



# Drought Tolerant Landscapes

By Jason Aguilar

Florida homes boast some of the most beautiful landscapes in the country. With the Atlantic Ocean to the east, the Gulf of Mexico to the west and all of the fresh water rivers, lakes, swamp lands, hurricanes and the daily rains we hear so much about, we assume there is no shortage of water in Florida. Unfortunately, Florida experiences drought conditions certain times of the year. July and August can be some of the hottest months of the year. During the rainy season, usually from May thru October, we get the "Pop-up storms" that can produce a lot of rain in a short amount of time. Have you ever wondered why your neighbor seems to get all the rain and you get nothing? Or one side of the road gets soaked but the other side doesn't. Welcome to Florida. The rainfall can be very inconsistent, so it's hard to rely on it when it comes to plants and getting them established. With the extreme heat during these months, water can quickly evaporate leaving your shrubs needing more water than you might think, especially those in direct sunlight.

Drought stress can be caused by the absence of adequate rainfall or improper irrigation. When plants lose more water than the roots can absorb or the water content in the plant drops so low that normal plant growth is impaired, this can be referred to as drought stress. Plants who suffer from drought stress stop growing, and reduce photosynthesis and other plant processes putting all of their energy into reducing water usage. The plant will go into survivor mode to conserve as much water as possible. The leaves can turn a pale brown and eventually wither away as the plant stresses from lack of water. Some other symptoms to look for could be wilting to the young new growth, dropping leaves, dropping blooms and the leaves could have a dull look to them.



Gaillardia



Blue Daze

To keep the lawn green and our shrubs lush, it is important to understand your soil and water tolerance needs. Florida has a sandy soil so when it rains, most of it filters through the soil and past the root system. To help retain the moisture in your soil Anson Nursery recommends keeping your grass cut a little higher than usual to help shade the roots. Also, the higher the grass generally the stronger and deeper the roots will be. As for the existing shrubs in your landscape, the best way to keep them happy is to add mulch. Mulch is like the shield that protects your plants' roots and keeps the area around the root system from drying out too quickly. Add several inches and be generous, because this will be very important in a drought and hot days. As a bonus, mulch creates compost

as it decomposes and will greatly reduce weeds!

Now let's talk about some good drought tolerant plants to add to your landscape and can give you color most of the year.

**Gaillardia** – is a great full sun option for your landscapes. This beautiful blooming plant will add color and loves hot dry areas and is a Florida Native.



Firebrush

See Landscapes/Page 26

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