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Heritage Park
Approx. 1 mi. W of Tpk. Exit 244 on 192
Letter from the Editor

To our readers:

I can’t think of a “greener” activity than gardening, which puts our readers in a very politically correct situation at this moment in time. In spite of that, I don’t think we can be “too green,” no matter where you are on the global warming acceptance scale. What is beyond debate is that we consume far more resources than is sustainable in the long run and if we don’t rein in our practices our fragile globe may be unable to support human culture in the foreseeable future. The ancient philosopher’s “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step” can be seen as a clue to survival: while huge steps as a society would be nice, as individuals we each need to take as many single steps as we can—they will all add up.

On page 5 we have compiled a list of gardening tips designed more to pique our imaginations than be an exhaustive hint list. Many of these may be well-known to many of our readers—we certainly hope so. Others may spark a sense of invention or give new ideas for family or individual projects. The hope is that we can all get an idea or two and make our own individual, small contribution to changing our culture from one of waste to one of sustainability.

The first article in the issue is the eighth and final installment of Carolyn Lamond’s series on Old Garden, or Heritage, Roses. In it she summarizes the planting and maintenance techniques to lead to increased success in caring for these lovely, and surprisingly hardy, plants.

Sandi Switek graces us once again with a tale of an unusually hardy tomato plant on page 12, and she also shares some important information from the files of the Master Garden Plant Clinic, open daily at the Extension Office in Heritage Park, 321-697-3000, or by email at oscmg@osceola.org.

If you read the side-bars, and we hope you do, on page 5 we provide a list of local nurseries who will start carrying melaleuca mulch beginning the first week in April, coinciding with our Spring Plant Sale. We will, of course, have melaleuca mulch available at the Plant Sale, but twice a year is hardly sufficient for most gardeners. As Master Gardeners, our function is to teach and advocate responsible gardening, and finding a way to reduce the devastation of native cypress forests is one part of that. But we are not retailers, and the more nurseries who participate with us by carrying melaleuca mulch the easier it will be for you, the gardeners of Osceola County, to use it in your planting beds. Support our participating nurseries and mention your appreciation of their taking the risk to carry this as yet unproven inventory item on a regular basis.

Enjoy the spring in your garden—it’s truly the best time of year if you’re a gardener!

Donn Barclay

Roots & Shoots  Acting Editor
ROSES: PART VIII —CAREFREE
ROSES IN CENTRAL FLORIDA

By Carolyn Lamond, Master Gardener (1998)

Over the last seven issues of Roots & Shoots, Old Garden Roses have been featured, discussing the different varieties that are appropriate for Central Florida and their origins and history [Ed: these issues are available online at the Master Gardener archive--<http://osceola.ifas.ufl.edu/mg_archive.shtml>]. Many people, when they first come to Florida, shy away from growing roses because they think that they are too labor intensive. Well, I have good news. The appropriate varieties for Florida, along with the correct know-how, make it not only possible but very care-free, enjoyable, and rewarding. So rose lovers, listen up. HERE IS THE SCOOP!

The three basic fundamentals for successful rose growing in Central Florida are:

Choose the right variety
Plant properly
Provide proper maintenance

Having a grasp of these three essentials is the key. In the Oct-Dec 2007 and Jan-Feb 2008 issues many examples of roses suited for Central Florida were discussed. Choosing plants from these classes will provide the best start. Please refer to those issues or to the web-sites listed in the sources at the end of this article. Before buying, make sure you have a place in your garden which will receive 6-8 hours of direct sun daily, and that it will have plenty of room to spread and grow—like 4-6 feet. These bushes get large.

Once you have purchased your rose, planting it in good compost is of the utmost importance. A mixture of 1/3 peat moss, 1/3 garden soil, and 1/3 compost is a good medium. This will allow the soil to retain water, and it will provide extra nutrients. When taking the plant out of the pot, check to make sure the roots are not bound up. If they are, unwind them so they will spread out into the soil.

Dig a hole slightly deeper and 3 inches wider than the root ball. Fill the hole with water to dispel the air pockets. Add some compost mixture in the bottom, and place the plant in the hole making sure that it sits no deeper than it was planted in the pot—even slightly higher will do. Back fill with the composted soil. Do not fertilize at this time. Remove all buds for a month to help the plant put its energy into root establishment. Pour 2 gallons of water directly on the root ball every day for one week, every other day for the second week, and then every third day for the third week. By then the roots should be pretty well established.

Maintaining your beautiful rose from now on is not nearly as labor-intensive as you may think. The beauty of Old Garden Roses is that they are quite carefree since they are genetically tougher than hybridized roses. These roses are very forgiving.

They are constantly putting out new foliage which seems to keep them from becoming overtaken by bugs and fungus. By allowing the beneficial insects to take care of the harmful ones, everything balances out. There is rarely need to spray them unless the shrub is weakened for some other reason, making it vulnerable to attack. Not spraying them allows the petals to be used for culinary purposes in salads, cake decorations and tea.

They require regular watering of 1½ inches, twice a week in the morning. Drip irrigation on the root system

(Continued on page 4)
From the Plant Clinic
By Sandi Switek, Plant Clinic Coordinator, Master Gardener (2005)

Question: My orange tree has new shoots coming up from the trunk near the ground. Since they look so healthy, I haven’t cut them off. Is it OK to let them continue to grow there?

Answer: Since the citrus trees which can be purchased here must be grafted onto a nematode-resistant, disease-resistant rootstock, it means that the sprouts are most likely coming from below the graft and will be different from your fruit tree. This also means that they will not bear edible fruit and that you should cut them off. If left alone, they could outgrow your good orange tree shoots and take over.

Question: I bought 2 poinsettias last December and am tired of having them in the house. They look terrible by now, anyway. Can I put them out in my yard? If so, how would I take care of them?

Answer: Yes, you can put the poinsettias out in your yard. However, you must be aware of the possibility of these plants being damaged or killed by a winter freeze if not protected. They need full sun most of the day, and they must have 14 hours of total darkness at night from early October until the bloom season. They should be pruned down to 12 to 18 inches of the ground in the early spring, and new growth should be cut back to four NEW leaves per shoot each time it grows another 12 inches. This goes on until early September, when the plants should be left alone. They should be fertilized monthly from March through September and should be kept moderately moist.

(Continued from page 3) Roses

is preferable to overhead watering, which can lead to wet leaves and fungus.

A slow-release rose fertilizer every other month or a liquid fertilizer every other week is adequate. A top dressing of compost every year over the roots to replenish the soil is a good idea and a 3 inch layer of mulch twice a year keeps the surface roots cool in summer and warm in winter. It also helps to hold moisture around the roots.

Pruning is not recommended for three years or until the rose becomes fully mature. Before that time it will only be necessary to trim away the dead twigs and spent blooms. After it is all grown up, prune back about 1/3 of the bush to encourage fuller growth and more blooming. The best time to prune is any time after Valentine’s Day for ever-blooming roses and right after blooming for once blooming ones.

When pruning cut back to a 5-leaf outward facing node. New growth will appear at that node. The idea of cutting at a node facing away from the center of the bush is to help keep the interior of the bush less dense to allow for greater air flow. This helps to reduce the chance for fungus to develop. A second pruning for the ever-blooming varieties in the fall can be done but it is not necessary. Following these basics will ensure you of success.

Swallow your doubts and fears and give it a try—you’ll be so glad you did.

The Master Gardeners will have a limited number of OGRs for sale at their annual Spring Plant Sale, April 4 & 5 from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at Osceola Heritage Park. For more information you may call 321-697-3000.

Sources:
The following ideas came from many sources, more than can be named. Many Master Gardeners contributed these ideas, many of them duplicated, so individual attribution is impossible. However, it is ample demonstration that we can all use our creativity to reduce trash going into the landfill and still craft useful tools for the garden. The duplication of ideas submitted undoubtedly comes from a shared reading base, most notably The University of Florida IFAS database, Florida Gardening magazine, Horticulture, Mother Earth News, and Organic Gardening.

It is always nice to find ways to make use of all those little irritants that litter our lives. Rather than buy those peat pots for starting seeds, consider making toilet roll seed pots. Slice an empty toilet paper roll core in half, make four ½-3/4” vertical cuts in one end, fold the resultant tabs in to form the bottom and fill with potting mixture. Seedlings started in them can be planted directly in the ground, and you can even open the bottom to make root growth even easier. The cardboard will eventually break down. If there are multiple kids in the house, this could be an ongoing project to make enough pots to be ready for spring planting.

Along the same lines, try out somewhat larger newspaper seed pots: fold 1 page from a newspaper down to 4- 5” width, roll tightly around a 1 1/2-2” form (rolling pin, pvc pipe, etc.) into a tube, cut bottom to fold inward to form base. A small kit to do this is available from www.burpee.com for around $15.

We all have multiple bags of granular fertilizer or insect baits lying around, and their use can be simplified by making a simple water or soda bottle fertilizer scoop: using a sharp knife or kitchen shears, cut the side and bottom out of a plastic bottle to make a handy scoop—water bottles are a major problem in landfills, and shaking the bag can often lead to excess fertilizer or insecticide spilling forth. For careful measuring, you can even mark each scoop with its general size by measuring how much it scoops and using masking tape and a Sharpie. If you need a bigger scoop, use a bigger bottle.

To keep weeds down in the vegetable or flower garden, mulch with 2 or 3 layers of newspaper, cover with regular mulch to hide. Don’t use advertising or color pages since some of the dyes used may contain unwanted ingredients; regular newsprint is most likely soy-based, and the paper will biodegrade while it blocks weeds from sprouting.
As an effective and “old timey” weed killer, use a **white vinegar** solution of one-quarter cup per 12 ounces of water in a second-use spray bottle. Since it is non-selective, use for weeds growing between paving stones, etc.

If you put in new plants and won’t be around for a couple days to keep them watered, make a few slow release waterers out of 2 liter or other **large plastic bottles**. Punch small holes around the shoulders, cut off the bottom, replace the cap, fill with water and invert next to the plant. The water will drain slowly, depending on the size and number of holes you make, giving the plant a steady drink as it becomes established. Filling the bottle when necessary is easy with a hose or watering can.

Unless you have age or health-related limitations, use fewer power tools in the garden. Get back in contact with the soil, work up a sweat, but be realistic and take breaks for rest and hydration— make it more fun than work. Small engines are huge polluters and gardening should put us back in contact with the earth, not distance us from it. [Editor’s disclosure: some of my favorite tools are major polluters, but I am gradually cutting down on their *overuse* as best I can!]

Build a rain barrel to collect run-off and use to water planting beds, garden, etc. Stop in to the Plant Clinic at the Extension Office or do a web-search for simple plans to recycle 55 gal plastic drums for rainwater collection.

Compost! Vegetative kitchen scraps and yard trimmings most emphatically do not belong in the landfill. Check your development’s restrictions first, but a properly built and maintained compost pile will provide you with a free source of nutrients for the garden without attracting pests or causing odors. See the Jan-Mar (2008) *Roots & Shoots* online for a couple of articles by experienced composting Master Gardeners.

Use a coffee can or some other covered container to collect kitchen scraps (vegetable trimmings, coffee grounds, *rinsed* egg shells, etc.) for the compost pile. There are some fancy stainless steel composting containers available for sale, but keeping plastic containers out of the landfill is always a better alternative—and a whole lot cheaper!

When you mow your yard, take the bag off the mower and leave grass clippings on the lawn to return their nutrients to the soil and your lawn. If you fear a build-up of thatch, understand that thatch results more from over-fertilizing and the resultant constant new growth than from clippings. Mow when the grass is dry and mow often enough to only take a third of the blade length at a time to prevent clumping.

If you have them around, panty hose can be cut into strips for tying stakes for flower stems or to—

**a properly built and maintained compost pile will provide you with a free source of nutrients for the garden without attracting pests or causing odors. See the Jan-Mar (2008) *Roots & Shoots* online**

mattoes, etc. Unlike cloth, they won’t break down in the course of the season and their stretchiness allows for stem growth over the course of the year.

Most seeds, while packaged for use for the current season will remain viable if properly stored. Use **prescription pill bottles** for an airtight storage container, and if you can spare the room, save a spot in the refrigerator for the seeds you don’t use this year. Seeds should stay viable for a couple of years, though they may drop in germination rate over time.

Similar to idea #3 above, cut a **chlorine bleach bottle** and make a scoop with a handle for working with your potting mix, peat moss, vermiculite, etc. Not only will it save a plastic
bottle from the landfill, the added control you’ll have could save on clean-up time.

Another good seed starter is a used egg carton, either foam or cardboard. Make sure to punch drainage holes in the bottom of each cup to prevent excess moisture. If you use the corrugated cardboard you can cut the cups apart with kitchen shears and plant the cup and all as it will decompose. If you have a lot of egg cartons, talk to a teacher to see if he/she can use them for a school science project.

When you repot your houseplants, make a layer of a few teabags at the bottom to keep the dirt from draining out with the water. They will allow drainage with less mess. The tea in the bag will also leach some nutrients into the potting mixture.

Have a paper shredder? Wet your shredded paper and use as mulch around your plants or put it in your compost pile. It will help aeration of the pile, and count it as carbon/brown material in the 3:1::brown:green composting material balance formula.

If you’ve started your garden early and a cold front is coming in, 2 liter soda bottles can be used to make a temporary greenhouse for small enough seedlings. Cut the bottom off and push the bottle down around the plant. If the day will be clear, take the top off so too much heat doesn’t build up, and replace the top in the evening to retain the heat inside. Obviously, if it will warm up too much during the day, remove the bottle to avoid damaging the seedling. Depending on the plant size, bottles of many sizes can be saved and used this way. With practice, internal temperature can be regulated by taking the top off or leaving it on.

Have a lot of foam packing peanuts lying around? When using a large pot, put some packing peanuts in the bottom of the pot to make it a little lighter to move around while allowing drainage.

Use old plastic margarine and sour cream containers for starting plants. Once again, be sure to poke drainage holes in the bottom and use the lids as saucers underneath.

If you find your potted plants drying out far too soon and cannot increase your watering schedule, use plastic bags from stores inside plant containers to help with moisture retention. Just be sure to poke drainage holes in the bottom to avoid fungal and root-rot problems.

To keep soil from running out the bottom of clay pots is to put used coffee pot filters in the bottom. Not only will it keep the soil in, but the grounds sticking to the paper will break down into the potting mixture.

Use a gallon milk bottle to start seeds—cut it roughly in half horizontally, leaving one side uncut as a hinge, and use tape to hold it closed. As usual, poke some drainage holes in bottom and add an inch or two of seed starting mix into the bottom. You can open it periodically to check that the soil is still moist and moisten with a misting spray when needed. When the seedlings emerge the top can be propped open and the entire container can be put into the sun to promote growth.

Create a mini-greenhouse for pots by using the bag the morning paper comes in. These can help fresh cuttings stay moist and humid as their new roots form, or it can keep fresh seed from drying out too soon. Add some sticks or other supports so the plastic doesn’t droop, and keep the “greenhouse” out of direct sun. When the seedlings come up, or there is new growth indicating some root development, take the bag off the pot and orient the plant to full sun gradually, an hour or two a day, or so. Make sure the soil stays moist by opening the bag and spraying with a mist when the soil dries out on the surface.

I am sure there are many other good ideas and tips out there, but these were the most submitted for this article. The idea is that creativity is a better problem-solver than spending money, and with all the trash we generate for our landfills our creativity is needed now more than ever. Finding new uses for old “trash” is a habit we can all develop and nurture, and our ability to live on our limited planet requires we all participate.
Kids’s Korner

Make a Plant Person!

You can make a comical “plant person” with a full head of gorgeous, green “hair.” Your plant person can sit on a saucer in your kitchen. As you munch your breakfast, watch its head go from bald to bushy!

Materials needed:
• Old nylon stocking
• Sawdust, or vermiculite, perlite, or soil
• 2 tablespoons (Tbs) of grass seed
• Thumbtacks and twist tie

Step 1: Cut the foot from an old nylon stocking

Step 2: Put 2 Tbs. of grass seed into the toe, then fill with sawdust or other medium.

Step 3: Close with the twist tie, then form into a round head.

Step 4: Push in thumbtacks for eyes, or use scraps of cloth, old Mr. PotatoHead pieces, etc.

Step 5: Soak in water and put in a sunny spot. Moisten it every day and watch the “hair” grow!

Source: Make and Take Booklet, 2002 ed. Florida Ag in the Classroom, Inc. pp. 28-29. (Adapted from.)
PLANTING GUIDE

Annuals

Seeds to plant in April: Celosia, Coleus, calliopsis, Crossandra, dusty miller, Exacum, Gaillardia, Gazania, hollyhock, Impatiens, Lobelia, Marguerite daisy, marigold, Nicotiana, ornamental pepper, Pentas, periwinkle, Phlox, Portulaca, Rudbeckia, Salvia, Streptocarpus, sweet William, Thunbergia alata, Torenia, Verbena and Zinnia.

In May, plant seeds of Celosia, Coleus, calliopsis, Crossandra, Exacum, Gaillardia, Gazania, hollyhock, Impatiens, Kalanchoe, marigold, Nicotiana, ornamental pepper, Pentas, periwinkle, Portulaca, Salvia, Torenia, Verbena, Vinca and Zinnia.

June is a hot month which limits planting of many flowers. For June seeding, choose hardy flowers: Celosia, Coleus, Exacum, hollyhock, Impatiens, Kalanchoe, marigold, Nicotiana, Ornamental pepper, Portulaca, Salvia, Torenia, Vinca and Zinnia.

The afternoon rains tend to shatter blooms of geraniums and can promote leaf spot diseases on many flowers. Use a general purpose fungicide labeled for flowers when frequent afternoon rains begin.

Perennials and Bulbs

Bulbs to plant in April: Achimenes, African iris, Amazon lily, Aztec lily, tuberous Begonia, blood lily, Caladium, Canna, Crinum, Gladiolus, gloriosa lily, kaffir lily, shell ginger, society garlic, spider lily, tiger flower, walking iris and Watsonia.

For May planting: African iris, Amazon lily, Aztec lily, tuberous Begonia, Butterfly lily, Caladium, Crinum, Gladiolus, kaffir lily, society garlic, spider lily, walking iris and Watsonia.

In June, plant: African iris, Aztec lily, tuberous Begonia, Butterfly lily, Crinum, Gladiolus, kaffir lily, society garlic, spider lily, walking iris.

Vegetables

In April, plant beans, cantaloupe, collards, okra, sweet potatoes, southern peas, New Zealand Summer Spinach, and peanuts for summer harvest.

The summer heat is tough on most vegetables but sweet potatoes, southern peas, peanuts, okra and Swiss Chard can be planted through June with success.

Fruits

Plant banana and other tropical fruits such as guava, papaya and pineapple to take advantage of the frost free growing season.

Containerized fruit plants can be planted throughout the year.

A variety of deciduous fruits can be grown here including some types of apples, peaches, pears, figs, blueberries, and persimmons. Be sure to select varieties adapted to Central Florida, since most popular northern varieties do not do well.

(Continued on page 10)
Landscaping
Sow seeds for Bahiagrass, Bermudagrass and Centipedegrass or plant St. Augustinegrass using plugs, sprigs or sod. Plant now only if you can water.

Landscape plants grown in containers can be planted throughout the year.

Delay planting balled and burlap palms until the summer rains begin. Keep the bud tied until it forces new growth. This keeps the young leaves from drying out until the new roots get established.

Maintenance Guide

Fruits
Continue to water as needed during the next few months which are normally dry. Even though regular afternoon showers begin in mid-June, check for adequate moisture in root zone.

Fertilize newly planted trees after new growth begins, about a month after planting.

First year citrus trees should be fertilized every 6 to 8 weeks.

Fertilize and prune blackberry and blueberry plants after fruit is harvested.

Keep weeds and grass away from citrus trunk.

Rake fallen citrus leaves and apply copper or benomyl fungicide in June if greasy spot has been a problem on citrus.

Rains trigger "June bloom" which yields low quality fruit.

In April, May and June, plan to harvest blackberry, blueberry, watermelon, Surinam cherry, 'Valencia' oranges, 'Honey' tangerine, and grapefruit.

In April, continue harvest of loquats, and strawberries. Peaches should be ripe.

Begin harvest of apples, avocado, bunch grapes, and mango in June.

Vegetables
Harvest from winter and spring plantings.

Water during dry weather.

Continue applying fertilizer as a side dressing 6" from the plants along the side of plant rows at a rate of 5 weight oz. of 6-8-8 per 20 foot row.

Remove old crop debris to reduce insect and disease problems in the fall.

Prepare the garden area for fall planting.

If you have had problems with weeds, nematodes, or wilt diseases, then plan to solarize the garden for 6 to 8 weeks. Water, then cover the prepared garden area with clear (NOT black) plastic to trap solar heat and bake harmful organisms which live in the soil and cause plant problems. The garden area must be located in full sun to get the full effect of the heat.

Lawns
Fertilize Bermudagrass in April and June using a water soluble nitrogen source.

Sharpen and balance mower blades.
Mow often and leave clippings on the lawn to recycle as natural fertilizer.
Check sick looking areas in the lawn for chinch bugs, webworms, brown patch or grey leaf spot disease. Bring a shoe box size sample of the sod from the edge of the sick area to the Plant Clinic.
If mole crickets have been a problem in Bahiagrass, use baits late in the afternoon during late June and early July to kill the young ones. Use residual granules early in May for long term mole cricket control.

**Landscaping**
Remove old flowers to extend blooming.
Fertilize flower beds at planting time and then monthly.
Fertilize trees and shrubs which have not been fertilized yet this spring. Fertilize again late June and late September.
Gerberas need to be fertilized every month from February to November.
Fertilize roses each time the plants produce a flush of bloom (about every 6-8 weeks).
Water shrubs if there is not much rain since this tends to be dry season until mid-June.
Cut back spring blooming shrubs, such as azalea, spirea, and camellia soon after they bloom. Don't prune azaleas after June.

Several light prunings with hand pruners over the summer will keep fast-growing shrubs such as Ligustrum, viburnum and Photinia looking neat. "Pinch" tips for compact growth. Poinsettias should be pruned several times from May through August.
Root 4" to 6" long softwood cuttings for potting in 6-8 weeks.
Check weekly for powdery mildew (crape myrtles, roses), black spot on roses, scale, aphids, lacebugs on azaleas, thrips on roses, spider mites on daylilies, chewing caterpillars on cannas and oleander and grasshoppers on lilies.
Scab fungus can cause tan bumps on stems of poinsettia and deform leaves.
Check for angular leaf spot on pittosporum and Ligustrum. On pittosporum, symptoms are light yellow to pale green and tan angular spots, developing first on upper leaf surfaces.
Psocids (tree cattle) cause harmless webs on tree trunks. Wash off with a squirt of water hose or whisk off with a broom.
Apply Bacillus thuriengensis (ex. Dipel, thuricide) to kill caterpillars and not affect most beneficial insects.
Spider mites, aphids, soft scales and other soft bodied insects can be killed using a spray of 2½ tablespoons each of liquid dish soap and vegetable oil per gallon of water. Repeat in 5 days for mite control, as needed for others.

Roses will need weekly spraying once the afternoon rains begin in order to prevent many diseases. Alternate approved fungicides weekly or as the chemicals are used up.
Apply magnesium sulfate (Epsom salts) to poinsettias, gardenias, fruits and palms showing yellowing deficiency symptoms on oldest leaves.
The potted begonias you had in the house during the winter can be planted in shady areas of the yard.
Replenish mulch around all plantings (except annuals and citrus) to a depth of 3 inches.
The Tomato That Wouldn’t Die
Sandi Switek Master Gardener (2005)

My first attempt at growing a tomato plant or two was a disaster. Just when the poor spindly things managed to get a few blooms and fruits, a big fat groundhog came along and put them out of their misery. Looking out the window one morning, I saw the hungry creature with a whole plant in its mouth.

Since I haven't seen any groundhogs where I live now, I decided to make another attempt at growing tomato plants. Often planted on about March 1 and also September 15, tomatoes are normally grown before or after the hot summer weather. Although October 15 was a little late, I decided to try it anyway. Unable to find any plants which didn't already have leafminers, I picked out two which didn't look too bad and then threw away the bad leaves. One plant was some sort of a Florida Heirloom variety, and the other one was called Celebrity, a recommended variety.

The tiny plants were given a home next to the southwest wall of our house. In spite of a temporary return of the leafminers, they began to flower and fruit very quickly. To my surprise, the fruit of the somewhat homely Florida variety was as good as any I had ever tasted.

Since the winter weather can be a problem for tomato plants, people usually start over again in early spring. Not knowing this, my plants continued to flourish throughout the winter and spring. Small but frequent feedings of citrus food were given to keep them from yellowing. The Heirloom plant continued to outgrow the Celebrity in my location.

In Central Florida the next obstacle in a tomato plant’s life is called summer. It is perfectly normal for plants to die at this time. There are countless insects and diseases which love to attack tomato plants, and temperatures are often too high for fruit to form anyway. Nematodes can also kill plants at any time. As my Celebrity plant languished, the Florida plant hung in there but did not fruit.

By September, my plant was once again blooming and fruiting well, and I had high hopes for it. It was terribly shocking to go outside one day to find that most of the plant was gone. The deer prints next to its stem were a dead giveaway as to what had happened. Not knowing that tomato plants were a "deer food", I had failed to protect the now beloved plant with fencing.

Hoping to revive it again, I kept my plant fed and watered. New shoots did begin to emerge, but it wasn't exactly a specimen at this point. It was still looking rather sad when a visitor saw it in October of 2007. He blamed its condition on the fact that it was "born" in August of 2006 and was just too old to live.

By early November, things began to change. The yellowing leaves had been replaced with deep green ones, and flowers and fruits were everywhere. As the plant spread across the side of the house, three tall stakes were put up to support its many branches. It began giving us fruit by Christmas and still continues to do so. These tomatoes are so tasty that my husband and I would never think of putting them in a salad. Instead, we just peel and eat a whole tomato.