



**PANTRY PRIDE**  
Get realistic about your storage needs.  
PAGE 3

# Home & Garden Lifestyle

Temple 5  
ROBERT HARTLEY 3  
TELEVISION 4  
COMICS & PUZZLES 67

SOUTH FLORIDA SUN-SENTINEL | FRIDAY | MAY 25, 2001 | SECTION E



## Parch enemies

Running dry of garden ideas in these times of drought? These plants have lots of color but use little water.

"Here the rain is everything."

— Marjory Stoneman Douglas, *The Everglades: River of Grass*, 1947

BY JON VANZILE  
SPECIAL TO THE SUN-SENTINEL

Florida has always had a dry season, a time when smoke rolls off the burning Everglades and dust blows on the winds of spring. And there will always be a dry season.

Even after our current drought gives way to the seemingly endless summer rain, another will come, followed by another and another and another.

The lesson: We need to change the way we garden to conserve our water resources. But this doesn't mean giving up your favorite plants. With proper planning, water management and fertilizing techniques, even moisture-hungry plants such as bananas and birds of paradise can thrive when the rains stop.

Xeriscaping is one popular approach to water conservation. Introduced about 20 years ago, xeriscaping relies on landscape designs that maximize existing water sources.

Bill Reeve, owner of Botanical Visites in Lauderdale-by-the-Sea, lectures widely on xeriscaping and uses it in his own landscape designs. The first step, Reeve says, is to spend some time getting to know your property.

"Where is it wet?" he asks. "Where does it get full sun and how does the summer sun differ from the winter? We get a lot of rain in the summer, so you might have a dry front lawn, but around the downspouts it will stay wet all summer."

### ■ XERISCAPE CONTINUES ON SE

**SOME LIKE IT HOT:** Gazinia daisy, bottom left, walking iris, top left, purple queen, top right, Irisee and Puerto Rican portulaca, bottom right, are suited to dry, sunny locations. Staff photos/Nam Y. Huh; staff photo illustration/Deidre D'Asaro

# Experts say you should know your yard before you buy plants

## XERISCAPING

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1E

Over time create a map that shows the microclimates on your property, including drainage, sun and natural water levels.

"Then look at your palette," Reeve says. "There's a plant for every place. Don't try to change the conditions of your site. Match the conditions of your site with plants that evolved to grow there. You'll have many, many options."

Xeriscaping is often introduced over time, slowly changing the garden into a diverse, natural botanical oasis that needs very little water and is resistant to pests.

## SUNNY SIDE

Taking it slow is good advice for any drought-tolerant landscape. Before you can create a garden that peacefully coexists with your environment, you need to know your property.

"We need to take one step back," says Jay Vedaae, an extension agent and horticulturist with the Broward County Extension Education Division. "The last step to designing a landscape is buying plants."

The first step, he says, is evaluating how much light your property receives. In general, any place that gets more than six hours of direct sunlight is considered a full sun location.

"If you take a plant that likes shade and put it in full sun, it will burn," Vedaae says. "If you put a plant that likes full sun in the shade, it will get stressed out. Then it gets insects, it gets diseases and the homeowner thinks it lacks nutrients. So they put a pile of fertilizer in there and water it and spray it with chemicals, contaminating the environment and not realizing that it's actually a wrong plant in a wrong place."

Determining a plant's sun



**THEIR DAY IN THE SUN:** Blue plumbago at Joe Hupper's house in Southwest Ranches can take the heat. Staff photos/Nam Y. Huh

requirement is fairly easy. Shop at a reputable nursery with well-trained employees and ask questions. A well-placed plant will require far less water and will be much healthier than a plant struggling with too much sun or a water-lower located in the highest and driest corner of the yard.

## AVOID GUZZLERS

Although almost any kind of plant, when properly placed, can find a home in a drought-tolerant landscape, there are some particularly notorious water-guzzlers. The worst are impatiens.

The popular flowering annual couldn't survive without tremendous amounts of water, often requiring daily irrigation to make it through the winter. Then, during the summer, impatiens beds are often replaced with caladium, another popular annual that needs lots of water.

People like these plants for their bold colors and wide

availability. Sometimes it may seem as if there aren't many colorful options for flower beds.

But Ken Zugar, owner of Zugar Growers in Fort Lauderdale, disagrees. His nursery specializes in ground covers, growing and selling a wide variety of perennial flowering plants that don't need much water once they're established and will never need replacing.

His list of suggested perennial ground covers is extensive: lantana, dwarf crown of thorns, portulaca, gazinia daisy, liriopse, purple queen, walking iris, jewel of opal, coral creeper and zig-zag plant.

Zugar also recommends ferns — the beautiful and delicate foxtail fern, the native sword fern, the smooth-leaved wart fern or the waist-high macho fern.

## WATERING WISELY

After any plant is in the ground, the next step is to develop good watering

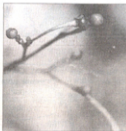
habits.

New plants will require extra water as they are weaned from the nursery environment, where they likely have been pampered. For this reason, it's a good idea to plant in the late spring or early summer when the rainy season will help naturally acclimate new plants.

Once they've been weaned, encourage healthy root growth with good watering habits. Mist sprinklers and zone sprinklers that switch on for only 20 minutes might be keeping your landscape green, but they're also using much more water than necessary and not encouraging strong, healthy plants.

In general, you water only when your landscape needs it. This may be once a week or less during the dry season, and perhaps not at all during the rainy season. Signs include drooping leaves or leaves that have brown, crinkly edges.

When you do irrigate, use as much as an inch of water to penetrate far into the soil and cause the roots to reach deep.



**CREEPY:** Ground-covering zig-zag plant, above and jewel of opal, left, are drought resistant.

especially true for native plants, which have spent thousands of years acclimating themselves to Florida's seasons and poor soil conditions.

"The plants that are native to this area are adapted to wet and dry seasons, so it makes sense they would be able to survive the drier times with less irrigation and less problems," says Jack Lange, president of the Broward Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society.

And, contrary to many people's opinions that native plants are scraggly and colorless, Lange recommends several for their natural beauty, as well as their ability to bring butterflies and wildlife into a yard. He likes coco plum, which has satiny leaves in red and green, firebush with its tubular orange flowers that butterflies find irresistible, and the shiny green wild coffee, which is extremely hardy during the dry season and attracts many kinds of wildlife.

Then, when the top couple inches of the soil are baking through the dry season, the plant's deep roots still get moisture.

Access to food is equally important.

"Our soils are terrible," Vedaae says. "Plants need to be fertilized three to four times a year with a good, complete fertilizer. The fertilizer should have 50 percent or more slow-release nitrogen. If you can afford 100 percent slow release, that's fantastic."

A large bag of high-quality, slow-release fertilizer, such as Nutracote or Osmocote, might cost as much as \$60. However, that single bag will outlast several bags of an inferior fertilizer and make for much healthier plants.

While very few plants in Florida are drought-resistant, some are more easily conditioned than any others. This is

Jon VanZile is a freelance writer who lives in Pompano Beach.