**Outer Space Makeover**
How to make your yard more usable, personalized, and fun

I don’t know about you, but I’m already weary of the holiday madness, therefore I decided to write about non-holiday-related themes this month. Do you want a break from the hassle of deciding what gifts to buy, who’s going where for dinner, what kind of cookies to bake, etc.? If so, then find a nice quiet corner to hide in and consider these ideas for creating an outdoor space that you’ll love to be in…

**Put up a bird house**
Birds add an element of entertainment to the landscape, and your feathered neighbors will appreciate the home. Habitat for cavity-nesting birds is decreasing rapidly with expanding urbanization, and birdhouses are an easy way to invite nature back to your neighborhood. Birds like woodpeckers and wrens are frequent visitors of backyards and will readily nest in a box. The best approach to selecting a birdhouse is to know what kind of birds are in your area and select or build a birdhouse with the appropriate dimensions specific to one of those birds. Avoid brightly colored, ornamental birdhouses, as they attract attention from predators. Also avoid houses with lots of perches, which give predators easy access to the birdhouse. For more information, request the free publication SS-WIS 901, *Helping Cavity Nesters in Florida* from the Extension Office.

**May there be peas on earth**
The landscape is so much more interesting when you can taste what’s growing in it. If you’re new to vegetable gardening, try something easy like cherry tomato, jalapeño pepper, eggplant, or radish (all of these can be planted in January-March). Containers are an easy way to grow vegetables.

**Take time to smell the…**
Confederate Jasmine, Tea Olive (*Osmanthus* species), Old Garden Roses, Bay (*Laurus nobilis*), Orange Jasmine (*Murraya paniculata*), Banana Shrub, (*Michelia figo*), or one of the fragrant Gingers! Scent is often overlooked because you *can’t* actually look at it, but fragrance is just as important as visual aspects in creating a pleasant garden experience.
Make some shade
Since the majority of Florida months have plenty of sunshine, shade is a requirement if you want to go out and enjoy your yard. We would all like a lovely backyard gazebo, right next to our own personal lake of course, but if your budget doesn’t allow for such luxuries, then a well-placed umbrella or weatherproof canopy will serve the purpose. A well-placed pergola or trellis with vines growing on it will also add easy shade to the landscape. Planting trees provides the ultimate outdoor haven, and can save on your indoor energy costs by shading your home. The Annual St. Cloud Christmas Tree Swap will be held at 8:00am-3:00pm at the Recycling Center at 10th & Missouri. Bring in your old cut Christmas Tree and exchange it for a live, containerized tree to plant in your yard. You can even take home your old Christmas tree as mulch for your new tree. Several tree species will be available to choose from. It’s one day only, so don’t miss your chance for a free tree!

COLOR
Color is a requirement in any garden, and luckily, it’s an easy one to meet in Florida. For a quick facelift of any landscape, plant containers of winter annuals such as Petunia, Pansy, Statice, and Snapdragons to brighten the season.

Sit Spot
Why spend time and energy transforming your landscape if you can’t sit back and enjoy the view? Give yourself a place for relaxation and contemplation. Be sure the seating you select is comfortable. I see many beautiful garden seats, but they don’t feel so beautiful to sit in! A metal chair was branding-iron hot in the sun and poked into my ribs, and a lovely stone bench offered nothing to lean back on. Hammocks are cozy, but squirrels can ruin a $200 hammock with a few nibbles (they like the salts that human sweat leaves behind). Plastic lumber or PVC are long-lasting weather proof materials that won’t rust, rot, or lose color outdoors. Even garage-sale variety outdoor furniture can be revived with a coat of paint and some colorful cushions.

Give it meaning
Include something in your garden that has some sentimental value. The smell of honeysuckle takes me back to summers spent climbing trees and catching fireflies at my grandparents’ house. A funky garden gnome peeks out from behind the cut stump in my yard and reminds me that gardening should be fun. My mother in Kansas buys two packets of identical seeds every spring and sends me one to plant. And even though we’re far from each other, we have a connection, and I’m reminded of my mom every time I see the flowers. Your landscape can be an extension of what you do, what you value, where you come from, or where you are going.

Give it away
A wise person once said “Landscapes are better when they’re shared.” (I’m pretty sure that’s how it went anyway…) Take a bouquet of flowers from your yard to the neighbor; bring some of your extra produce into work…you grow when you give.

Get help
Remember that your landscape should bring you joy. Yes, you’ll have to devote some planning time and some sweat to keep your landscape looking good. But, if you select Florida-friendly
plants that are practical for your yard, then your time and work will be minimal. Contact the Extension Plant Clinic at 321-697-3000 for answers to your landscape questions.

Call 321-697-3015 to register for these free homeowner seminars:

**Trees in the Landscape- Selecting, Planting, and Care**
Held at Peghorn Nature Park, St. Cloud

**Thursday, January 11th**
6:00pm-8:00pm

and repeated on

**Saturday, January 13th**
9:00am-noon

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