

Alternative Cut Foliage Crops for Florida's Unique Climate

By Dana Venrick

Volusia County Extension Agent - Commercial Horticulture

Florida's unique climate opens opportunities for growing many plants which cannot be grown economically in latitudes to our north. Most of the plants listed in this fact sheet grow well in warm, humid conditions and do not tolerate freezing temperatures, giving Florida growers a competitive edge when growing these plants. Some of these plants are grown in colder climates but require the protection of expensive greenhouses and extensive heating during the winter. In Florida, they can either be grown without freeze protection or protected within shade-houses with irrigation systems designed for watering as well as for freeze protection.

The more sensitive plants in the "Fern Capital" around the Pierson area can be protected from occasional freezes by a system that sprays water over the top of the saran covering the structure until a thin sheet of ice is formed. After the solid sheet of ice is formed the overhead water is turned off but water continues to run within the "house". Much of the warmth produced by the running water is retained within the "igloo" of ice around the plants keeping temperatures at a safe level.

Diversification and value added products are keys to continued profitability among Florida's cut foliage growers. Growing desirable alternative crops that are not widely available will help ensure continued profitability for Florida growers.

The following plants are worthy of consideration for growing in Florida's unique climate. It should be noted that about 80% of the cut foliage grown in the United States is grown within Volusia, Putnam and Lake Counties. This area of Florida is within zone 9 of the USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map.

Acacia podalyriifolia	Pearl acacia
Acca sellowiana	Feijoa or Pineapple guava
Adiantum, sp.	Maidenhair fern (use of silver nitrate will double vase life)
Ageratum	Floss Flower (has fluffy looking flowers - use taller cultivars for cut flowers)
Alpinia	Shell ginger - Blue ginger (tips root easily)
Angelonia	Summer Snapdragon (very heat tolerant)
Antirrhinum	Snapdragon (likes cool weather)
Asparagus 'Meyer'	Foxtail fern (a strikingly beautiful Asparagus)
Aspidistra	Cast Iron Plant
Callicarpa americana	Beauty berry (zones 7-10) (all about its purple or white berries - take off the leaves)
Camellia sp.	Beautiful and long lasting
Capsicum	Ornamental Pepper (has brightly colored fruits of various shapes)
Celosia	(one of the most versatile cut flowers - may be used fresh or dried)
Clematis, sp.	(very long flower stems make it a superb cut flower - vase life is about 7-10 days - may be floated in bowls - 'Inspiration' stems last up to three weeks)
Cortaderia selloana	Pampas grass (Dramatically large white or pinkish silken plumes - if uniformity is desired, propagation should be from dividing the clump and not from seed - long lasting fresh/ dried plumes.)
Cyperus	Variegated umbrella plant
Delphinium 'Blue Shadow and 'Dwarf Blue Mirror'	(Makes a great cut flower- if kept from seeding, it will bloom steadily all season.)
Dianella tasmanica "variegata"	Blue flax lily or Blueberry flax lily
Dianthus	'Rose Queen' (zones 3-10) (Has beautiful pure pink color that won't fade. Holds up well in bouquets.)
Dietes iridioides	African iris (zones 8b - 10)
Eleagnus angustifolia/pungens	Silver thorn or Russian olive (zones 9-10) (when tall cut foliage is needed)
Equisetum	Scouring rush or Horsetail (zones 5-9)
Eriobotrya	Loquat or Japanese Plum (zones 8-10) (boldly textured foliage)
Eucalyptus albida	White leaved mallee 'Moon Lagoon'
Gladiolus	Perennial favorites

Gloriosa lily	Zones 8b - 11 (Most unusual and exotic of flowers but all parts of the plant are poisonous if ingested - wear gloves to protect hands when handling seeds.)
Grevillea robusta "Robyn Gordon"	Silk oak (zones 9-10) (Lavender flowers don't hold up well.)
Helianthus annuus	Sunflower 'Premier Light Yellow' (long lasting and easy to dye)
Heliconia caribaea	Lobster Claw, Parrot beak (remarkably beautiful flowers)
Hydrangea macrophylla	Quercifolia (oak leaf) Hydrangea
Illicium floridanum	Chinese Anise or Star Anise (zones 8 & 9)
Kunzea ericifolia	Yellow/green gold Kunzea - Tick Bush (zones 9-10)
Leptospermum scoparium	Tea Tree (zones 8 & 9) (a filler without flowers)
Loropetalum Chinensis "Burgundy"	Chinese fringe bush (zones 7-10a)
Magnolia grandiflora	Southern magnolia 'D.D. Blanchard', 'Little Gem', 'Lee'
Murraya paniculata	Orange jessamine or "coffee"
Musa 'Zebrina'	Red Banana (beautiful blooms - likes higher pH)
Myrtus communis	Common myrtle (likes higher pH)
Nandina domestica	Heavenly bamboo (zones 6-9) (long vase life - keep contained as this is a category 2 invasive)
Nandina domestica	Heavenly bamboo (beautiful foliage and berries-seed is poisonous if ingested)
Orchid	Dendrobian
Philodendron	'xanadu'
Pittosporum	tobira/nigra/tenuifolium (zones 9-11)
Platycerium, sp.	Staghorn Fern (striking antler-like fronds)
Podocarpus gracilior	Weeping Podocarpus (more cold sensitive than P. macrophyllus)
Prunus persica	Peach (zones 5-9) (Force peach trees to bloom in January and February using temperature and sucrose solutions.)
Pteris ensiformis	Brake Fern (used for arsenic hyperaccumulation in remediation projects - grown in water with a flotation system)
Rhamnus alaternus 'Argenteo variegatas'	Italian Buckthorn (one to three weeks vase life)
Roses	David Austin, English rose
Ruscus hypophyllum	(Florida/Holland/Israeli) zones 8 & 9) (extremely durable - use Serenade and Rhapsody for Pseudomonas disease)
Salix babylonica 'Tortuosa'	Dragon-claw willow
Smilax	A Florida native
Sorghum bicolor	Sorghum (very drought, resistant - pH must be adjusted upward if soil is acidic - good until first frost in the winter - must be dried in a drier) Broomcorn "Texas Black Amber"
Ulmus alata	Winged Elm (zones 4-9) (a native Florida plant)
Variegated Sansevieria	Mother-in-law Tongue or Snake Plant
Viburnum obovatum	Walter's viburnum (a native Florida plant)
Zamia floridana	Coontie or Seminole Bread (a native Florida plant)

Of course, many of the most widely grown cut greens, such as leatherleaf fern and various Asparagus sp., are not included in this fact sheet.

For further information go to the following web pages:

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>

<http://mrec.ifas.ufl.edu/cutfol/cutpage.htm>

<http://www.ascfg.org> (cut flower growers)