

THE WALTON COUNTY GARDENER

JULY/AUGUST 2023

Andrea M. Schnapp, Editor

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Be careful what you ask for - our dry conditions in June was making us do a lot of rain dancing. But we asked for a cup, not an ocean! So. Much. Rain. Then let's add some humidity just to make it interesting and impossible to tend to our gardens! The struggle is real, so let's carry on.

In this issue:

There's always that one plant, or maybe two, that you have so much trouble with, no matter what you do. Our first article discusses this issue.

"Divas and Drama Queens"

Andrea M. Schnapp, Walton County Master Gardener

The first of several articles that will help you with the high cost of gardening. Now is the time to start to gather your detritus from the garden.

"Fall into Composting"

Carrie Stevenson, Coastal Sustainability Agent, Escambia County

A short mention on identifying **lady bugs (beetle) eggs** by Joe L'amp

I have two orchids as house plants that I have been trying to flower; no luck. Sooo.....

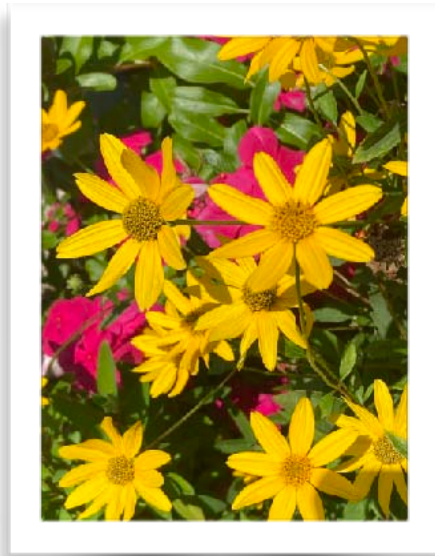
"Orchids"

UF/IFAS Gardening Solutions

In keeping with the statements above,

"Frequent Rains Promote Foliage Diseases"

Larry Williams, Horticulture Agent, Okaloosa County



Gardening Tip:

If you haven't visited your favorite garden center or nursery, now is the time! Many perennials are flowering this time of year and nurseries have them available now. Above is heliopsis, which is available now for purchase. This is an amazing perennial that is also called false sunflower. Smaller flowers on strong stalks that look like coreopsis with dark green foliage. About 3' tall and wide. Grows in all zones in Walton County.





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by Walton County Master Gardeners

July/August 2023

DIVAS AND DRAMA QUEENS

Diva - (noun)

a self-important plant that is temperamental and difficult to please.

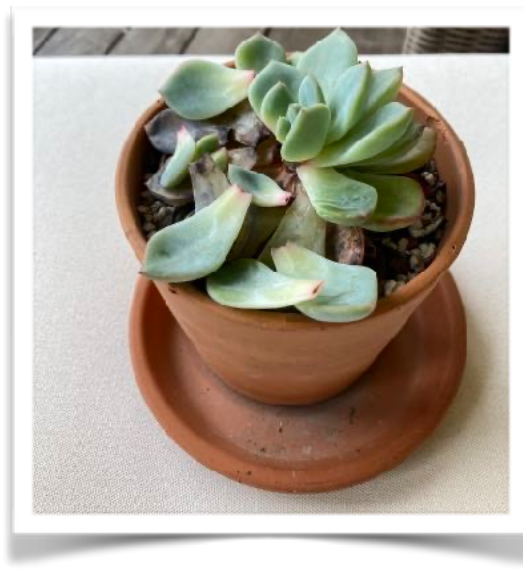
Drama Queen - (noun)

a plant that habitually responds to situations in a melodramatic way.

Have you ever tried to grow a plant that seems everyone can grow, but you just fail?

Have you ever had a beautiful plant that is just glorious one moment but miserable the next?

These two scenarios perfectly describe divas and drama queen plants. For some reason, a plant that looks great in someone else's garden, just fails miserably in yours.



Bacopa. It is such a beautiful plant; perfect for a spiller in the container. You get a little bit of rain (10 seconds too long) and, well....



June 26



July 8

This is not *mea culpa*, bacopa! I potted this container up in mid May. It did beautifully with its companion plants, verbena (pink) helichrysum (silver), cascading torenia (white) and a sharp pink vinca. Not only did she poop out, she took the helichrysum with her. In further search as to why this happened - they just do that! I consider bacopa a DIVA.

I replaced her with a hot pink portulaca and the helichrysum with a sun coleus.



July 21

Let's talk calibrachoa (million bells, etc.). What does this plant want? One thing for certain is that it does not want to be in the ground - it hates it there - it needs good drainage as these plants do not like to have their feet wet. If not in the ground, then that leaves a container. I will admit that I try this plant or a variety of it almost every year because it is just so pretty and it comes in so many colors that I want to be able to grow it in my containers. AND EVERY YEAR IT DIES! DRAMA QUEEN!



June 1 July 5



I replaced the dead calibrachoa with a portulaca as well.

Anything in the potato family is susceptible to fusarium wilt; a soil-borne fungus that is deadly. Once you have fusarium in your soil, it will not die. To avoid this you must use clean potting mix every time you plant *them*. That includes supertunias, mini supertunias, million bells, calibrachoa, petchoa, wave petunias and just old regular petunias. Because calibrachos are fussy about wet roots AND are susceptible to fusarium, I am no longer willing to throw my money away on growing this plant. But I know I have a better chance with supertunias and Wave petunias IF I use new potting mix every time, which I am willing to do, because.....*you get this!* 'Persimmon' supertunia.



One more -



DRAMA QUEEN

SUCCULENTS! What is more upsetting than going out to water your succulents, only to find this. You did everything right; you planted them in loose soil, you held your breath each time you watered (you even skipped watering when you knew they really needed it for fear that this would happen) and prayed to the succulents gods to please, please don't kill my favorite echeveria. You walk out to your front porch and even though you did everything to prevent them from being drenched by 10 inches of rain in 24 hours - ummmmmm too bad, too late, so sad.

This is rot. I am getting better at growing succulents, but I turned my back on them for an hour so I deserve this loss. I actually lost 10 echeveria from the rain.

A good substitute for echeverias are sedums. My attraction to echeveria are the lovely forms that they grow; sedums have varieties that do that as well. Try sedum clavatum, no drama, no divas, easy to grow and just as pretty.



So what is the answer? Death the first time, shame on them; death the second time, shame on them, again. The third time - well, a fool and her money are soon parted. Give it up. When a plant is trying to teach you a lesson, you best play close attention.

Take the hint and find a worthy alternative.



Fall into Composting

by Carrie Stevenson

Fall is the time of year many of us spend countless hours raking leaves and pine straw, piling them up, watching kids jump into the piles (then re-raking!), and bagging them up for disposal. However, what you may not have considered is that all of those materials are ideal fertilizer for your lawn and garden.

Composting is an excellent way to recycle yard waste, and now that leaves are dropping, you've got plenty of material to recycle. Vegetable gardens and landscapes alike can benefit from a generous dose of compost now and then. A free source of much-needed nutrients in our often nutrient-poor sandy soil, organic-rich compost also loosens tight, compacted soils and helps them hold nutrients and water.

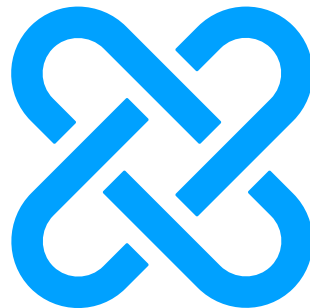
So what is compost? Basically, compost is what's left of organic matter after microbes have thoroughly decomposed it. Among the compostable organic materials available to most homeowners are leaves, grass clippings, twigs, chopped brush, straw, sawdust, vegetable plants, culled vegetables from the garden, fruit and vegetable peelings and coffee grounds (including the paper filter) from the kitchen. Don't add table scraps with meats or oils to your compost pile—meats especially will attract animals. Contrary to popular opinion, compost piles don't typically smell—but if you do have an odor come from decomposing vegetables, turning the compost pile and adding dirt, grass clippings or leaves will eliminate any smell.



The organisms that do the actual composting are bacteria and fungi are microscopic, although you will also find worms and arthropods in a good compost bin. A number of companies sell “composting microbes,” *but you don't need them*. Fortunately, plenty of these microbes are around already. To get started, just mix a few scoops of garden soil or compost from a previous batch into the compost pile will provide all the microbes you need to start the process. The microbes just need water, oxygen and nutrients to grow and multiply.

Rainfall will provide most of the needed moisture. You may need to hand water the pile on occasion, too, during dry times. For best results, keep the pile moist but not soggy; if you pick up a handful it should not crumble away nor drip water when squeezed. The right mix of organic matter can provide all the nutrients needed. Alternate using brown (leaves, straw) and green materials (grass clippings, vegetables) in your compost bin to provide the needed amounts of carbon and nitrogen. If the pile seems to be decomposing too slowly, raise the nitrogen level by adding a few more green materials or a handful of granular fertilizer. And the more you turn the pile, the faster it will decompose.

There are many ways to contain your composting materials, from a simple pile to a solar-heated, rotating bin and everything in between..





Many informed sources exist on the internet and on various Social Media sites. Here's one your editor came upon that I am sharing because of the valuable message. Joe Lamp'l, Florida State University



Here's an important reminder for all gardeners! When you find egg clusters on your plant leaves, don't assume they are bad. For example, this yellow cluster was on the bottom of a squash leaf. Many people would logically assume they were eggs of squash bugs. They are not. These are Lady beetle eggs - exactly what you want to have on your leaves in your garden! So, here's today's reminder: never remove or destroy insects or eggs until you know for sure they are something you don't want in your garden. Likely they are beneficial. The rest are benign. If you are unsure, take pic and use your phone app to ID it. Super easy and very important.

Orchids

Exotic, beautiful, with thousands of species and as many hybrids, orchids are popular with homeowners and can be an obsession for the serious collector. And contrary to popular belief, they're not difficult to grow.

Many orchids thrive in Florida's heat and humidity, like *Cattleya* and *Phalaenopsis*, and can do well in the home and around the yard.

Most orchids need to be repotted every few years, and many can be divided into smaller plants. Orchids typically prefer at least partial shade or filtered sunlight, and should be protected from cold temperatures.

Orchid Potting Media

Most orchids are epiphytes and they need special media in which to grow.

Some of the most common ingredients in commercially available orchid mixes are chopped tree fern fiber, chopped fir tree bark, osmunda fiber, charcoal, and volcanic rock. These materials all help to create the loose, well-drained environment that orchids crave.

Choose from containers made of plastic, clay, wire, or redwood. Some orchids can be mounted on a piece of cork or other bark. Every two years or so you'll need to replace the orchid growing media for each of your plants.

Repotting Orchids

Orchids should be repotted when the media breaks down or the plant gets too big for the pot. You'll use the same procedures when you want to divide an orchid to create a new plant.

To repot an orchid, first remove the old media, as well as any dead or diseased roots before placing it in the new pot or on the new mounting. After repotting, use clips to secure the orchid until it's established. Water your plant right away, but don't fertilize for at least several weeks.

Why Won't My Orchid Bloom?

One of the biggest mysteries for some gardeners is why their orchids won't bloom. If your orchid sits in a dark corner, try moving it closer to a windowsill. Most orchids prefer bright, indirect light and won't bloom unless they're getting it.

Next, think about how you fertilize. Orchids need nutrients, but applying too much fertilizer can inhibit blooming. Consider how old your orchid is. Some orchids won't bloom until they're at least five years old.

Also, many people aren't aware that most orchids need a 15- to 20-degree difference between day and night temperatures in order to flower.

Orchid Pests and Diseases

The most common orchid pests are scale, mealy bugs, thrips, and mites, especially if you're growing orchids as houseplants.

You can treat small pest problems on some orchids by dabbing the pests with a cotton swab that's been dipped in rubbing alcohol. For larger infestations, you can wash the plants with water or use a [horticultural oil or soap spray](#) that's safe for use on orchids. You may need to repeat this process to get the pests in check.

If the pests still won't go away, you can search for a stronger insecticide that's safe to use, though you should always start with the least toxic products first.

Orchids that are suffering from a disease may show symptoms like streaks, blotches, or even crinkling on their leaves, roots, or flowers. If you suspect a problem, the first step is always to isolate sick plants so that the pathogen can't spread to healthy plants.

With some diseases, you can remove the affected tissue with a clean knife and then treat the orchid with an appropriate bactericide or fungicide. In other situations, the best strategy is to dispose of the infected plants.

Cut down on future disease problems by creating a healthy growing environment and practicing good sanitation. Provide good air movement, avoid getting the foliage and flowers wet, and always use clean tools when transplanting and propagating your orchids.

Remember to check your orchids often so that you can take action before small problems from become bigger ones.

Also on Gardening Solutions

- [Florida's Native Orchids](#)
- [Vanilla](#)

More from UF/IFAS

- [Boisduval Scale, *Diaspis boisduvalii* Signoret](#)

- [Florida Plant ID: Dendrobium Orchid](#)
- [Florida Plant ID: Moth Orchid](#)
- [Management of Orchid Pests with Silwet® L-77 and Horticultural Oils](#)
- [Orchid Pollination Biology](#)
- [Terrestrial Orchids for South Florida \(PDF\)](#)

Elsewhere on the Web

- [The American Orchid Society](#)



Frequent Rains Promote Foliage Diseases

Larry Williams, UF/IFAS Extension, Okaloosa County



We live in a wet environment here in Florida. Our frequent summer rains and high humidity provide ideal conditions for foliage disease development in our lawns, landscapes and gardens.

These foliage diseases show up mostly as tan, brown or black colored spots varying in size and shape on plant leaves (pictured above, crapemyrtle). Some also may occur on plant stems and fruit.

Most fungal diseases are dependent on moisture, especially foliage or leaf spot diseases. Many of these disease-causing fungi spread by microscopic airborne spores that require moisture to germinate, infect and colonize our plants. Many fungal leaf spot diseases require a 12-hour period of uninterrupted wetness. A UF/IFAS Extension factsheet on gray leaf spot of St. Augustine grass states, "Warm rainy spells from May through September commonly produce extended periods (12 hours and greater) of leaf wetness and relative humidity greater than 95%. During these periods, turf grass leaf blades can remain wet and air temperatures often hover between 80- and 90-degrees Fahrenheit. Environmental conditions such as these are ideal for the pathogen growth, infection, and colonization of St. Augustine grass."

A Texas A&M Extension factsheet on *Bipolaris* and *Exserohilum* fungi states, "The severity of the disease increases with temperature and humidity. At 78°F a period of 8 to 10 hours with 100% relative humidity is all that is required for a high level of infection to develop." These two fungi are common in Bermuda grass and St. Augustine grass.

Leaf spot diseases of trees and shrubs follow this same scenario. With higher humidity and frequent rains come diseased leaves. It's common to find entomosporium leaf spot on Indian Hawthorn and black spot on roses with these weather conditions. This wet weather promotes foliage and fruit rot diseases on vegetables. It's best to remove and dispose of diseased, worn-out vegetable plants as they succumb to summer's heat, frequent rains and diseases.

Not all plants are equally susceptible to foliage diseases. It's wise to learn the landscape and garden plants that are likely to experience disease problems as a result of our classic summer weather here in Florida.

A fungicidal spray program can be used to prevent and reduce many of these diseases. But it needs to begin ahead of the symptoms in order to be effective. Frequent rains can make it challenging to apply a fungicide in a timely manner. There are also cultural practices that can be helpful in managing some of these diseases.

Not all leaf spot diseases are serious. If you need help identifying or controlling a foliage disease, contact the Walton County Extension Office at 850-892-8172 in Defuniak Springs or 850-622-7904 at the Coastal Branch in Grayton Beach.



For your Information -

Here is link to help you connect with all the Extension Agents by reading the Newsletter prepared by the staff:

Did You Know?

UF/IFAS Extension Walton County sends out a monthly E-newsletter containing useful articles, resources and more. Click the link below to subscribe.

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The complex block is a blue rectangular graphic with a white border. It features the text 'Did You Know?' in white, followed by a paragraph in white text. Below this is a large orange link 'Subscribe to our E-Newsletter' with underlines. Two icons are shown: a laptop with an envelope icon and a teal envelope with an '@' symbol. At the bottom are two logos: the UF IFAS Extension logo and the Walton County logo.

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