

THE WALTON COUNTY GARDENER

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Greetings, Fellow Gardeners!

The Walton County Master Gardeners will be hosting an Open House, March 2, 2024 from 9:00 AM until 3:00 PM at our Coastal Office on 70 Logan Lane in Grayton Beach. Several lectures are scheduled throughout the day along with many gardening displays.

Be one of the first 50 and receive this cutie, planted with a shamrock!



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Margaret Z. Morrison, Walton County Master Gardener

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Andrea M. Schnapp, Walton County Master Gardener

EDIBLES TO PLANT IN February

	North	Central	South
Easily Survives Transplanting	Arugula, Beets, Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Chinese Cabbage, Collards, Eggplant, Endive, Kale, Kohlrabi, Lettuce, Peppers, Swiss Chard, Tomatillo, Tomatoes	Arugula, Beets, Boniato, Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Chinese Cabbage, Collards, Eggplant, Endive, Ginger, Kale, Kohlrabi, Lettuce, Pepper, Swiss Chard, Sugar cane, Tomatillo, Tomatoes	Arugula, Chinese Cabbage, Eggplant, Endive, Kohlrabi, Lettuce, Pepper, Swiss Chard, Tomatoes
Transplant Carefully	Celery, Mustard, Potatoes, Spinach	Celery, Mustard, Pineapple, Potatoes, Spinach, Sweet Potatoes	Amaranth, Calabaza, Celery, Lemp Squash, Luffa, Peppers, Passionfruit, Pineapple, Seminole Pumpkin, Spinach, Sweet Potatoes
Use Seeds	Cantaloupe, Carrots, Corn, Cucumbers, Onions (bunching), Peas (English), Radish, Squash, Turnips, Watermelon	Beans (bush, pole, lima), Cantaloupe, Carrots, Corn, Cucumbers, Onions (bunching), Peas (English, Southern), Radish, Squash, Turnip, Watermelon	Beans (bush, pole, lima), Cantaloupe, Carrots, Corn, Chayote, Cucumbers, Onions (bunching), Peas (English, Southern), Radish, Squash, Watermelon

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by Walton County Master Gardeners

January 2024

Wait to prune cold injured landscape plants

Larry Williams, UF/IFAS Extension Agent, Okaloosa County,

Recent freezes have resulted in many people questioning whether to prune or not to prune cold damaged plants. The short answer is - wait.

We've just had a run of freezing temperatures. But winter's not over. Our winter temperatures go back and forth all season – one week it's winter, the next week we think spring has sprung and then winter decides to pay us a visit again. This is typical here in North Florida.

As a result of the freezing periods, the less cold hardy tropical and subtropical landscape plants can be injured. For example, it's normal for popular landscape plants such as oleander, hibiscus, bottlebrush and philodendron to suffer some cold damage. Then, the first impulse for many gardeners is to cut away the dead and dying leaves and branches. But this is not the best idea.

During winter it's difficult to tell how much damage has been done to these plants. Pruning immediately after a freeze will cut away live wood that does not have to be lost. Also, leaves and branches, which have been killed, can help protect the rest of the plant when the next freeze strikes.

Some of the more tender landscape plants such as bananas, cassia, gingers, tropical hibiscus and many of the tropical perennials may have been killed back to the ground. Don't give up on them too soon. These plants may surprise you by sending up new shoots come spring. Some of these plants require warm soil temperatures before they'll produce new growth. Many of the gingers, for example, may not show any signs of life until April or May.

Some winter and spring flowering plants such as camellias and azaleas may experience flower bud damage. This will be evident at blooming time with few to no flowers. Cold damaged camellia flower buds will either drop off the plant or only partially open showing brown centers. Stem damage will show up in spring and early summer when some of the branches die. Cold injured leaves will fall as new spring growth occurs.

Individual woody stems on some azalea and bottlebrush plants are likely to split or crack during a freeze. These injured stems/branches are subject to dieback the following spring or summer. It's best to wait until these branches begin to die before removing them, during spring or summer. When pruning, make sure to cut below the split or injured area into healthy wood.

Winter is not over. February and early March can bring occasional frosts and freezes. When spring really has sprung, you'll know what survived and what didn't. That's the time to prune.



FIREBUSH



AFRICAN IRIS



LANTANA



HIBISCUS SABDARIFFA

MAKING FLORIDA CRANBERRY TEA

Margaret Zonia Morrison, Walton County Master Gardener

The idea of being able to grow your own vitamin-packed tea is quite a surprise. And, yet here in the Panhandle, it is perfectly possible. I am not talking about the type of tea made from the *Camellia sinensis*, from which most black and green teas are created (although, by the way, you might also have some luck with those here in Walton County...a topic for another time!). What I am offering you now; however, is the amazing roselle, from which you will be able to create your own hibiscus tea.

This is a very specific plant – not your Confederate Rose, Texas Star, Swamp hibiscus or tropical hibiscus. This is the *Hibiscus sabdariffa*, also called the Florida cranberry, red sorrel or Jamaica sorrel. And, while it has a pretty but unassuming flower, it is primarily important for the tea that may be made from its dried flowers. This tea is herbal, caffeine free, and packed with vitamin C. While you want to be careful to limit your consumption of this to only two or three glasses per day, and avoid it if you are pregnant or trying to conceive, it has many benefits.



Calling it the Florida cranberry is appropriate, since it has that same kind of tang one finds with cranberries. There is also the beautiful color which matches that of traditional cranberries, and the health benefits that each has to offer.

While traditional cranberries may be used in many different ways, the Florida cranberry has much to offer as well: food coloring, jams and preserves, and tea. Let us focus on the making of tea.

When your Florida cranberry has shed its flower and begins to dry on the vine, leaving only the roselle for which it is named, that is the time to note that harvest is nearing. When you pluck what is left after the flower, make sure to take the leaves as well as the calyx (the “cup” that holds the red leaves in place). Set your harvest in a dry, protected spot and let it remain untouched until it becomes crisp to the touch. Once it has reached this stage, it will be ready to give you tea.





There are several ways to prepare your tea. You may bring 8 cups of water to just below a boil, and then add about one-half cup of dried flowers to this, letting it steep for about 5 minutes. If you wish to sweeten this tea, do so when it is hot, adding a sweetener of your choosing: sugar, maple syrup, agave nectar, or simple syrup. Lime juice is a pleasant addition to the mix, or when serving. You may also “cold brew” hibiscus tea, steeping one-half cup of the flowers in four cups of water, storing it in the refrigerator, perhaps adding a cinnamon stick. Strain it before serving, and add simple syrup to taste. You may serve it with lime, add some

club soda, serving it with ice.

Once you have tried this, enjoying it either hot or cold, you should experiment with tastes that please your own palate. Lime is a good addition, but lemon might also be used. It is an opportunity for you to indulge in a healthy beverage, perhaps one that you have grown in your own garden, and is yet another way to enjoy the fruits of your labor.



TIME TO START YOUR SEEDS!

February is a great time to start growing your seeds indoors. You don't need complicated materials, just viable seeds and a good growing medium. If you are growing vegetables, be sure to use **organic seed medium or a soil without synthetic fertilizers or watering agents.** Any container that drains water well can be used. Egg cartons with drainage on a south facing window sill are just fine!

When purchasing seeds, be sure to check the date of seed collection; the best seed is from this year or the previous year. Other information should include:

- germination light requirement
- days to germination
- weeks to transplantation (important so that you know when to start your seeds!)
- temperature to grow in

The packet of seeds should indicate the date of collection. If you want to use previous year's seeds, check them for viability by taking a few and wrapping them in a wet paper towel and leave a few days. If they sprout, then they are good to go!

Take caution when ordering off of eBay or Etsy. Unless you are sure of the seller, viability could be a problem.

For more information on buying seeds:

<https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/care/planting/seed-sources.html>

For more information on what to plant:

<https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/plant-of-the-month/monthly-infographic.html>

There are various lighting options when growing seeds indoors. Fluorescent lights are a good option if you use FULL SPECTRUM bulbs; that is, bulbs that have both red and blue spectrums, mimicking the sun's rays. A simple workshop light is all that is necessary once you have the correct bulb. It is important however, that you lower the unit so that it is just a few inches over your tray of seeds. You should use bulbs that are rated T5. Leaves lights on 12-14 ours a day.

Another option are full spectrum LED lights. Many lighting systems are available and some can be quite costly, but you can use a shop light that uses LED bulbs as well. LED bulbs do not require placing the bulbs close to your seed tray. The picture below shows the trays are about 10 inches from the light source. Leave lights on 12-14 hours a day. LED lights last 5 times that of fluorescents.



When planting seeds, make sure your soil is moist enough that it forms a ball in your hand. Fill each cell of your tray and tamp it down, as soil will settle. Plant your seed according to the instructions on the seed packet. Many seeds require darkness to germinate. Plant two-three seeds in each cell and thin once germinated, You can add vermiculite on top if seeds require darkness to germinate and to keep moisture in and to control algae. A dome or plastic wrap should be used to keep the soil moist while your seed is germinating. Using a heat pad under the tray can speed up the growing process, but should be removed when the second set of leaves appear. Once germinated, remove the cover. Use diluted fertilizer once a week, using a spray bottle. Seedlings benefit from having a wind source (an oscillating fan); they will develop a better root system.

The seed tray shown here has cells large enough that the plants do not require to be transplanted and can be taken from the tray and planted in the garden or container. Before planting, make sure to acclimate your plants to the sun, giving them a more sun each day to avoid sun scald.

