

## **Reduce need for irrigation with drought tolerant plants**

Some plants are genetically better able to withstand drought. The need for irrigation can be drastically reduced when drought tolerant plants are used.

Many Florida native plants are designed to grow in our sandy soils. Many plants native to arid areas of the world possess high drought tolerance. These plants have characteristics that allow them to better survive dry weather. These features include thicker or waxier leaves, large surface root areas or deep roots and the ability to drop leaves in drought and regain them when moisture is adequate.

It's important to realize that these plants must first establish a root system before they can cope with severe dry weather. Plan to irrigate if necessary for the first season to allow them to establish. But after they are well established, supplemental irrigation may not be required, even during extended dry periods.

But don't overuse these plants. Remember we have rainy weather too. Some drought tolerant plants have poor tolerance to the other extreme – too much water. There are a few plants that can tolerate both extremes but they are the exception. Avoid using drought tolerant plants on naturally wet or poorly drained sites. But if you have the typical deep sandy well drained soil Florida is famous for, you'd do well to include some drought tolerant plants on your site. They are especially well suited for areas that receive little to no irrigation.

Some outstanding trees to consider include crape myrtle, redbud, Chinese pistache, cedar (*Cedrus* species), hawthorn (*Crataegus* species), American holly, yaupon holly, Southern red cedar (*Juniperus* species), Shumard oak, Live oak, Sand live oak, winged elm, pond cypress and bald cypress. Some people are surprised to learn that pond cypress and bald cypress have high drought tolerance because these trees are associated with swamps, many times growing in standing water. But once established on a dry site, they exhibit very good drought tolerance.

Some outstanding shrubs with drought tolerance include glossy abelia, dwarf yaupon holly, Indian hawthorn (*Raphiolepis* species), butterfly bush (*Buddleia* species), beauty berry (*Callicarpa americana*), pineapple guava, junipers, oleander, spiraea, blueberry or sparkleberry (*Vaccinium* species), viburnum, Chaste tree (*Vitex agnus-castus*) and coontie (*Zamia pumila*).

Some outstanding drought tolerant groundcovers to consider include beach sunflower (*Helianthus debilis*), daylily, juniper, lantana, liriope, rosemary (*Ceratiola ericoides*), Asiatic jasmine and society garlic. Many of the ornamental grasses such as Gulf muhly are good choices as well.

For more information on drought tolerant plants, contact your University of Florida County Extension Office.

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