When selecting plants for your landscape project, be sure to get the right plant in the right place.

One of the many wonders of our Central Florida landscapes is the diversity of plants we can grow. We are located in a subtropical climate which is well suited to a variety of plants from the tropics as well as plants from the lower range of the cold temperate zone.

Some temperate plants require a lot of cold to grow well. Examples include forsythia, lilac, ‘Red Delicious’ apples, Siberian iris, ‘Concord’ grapes, blue spruce, rhododendrons and saucer magnolia. Unfortunately, these northern favorites do not grow well here.

Tropicals are best adapted to frost free areas and freeze when we get that occasional cold snap. We are colder than the tropics so tropical plants are damaged some years but other years they thrive.

Familiar tropical plants grown in landscapes include ixora, philodendron, croton, copperleaf, purple queen and schefflera. They are grown primarily for their colorful foliage. Popular tropical flowering plants include powderpuff, hibiscus, alamanda, downy jasmine and princess flower. These are just a few of the many tropics we find locally.

These cold sensitive plants are often grown up north as patio plants in the summer and moved indoors in winter. If we have freezing weather here, the plants usually die to the ground and regrow from the roots if it doesn’t stay too cold for too long.

Tropical plants add accent and color to our landscapes, however a long dead hedge after a freeze is not a desirable color. Consider using tropical plants in containers or in small grouping with other more cold hardy plants so your landscape doesn’t look devastated after a freeze.

If you are concerned about the cold killing your special plants, you will want to move them indoors, protect them during cold weather or propagate more to set out after danger of frost in the spring.

Plan now to protect tender plants the event of frost or freezing weather which can come as early as mid-November. Start collecting boxes or straw to cover plants when cold is predicted.

Most tropical plants are easy to propagate from cuttings. Take a little color indoors and start rooting cuttings now. Cut shoots into stem sections 4” to 6” long. Remove the lower leaves and insert the bottom of the stem an inch or so into clean commercial potting soil. Press lightly to pack the soil around the stem. Do not use topsoil or soil from the yard since it may contain disease organisms that rot the cuttings.

Some gardeners prefer to use rooting hormone, such as Rootone, to encourage root development. It is usually applied as a powder to the cut end of the root system. Read the package directions when applying any chemicals.

Water the soil and seal the pot in a large clear plastic bag to create a small greenhouse. You will notice moisture condensing on the inside of the bag and "raining" back into the soil. The moisture inside the bag should be adequate until the plant begins to develop roots. Place the mini-greenhouse in a bright area out of direct sun. Direct sun causes the air inside the plastic bag to heat up and will damage the cuttings.

Within a month, roots should begin to form in the soil and new shoots may begin to sprout from the stem. Open the bag and tug on the cutting. You should be able to feel if roots have developed and are filling the pot. Once roots are well formed, open the bag and let the plant get adjusted to lower
humidity. You may need to water weekly. Soon you will want to plant the cuttings in a larger pot.

Rooting cuttings make pleasant additions to the home during the cooler months. If your landscape plants survive the winter and you don’t need them to set out in your own yard, they make great gifts to share with friends, family and neighbors.

Long-range plan

Osceola County is in the process of developing a long range plan for greenways and recreational trails. Greenways are natural corridors that connect our communities. Trails provide opportunities for hiking, biking, walking, skating and horseback riding. While no funds are currently budgeted, planning is important in determining funding needs.

Public workshops are scheduled in seven locations throughout the county during November. The first one is scheduled in Poinciana at the Community Center on Marigold Ave. on Thursday, November 2. We invite you to join us to learn more and give us input on what type of recreational trails you would prefer. The session is set up as an open house so come when it is convenient any time from 4 p.m. until 8 p.m. and visit the various information stations.

Call (321) 697-3000 for a schedule or check the web at http://osceola.ifas.ufl.edu/nat/natrec.htm and check out the greenways and trails links for more information.

Eleanor Foerste
Natural Resources Agent
Osceola County Extension/University of Florida
1921 Kissimmee Valley Lane
Kissimmee, FL 34744
(321) 697-3000
Fax (321) 697-3010
efoe@osceola.org
osceola.ifas.ufl.edu
Date: October 26th, 2000