

The Walton County Gardener



May 2026



Garden Notes

Welcome to the May edition of The Walton County Gardener.

We'd like to begin by thanking Andrea Schnapp for founding this newsletter and sharing her gardening knowledge with Walton County readers for the past five years. Her work helped create a trusted source of seasonal gardening information for our community, and we appreciate the strong foundation she built.

My name is Jennifer Pawlik and I'm excited to help continue this newsletter alongside the Walton County Master Gardener Volunteers in partnership with the [University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension](#).

Each month, The Walton County Gardener will bring you a timely mix of gardening notes, upcoming classes and plant events, answers to common garden questions, and practical tips for growing plants in Northwest Florida.

In this issue, you'll find upcoming garden learning opportunities, answers from our Master Gardeners, insights on crape myrtles in the landscape, and a feature on edible gardening.

Thanks for reading, and happy gardening. 🌱🌻

Jennifer Pawlik

In this newsletter you can expect:

Garden Notes

Florida Garden Insights

Garden Classes & Plant Events

The Kitchen Garden



Florida Garden Insights: Summer Color with the Crape Myrtle

Crape myrtles are a familiar sight across Northwest Florida, valued for their long summer bloom period, colorful bark, and adaptability in the landscape. While they are often considered low-maintenance, a few key decisions can make a significant difference in how well they perform.

One of the most important factors is selecting the right variety for your space. Crape myrtles range from compact, shrub-like forms to large trees over 20 feet tall. Planting with mature size in mind helps avoid overcrowding and reduces the need for heavy pruning later on.

These trees thrive in full sun and well-drained soil, producing their best blooms when given at least six hours of direct light each day. Once established, they are relatively drought-tolerant, though consistent watering during dry periods will support overall health and flowering.

Pruning is often where gardeners run into trouble. Heavy annual cutting, sometimes called “crape murder,” can lead to weak growth and fewer blooms. Instead, minimal pruning—focused on removing dead, crossing, or crowded branches—helps maintain the tree’s natural structure and strength.

When choosing a variety, it’s also worth looking for disease-resistant cultivars, especially those with improved resistance to powdery mildew. Many newer selections have been developed with both performance and resilience in mind for Southern climates.

With the right placement and care, crape myrtles offer more than just summer flowers. Their exfoliating bark and seasonal color provide interest throughout the year, making them a dependable feature in Florida landscapes.

Read more and explore varieties:

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/media/sfylifasufledu/duval/urban-forestry/Crape-Myrtle-Summer-Color-Fact-Sheet.pdf>



Classes & Events

Connect with local gardening resources and events this season.

- UF/IFAS Master Gardener Desk Hours — Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays in DeFuniak Springs and Grayton Beach.
- Ace Hardware Desk Hours — Seasonal plant and landscape help from Master Gardeners.
- Breath Easy Farms Indoor Market — Twice monthly through August at the Walton County Fairgrounds.
- Paradise Plants Field Trip — May 15
- Hammock Bay Farmers Market — May 16, Freeport
- Okaloosa County MGV Lecture Series: “Timeless Gardens” — May 18, 10 a.m.



The Kitchen Garden: Moving Into the Heat of the Season

Across Walton County, the kitchen garden is beginning to settle into a new phase of the growing season. Spring planting gives way to tending, as tomatoes stretch taller, peppers settle into the warmth, and herbs like basil begin thriving in the increasing heat and humidity.

This time of year shifts a gardener's focus from preparing beds and sowing seeds to supporting the plants already growing. Consistent watering, mulching, and regular observation become especially important as temperatures rise and summer weather patterns begin settling across Northwest Florida.

Late spring is also a reminder that timing matters in Florida gardening. Some crops that struggled in cooler soil earlier in the season may suddenly begin growing vigorously once warmer temperatures arrive, while certain spring vegetables begin slowing down as the heat intensifies.

One of the most helpful resources for gardeners in our region is the Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide from the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension. The guide includes month-by-month planting recommendations for Florida, along with seasonal gardening practices, crop timing, fertilization guidance, and tips for maintaining productive edible gardens throughout the year.

Whether you are harvesting spring crops, planting warm-season vegetables, or planning ahead for fall gardening, the guide offers valuable information tailored to Florida's unique growing conditions.

Learn more and explore the Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide here: <https://ask.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/EP451>

Thank you for reading!

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