Wow, our first cold spell and the high pressure system promise great weather for the weekend. This is ideal for outdoor projects and playing in the yard. Follow some simple guidelines on plant selection before you plant your landscape project.

Select the right plant for the right place before you buy the colorful plant on special at the nursery. Learn about the growing conditions required for best plant growth. Some plants can tolerate shade while others need full sunlight most of the day. Some will freeze during our normal winter weather. Others may require frequent irrigation to keep them at their bests. Plant labels may not have complete information so be sure to get the details from trained nursery workers or references specifically for our Florida conditions.

The University of Florida has developed a list of plants adapted to Central Florida landscapes. Fact sheets contain information on mature size, growth rate, sunlight and soil moisture requirements. Request information on trees, shrubs, groundcovers, vines, native plants, perennials, and bedding plants (annuals). Additional fact sheets make suggestions for butterfly and hummingbird gardens. We also have recommendations for shade and for wet areas. Search online at [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu) or link to EDIS through our web page at [http://osceola.ifas.ufl.edu](http://osceola.ifas.ufl.edu). Copies are also available through the Osceola County Cooperative Extension Office at (321) 697-3000. There are also several plant selection databases available for sale in CDROM format. Stop by the office for a free catalog or call for ordering information.

If you don’t have an irrigation system, you can still have a beautiful landscape. Select plants that are naturally drought tolerant. They need water during the first few months of establishment, but should then be able to survive on natural rainfall.

If your planting area is in an area that stays wet during our rainy summer season, be sure to select plants that tolerate wet soils. If the area is wet year round, your plant palette is limited but you can still grow more than weeds.

Be sure to consider the mature size before selecting plants. Many plants have been grown for specific characteristics and have numerous named selections called cultivars. Hollies and junipers, for example, have many cultivars with various growth habits and colors. Select cultivars which are naturally smaller in size for areas under windows, near walkways and by driveways.

Allow for full width when spacing plants. Don’t plant closer than 3’ from a wall, further for large shrubs such as viburnum or ligustrum. It is important to leave access between shrubs and buildings for maintenance and to allow for good air flow to prevent mildew and termite damage.

Know your soil before you plant. Soils which are tightly packed don’t drain well and result in poor root growth due to lack of oxygen or flooding. If you have a tough time digging in hard soil, the roots will likely have a difficult time growing as well. Most of our native sandy soil drains well, but fill dirt used under and around our homes is selected to keep our house from settling, not for good root growth. Improve drainage in planting beds by removing packed soil and replacing it with landscape soil that contains compost, humus, or topsoil.

Soils next to buildings become alkaline with a high pH level, limiting the growth of plants which need acidic soil. Azaleas, blueberries, ixora, hibiscus and camellias often have pale leaves due to nutritional problems when planted next to concrete block buildings.
If you are new to the area, or new to gardening, consider visiting the Master Gardeners for more information on what to plant and how. Master Gardener volunteers are on duty Monday to Friday from 10am to 2pm to help you with a variety of plant care questions. The Osceola County Extension office is located between Kissimmee and St. Cloud next to the Silver Spurs rodeo arena on highway 192.

Master Gardeners produce another resource to help you. Roots and Shoots is a free consumer horticulture newsletter published quarterly. Call to request to have it mailed to you or read it online on our consumer horticulture page at http://osceola.ifas.ufl.edu/mg_archive.shtml.

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