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## **THINGS TO DO FOR FLORIDA TIMES UNION in APRIL 2009**

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Our plants have jumped off to a good start. With lots of tender growth, they face April – the fourth driest month of the year. Make sure those sprinklers are working and watch the rainfall gauges. If there's less than ½ inch rain every ten days, a St. Augustinegrass lawn will need some water. There's more to do as well.

### **April timetable:**

\*\*\* April is designated Earth Month. It's a time when we take stock of our planet's health and as gardeners it's also a time to renew our efforts to be a part of the solution to environmental problems and not a part of the problem itself. Review your gardening practices. Do you grow plants that need minimum care? Do you water only as needed? Do you try to use minimum amounts of weed killers and other pesticides? Do you use organic mulches so you can minimize fertilizer applications? Florida Friendly landscaping and maintenance is the way of the future, let's all redouble our efforts to embrace it! The Official Earth Day for 2009 in the US is Wednesday, April 22 but each county will have their own celebration day. Check with your local Extension Office to find out when and where your primary celebration will be held. This is the 39<sup>th</sup> year that Earth Day has been celebrated with 2010 being its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

\*\*\* Our winter lingered on and delayed many plants from coming out of dormancy. Now that they are in full growth, watch that water schedule. If we go 14 days without significant rain, most plants begin to show some stress signs in the spring because of all the still tender growth. Be aware that we are currently under St. Johns River Water Management District restrictions that do not allow for watering more than an hour at a time or more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches at a time per zone (whichever comes first) per day. You may not water between 10:00 AM and 4:00 PM any day. The University recommends (to minimize disease on grass) to irrigate early morning only (3:00 AM until 8:00 AM). Under new guidelines from the District, if your address is even numbered (example 32, 106, 1248, etc.) you may only water on Thursday and Sunday. If your home address is odd numbered (example 33, 105, 1247, etc.) you may only water Wednesday and Saturday. No one may water Monday. Businesses, Parks, Churches, and Public Buildings can water on Tuesdays and Friday only. People with private wells, using city water, or drawing from rivers and lakes are under these restrictions. To learn more about this new rule go online to “sjrwmd.com: watering restrictions” where there’s a fact sheet you can download. Water is a precious commodity in Florida and we all need to do our share to conserve it. Watering a plant beyond its needs is wasteful.

\*\*\* As you mow your lawn, don’t collect clippings. By leaving these on the lawn you allow the nutrients trapped within to begin rotting and releasing nutrients back to the soil. This saves fertilizer and makes for a healthier lawn.

\*\*\* To reduce diseases/insects in the garden, scout for pests weekly. Learn what problems each vegetable you are growing is likely to face and watch for them – reacting early to a potential problem, will make control more effective. To prevent many diseases, where possible, grow plants off the ground. Tomatoes, peppers, and eggplant can be grown in cages or tied to a stake. Cucumbers, beans, and peas can be grown on a wire fence placed temporarily in the garden. Never work the garden when it is wet (its too easy to spread disease then) and if you do pick off a diseased leaf/fruit, take it out of the garden, don=t just throw it to the ground, where it can continue to infect other fruit.

\*\*\* This is the month stinkhorns return to our area. This is a saprophytic mushroom that lives off of decaying organic matter. It starts as a white ball, and then opens as a three or four legged orange dome resembling a ABishops hat.@ The fungus smells liked putrid meat. There is no control for it, except to pick it up as soon as it is observed, put it in a zip lock bag, and place it in the trash. Leaving them to attract flies (which spread the fungus from place to place) only means you will see more in the fall, when the fungus starts fruiting again. This fungus is a nuisance but not something that will harm plants.

\*\*\* Martins and Hummingbirds return to our area now. If you have a Martin house, be sure to pull it down and clean all the old nesting material out. Martins do not like to come to a Adirty@ house. If they aren't visiting your Martin house, then perhaps it=s in the wrong spot. They prefer houses out in the open where there are no trees nearby so they can Aswoop@ on their insect prey. They also need them to be set high (12-14 feet). If you are putting out your hummingbird

feeders, remember that they need regular weekly cleaning but never wash these with soap (which kills hummingbirds). Use only vinegar solutions or plain water to clean with. Always place more than one feeder out to decrease the fighting that will occur by the territorial males.

### **Things to Plant in April:**

Among the vegetables we can still plant this spring we list Beans, Cantaloupes, Corn, Cucumbers, Eggplant, Kohlrabi, New Zealand Spinach, Okra, Peppers, Pumpkin, Southern peas, Sweet potatoes, Tomatoes, Turnips, and Watermelon.

Among the annuals to plant are Celosia, Coleus, Calliopsis, Dusty Miller, Exacum, Gaillardia, Gazania, Geranium, Hollyhock, Impatiens, Lobelia, Marguerite Daisy, Marigold, Nicotiana, Ornamental pepper, Pentas, Phlox, Portulaca, Rudbeckia, Salvia, Sweet William, Thunbergia, Torenia, Verbena, Periwinkle, and Zinnia.

Bulbs, Tubers or Rhizomes to plant now include Allium, Alstroemaria, Amazon lily, Caladium, Canna, Gloriosa lily, Kaffir lily, Lily, Walking Iris, African lily, Spider lily, Tiger flower, and Tritonia.

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