that always draws me to coleus is that the leaves are the source of the color. This allows coleus to pop long after the flowering plants have lost their blooms. You can use coleus to create any color scheme. Many commercial properties will use coleus to create beautiful beds. Imagine lime green coleus behind a red begonia, or you could even create sports themed beds. Coleus stay predominantly pest and disease free. It is important to incorporate plenty of organic matter such as compost in the beds to keep nematodes at bay. Coleus thrive when kept compact. They are easy to trim annuals, simply pinch back stems no more than 1/3 the length at any one trimming.



Daylilies are a great perennial; adapt well to Florida, whose grass-like texture, and colorful blooms make them a versatile plant. Daylilies come in a variety of colors including: yellow, orange, red, pink, off-white and combinations of colors. Early blooming starts in March and late season bloomers extend the season until May. Daylilies grow well in our sandy soil, but it is important to add organic matter such as peat or compost to beds for the best results. I recommend about 3-4 inches of organic matter. The shade of the daylily will determine the best place to plant it. Darker colors like partial shade with lighter colors like full sun.

April is also a good time to plant shrubs and trellises, who doesn't love the fragrance gardenia and jasmine lend to the garden. Their soft sweet fragrance floats on the breeze as we enjoy nights outside before mosquitos take over. Confederate jasmine makes a great border plant, it loves to climb and grow along fences. Many commercial properties will create beautiful trellis' with them. Confederate Jasmine will also grow along walls, and in containers. Prized for their fragrant with flowers and glossy, dark green leaves, gardenia is a popular shrub. Gardenias can be used as container plants, hedges, or ground cover, but I recommend that you plant them near a patio or lanai so you can enjoy their fragrance.

Springtime Maintenance

Now that we can get back out in the garden, and we talked about preparing for Spring last month, what do we do now? It's time to wake things up and get them growing! Check flowering plants for and damage, or dead blooms. If you dead head or remove the expired blooms throughout the season it helps plants to bloom more. Go back and add mulch, since April is a dry month, anything we can do to allow plants access to water would help extend their growing season.

Lawns can also use some attention in April. After the new growth has started, it is safe to apply fertilizer. Choose a fertilizer that has little or no phosphorous, unless soil tests determine you need it, but uses a controlled release nitrogen.

Azaleas need pruning now that they should be done blooming. Shape your azaleas and other shrubs right after they finish blooming for the season. This allows you to control growth while not taking off next years' blooms.

Now, let's enjoy our landscape with its colors and fragrances!

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