

Edible Ornamental Landscaping Guide for North-Central Florida¹

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Edible ornamental landscaping is the “artful combination of edibles and traditional ornamentals in the garden” (Hansen 2019). Well-designed edible ornamental landscapes, also called foodscapes, provide landowners with aesthetically pleasing, multipurpose gardens that provide food, color, and cover year-round. Not only can these landscapes provide a source of healthy, locally grown food in urbanized communities, they can also promote energy and water conservation, improve food security, and provide wildlife habitat (Çelik 2017). By converting conventional yards into sustainable, edible ornamental landscapes that utilize the principles of Florida-Friendly Landscaping™, we may quell some of the health and environmental impacts of rising population growth and urbanization (Çelik 2017).

The purpose of this publication is to guide Floridians on how to design, install and maintain their edible ornamental landscape using reliable plants suitable for north-central Florida and the best management practices of Florida-Friendly Landscaping™.

Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ with Edibles

The Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ (FFL) program (<https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/>) is a statewide initiative to promote attractive, low-maintenance landscapes that conserve water, protect water quality, and provide wildlife habitat. The nine

principles of FFL can be applied to any landscape, including edible ornamental landscapes, to reduce maintenance costs, irrigation, and the need for chemical pesticides and fertilizers (see *Edible Landscaping Using the Nine Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Principles* at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/EP594>).



Figure 1. A lovely loquat tree is center stage in this residential backyard with other ornamental plants.
Credits: A. Marek, UF/IFAS

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Figure 2. A native beautyberry bush produces blooms and edible berries in the corner of this landscape.
Credits: A. Marek, UF/IFAS

Right Plant, Right Place

The first and foremost principle of Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ is to select plants best suited for the site conditions. Your edible ornamental landscape can be attractive and productive all while conserving water and protecting water quality by selecting the right plants for the climate, light, space, soil and water conditions of your yard. These plants can be native or non-native and should not be listed as invasive exotic (<https://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/>). By using the right plant, right place principle, many issues can be prevented from the very beginning to reduce your landscape maintenance needs.

Temperature and Lighting

To select the right plants, you will first need to know in which plant hardiness zone you reside. Average winter minimum temperatures, which dictate USDA plant hardiness zones, vary widely in Florida. North-central Florida primarily includes zone 9a, which has an average minimum temperature of 20–25 degrees Fahrenheit. Temperatures along the coast tend to be milder. Selecting plants that are hardy in your zone will reduce the care they will need to thrive through the seasons.

Likewise, some edible plants, such as peaches, plums, and blueberries, require a certain number of chill hours to be productive (<http://agroclimate.org/tools/chill-hours-calculator/>). These crops will need a minimum number

of accumulated hours during winter between 32° and 45° to set fruit consistently. To promote optimal productivity, select low-chill cultivars for your north-central Florida edible ornamental landscape (see *Dooryard Fruit Varieties* at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/MG248>). Some fruit trees, such as apples, peaches, plums, and nectarines, may not be reliable producers given the variable winters in this region. Plants may accumulate more chill hours if planted on the north side of a structure or in a location with early-morning shade. Plants that are less cold hardy should be planted on the south or southwest side near pavement or large trees.



Figure 3. Plant hardiness zones for the state of Florida as of 2012
Credits: <https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/resources/usda-hardiness-zones/>

Once your list of plants has been narrowed to those that are hardy and productive in your climate zone, observe the sunlight conditions of your landscape. Most edible plants will need partial to full sun, but some, like edible ginger and turmeric, thrive in shade. Keep in mind that light conditions may change as plants mature, leading us to the next consideration for selecting the right plants for your edible ornamental landscape—spacing.

Spacing and Soil

Overcrowding is a common issue in the landscape. Plants that are too close together or too close to structures, such as buildings and lanais, become stressed, less productive, and more susceptible to pests and disease. Plants that become too large for a given space are often pruned to maintain a desirable size, but over time, this can lead to branch dieback and general decline. Familiar examples of poor plant spacing are trees planted under power lines and large shrubs planted in front of windows. Know the mature size of a plant before you plant it, and keep in mind that many plant species have been cultivated into a variety of different sizes.

To properly space a plant, measure from the center of the plant to the center of the next. For example, a plant that gets 30' wide at full maturity should be planted 30' away from the next plant, measured from the center stem or trunk. As a rule of thumb, small to medium-sized trees should be planted at least 15' away from the foundation of any structure. Bushes and other plantings should be planted forward of the roof dripline, leaving at least 2.5' of space between the plant at mature size and the foundation. Keep trees and shrubs far from septic tanks, drainage fields and wells to avoid expensive plumbing issues in the future.

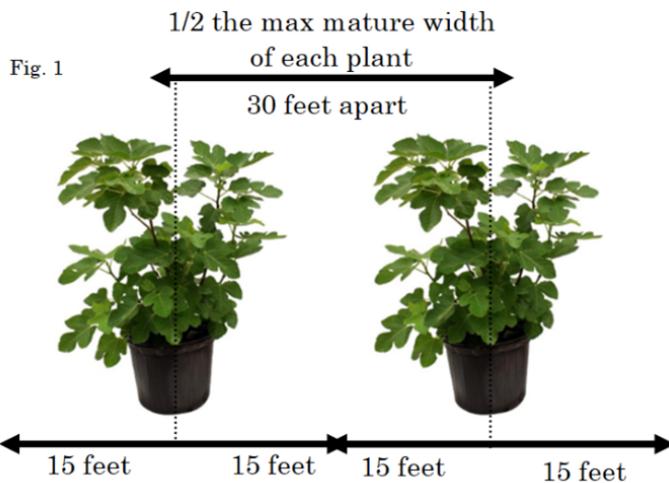


Figure 4. For proper plant spacing, measure from the center of one plant to the center of the next.
Credits: A. Marek, UF/IFAS

Before investing in new plants, be sure to get a soil test. Research the preferred soil pH and moisture level of the plants you want to install, selecting plants that best match your soil pH, moisture, and drainage conditions. Sandy soils tend to be dry and well-drained, while clay holds moisture and drains poorly. The majority of plants prefer soils to have an acidic pH between 5.5 and 6.5. It is relatively easy to raise soil pH, but nearly impossible to permanently lower it significantly. Therefore, it is best to match the plants to the soil than to try to fix the soil conditions to match the plants. Contact your local county UF/IFAS Extension office for more information and assistance on testing your soil pH and nutrient content.

Design Considerations and Establishment

The design of your edible ornamental landscape should be easy to maintain once established and attractive to you and to wildlife year-round. If you live in a homeowner's association or deed-restricted community, be sure to get approval prior to making any changes to your existing landscape. An edible ornamental landscape can follow much of the same general design considerations as a traditional landscape, with additional consideration for seasonality. Select a

diversity of plants that produce blooms or fruit in different seasons for year-long color and fruit production. It is also recommended to intermix evergreen plants or winter annuals with deciduous plants to avoid brown, bare areas during the months of winter dormancy. As with any landscape, select pest- and disease-resistant varieties or cultivars to minimize the need for pesticides. Specific design considerations for each of the recommended edible ornamental plants for north-central Florida are provided below.

A plant is considered established when it can survive without irrigation (see *Frequently Asked Questions about Landscape Irrigation for Florida-Friendly Landscaping Ordinances* at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/WQ142>). Florida-friendly plants selected according to site conditions and planted correctly typically require little to no irrigation once established. However, it is imperative that all new plants receive regular irrigation until that time. The larger the plant, the longer it will take to get established. Fruit-bearing trees and shrubs may need supplemental irrigation during fruit set if rainfall is not adequate. When irrigation is needed, such as during establishment and fruit-set, microirrigation that delivers water efficiently to the roots is recommended. Not only does microirrigation conserve water, it can also reduce disease pressure by keeping the leaves dry. Once the plants are established, microirrigation systems can be easily removed and used elsewhere. A 2"–3" layer of organic mulch can likewise help hold moisture and allow plants to establish easier. Pine straw and pine bark mulch are the best at weed suppression and help acidify the soil as it decomposes, adding organic matter to the soil. Keep mulch at least a few inches away from the base of all plants and 10" or more from the trunks of trees to maintain root health. A light 1" layer of mulch over the root ball for aesthetics is acceptable.



Figure 5. For every inch of tree diameter, provide 2–3 gallons of water. Water every other day until establishment (Dukes et al. 2020).
Credits: A. Marek, UF/IFAS

Pollinators and Pesticides

To protect yourself and pollinators, it is important to always read and follow label instructions for pesticides, particularly when applying to edibles and plants in bloom. Flowering plants provide nectar and pollen for honeybees and native pollinators. Some plants, such as passion fruit, are also hosts for moths and butterflies. Adults lay eggs on the host plant; larvae then eat the leaves, typically causing no permanent damage until they pupate and fly away to start a new generation. By adding pollinator plants to your edible landscape, your plants will bear more fruit, pest and disease pressure will be reduced, and you will provide critical habitat for struggling pollinators.



Figure 6. Avoid overuse of pesticides that can harm beneficial insects, such as this native green sweat bee visiting a blanket flower.
Credits: A. Marek, UF/IFAS

Before treating, identify an insect first. Less than 1% of all insect species in the world are plant pests, meaning the vast majority are beneficial or benign. If treatment is necessary, utilize mechanical removal, such as pruning off bad branches or picking off infested leaves, before moving on to the least toxic chemicals first. For many sap-sucking insect pests, such as aphids and scale, neem oils and horticultural soaps are effective while posing minimal risk to our beneficials. Positively identified caterpillar pests can also be benignly treated with a Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) product that is nontoxic to bees and will kill the caterpillars once ingested. Regardless of how safe, natural, or even organic a product is labeled, the application and safety instructions should always be followed. Pay particular attention to product application on edibles and the preharvest

interval (PHI) (how long to wait after treatment before harvesting). Utilize your UF/IFAS Extension office for pest identification assistance and integrated pest management recommendations (see *Natural Products for Managing Landscape and Garden Pests in Florida* at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/IN197>).



Figure 7. Identify an insect before treatment, and note that some plants are host plants for pollinators. This pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*), for example, is being fed on by zebra swallowtail butterfly caterpillars.
Credits: A. Marek, UF/IFAS

Edible Ornamental Plants for North-Central Florida

Once the conditions of your site have been analyzed and you have drafted a landscape design and maintenance plan, it is time to select your edible ornamental plants. The plants selected for your landscape should be Florida-friendly and meet your needs and wants in terms of both aesthetics and productivity. There are countless options; however, for the purposes of this publication, the following perennial plants have been highlighted for their ease of maintenance, reliable health and productivity, and overall aesthetic appeal for north-central Florida edible ornamental landscapes. Please see Table 1 below for a summary of these and other recommended plants to consider. Contact your local UF/IFAS Extension office for recommendations for your specific area.

Blueberry

Vaccinium spp.



Figure 8. Ripening blueberries and rabbiteye blueberry bushes that can be productive for many years.

Credits: M. Bailey, UF/IFAS

There are several native species of blueberries in Florida: shiny (*V. myrsinites*), Darrow's (*V. darrowii*), Elliott's (*V. elliotii*), rabbiteye (*V. virgatum*), and highbush (*V. corymbosum*). Depending upon the species, blueberry plants can range in size, shape, and color. Typically, most blueberries are small to medium-sized shrubs. Blueberries are naturally shallow rooted and need well-drained, acidic soil. When planting, blueberries should be planted with the top of the root ball slightly above the soil line. Pine bark and pine needles have soil-acidifying properties and are good choices for weed suppression under blueberry plants. Blueberries also have chilling requirements to effectively produce flowers and leaf out during spring. To help facilitate chilling requirements, choose a location that is exposed to cold northern air or has early-morning shade so the plant stays cooler longer in the morning. Blueberries are more productive when frequently lightly fertilized with a 12-4-8 formulation. Blueberry plants usually need one or two years before they begin to produce fruit. More information about blueberry production can be found in [CIR1192/MG359: Blueberry Gardener's Guide \(ufl.edu\)](#). The time of year blueberries flower and set fruit greatly depends upon the species. Southern highbush varieties are typically the first to flower and set fruit from late winter into early spring, while rabbiteye bushes will have ripe fruit available in early summer. At least two different cultivars of the same type will need to be planted to achieve cross-pollination and therefore fruit production. Shiny and Darrow's blueberry are small plants and produce small fruit that are typically ready to harvest in late spring. All native Florida blueberry species produce edible berries that can be utilized in many ways—fresh, dried, juiced, or preserved.

LANDSCAPING WITH BLUEBERRY

Rabbiteye and southern highbush blueberries can be used as deciduous edible hedges in the landscape. Rabbiteye varieties of blueberry can reach 12–15 feet high and 8–10 feet wide, so plant these in areas that allow for ample space

at maturity without overcrowding. If creating a hedge, plant about 7 feet apart center to center. Southern highbush tend to stay smaller than rabbiteye and can be planted in rows about 5 feet apart, but they may still be too large for some home landscapes. In those instances, the shiny or Darrow's blueberry bushes may be better choices. These little evergreen bushes stay about 2 feet tall and wide, and in addition to the small but tasty berries, the new purple-colored foliage is highly attractive in the landscape. Plant blueberries in full sun for optimal health and fruit set.



Figure 9. For smaller landscapes, the native, evergreen Darrow's blueberry is a great option.

Credits: A. Marek, UF/IFAS

Fig

Ficus carica



Figure 10. A mature Brown Turkey fig tree provides fruit and shade in this garden in Ocala, FL. Look for varieties that have closed “eyes,” like the fruit shown on the right, compared to an open eye, shown in the center.

Credits: M. Bailey, UF/IFAS

Figs are native to regions of the Mediterranean and western Asia. Figs need well-drained soil and full sun to thrive. They are well adapted to periods of drought as well as cold winters and hot summers. Figs require little pruning or fertilization to be highly productive. If pruning is needed, avoid doing so in winter, because that will cut off next year's fruit. Pruned stem cuttings can be used to propagate the fig.

Figs produce an edible fruit along the length of the stems about a year after planting. Fruit typically ripen during the summer. The fruit can range in size, color, flavor, and texture depending upon variety. There are two distinct types of fruit: a closed eye and an open eye. Each fruit has an eye, or ostiole, in the middle of the fruit. The eye is essentially a hole that leads into the interior of the fruit. An open-eye variety is highly susceptible to infestations from insect pests and plant pathogens. If the goal is to produce a reliable, high-quality fruit crop that does not need a pollinator, select varieties with a closed eye. Varieties with a closed eye include Celeste, Champagne (Golden Celeste), Green Ischia, Hunt, LSU Purple, and Tena. Brown Turkey fig is commonly available and has a moderately closed eye. Fruit is very sweet and slightly seedy for some varieties. Figs can be eaten raw, dried, or turned into fig jelly. In the summer and fall, it is common for figs to be affected by fig rust, a disease that occurs on the leaves. This disease often causes the leaves to fall off, though it causes minimal harm to the overall health of the plant. Fig rust can be managed by the preventive application of fungicides (such as Bordeaux mixture 5-5-50 spray of copper sulfate, lime, and water) onto the leaves. More information about fig production can be found in [HS27/MG214: The Fig \(ufl.edu\)](#).

Note: The UF/IFAS Assessment of Non-native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas has evaluated this species using a predictive tool and has assessed this plant to be high invasion risk. Utilize management practices such as monitoring to prevent potential spread. This species is currently not listed on the state or federal noxious weed list.

LANDSCAPING WITH FIG

Figs are attractive, medium-sized trees in the landscape, with large-lobed leaves. Depending on the variety, they can grow to be about 25 feet tall and wide and usually have multiple trunks that grow into an umbrella-shaped canopy. Given the mature size of these trees, be sure to plant them at least 15 feet from building foundations, wells, septic systems, and neighboring trees. The canopy of a grown fig will shade out plants below, so consider installing mulch, shade-loving plants, or winter annual flowers for color in the dormant months when the fig will be bare. Examples of ornamental plants that would be good under fig include caladiums, peacock ginger, pansies, calendula (edible leaves and petals), and petunias.

Ginger and Turmeric

Zingiber officinale and *Curcuma longa*

Most edible ginger plants originated from Asia, where they have been cultivated for thousands of years. A wide range of species belong to the ginger family (*Zingiberaceae*). Some of the species within the ginger family include edible gingers, turmeric, and cardamom. These plants are grown from underground rhizomes, which are modified plant stems. It is the rhizomes that are used to propagate new plants. Ginger plants are well adapted for partial shade and will need to be planted in good-quality soil for the plant to thrive. Generally, after a full growing season, ginger plants can be harvested, or they can remain in the soil and continue to grow. Ginger plants can be propagated after harvest by using sections of the harvested rhizome. Rhizomes can be used fresh in dishes, dried as a ground spice, candied, or used in beverages.



Figure 11. The flower of turmeric on left, an ornamental pinecone ginger in center, and an ornamental butterfly ginger on right. Credits: M. Bailey and A. Marek, UF/IFAS

LANDSCAPING WITH GINGER AND TURMERIC

Both ginger and turmeric are shade-loving plants and can therefore be incorporated into your edible ornamental landscape where many other plants will not do. These plants are deciduous but will return from the clumping underground rhizomes in the spring. Consider adding nonedible ornamental gingers, such as butterfly ginger, that grow to about 4 feet tall and have attractive, sweet-smelling, white blooms to the shadier parts of your landscape, or the low peacock ginger as a groundcover under the shade of your loquats, figs, and other shade trees. Pinecone gingers, also called shampoo gingers, grow to about 6 feet tall and get a vibrant, red, cone-like flower stalk with cream-colored flowers that are attractive to pollinators. When the red cone is squeezed, a sweet, fresh-smelling liquid can be collected and used to make soaps and shampoos (hence the name). The family of gingers and curcumas is quite large, and landscapers can add great color and diversity in the shadier areas of their yards by incorporating both the edible and nonedible varieties.

Lemongrass

Cymbopogon citratus



Figure 12. Lemongrass can cheaply and easily fill in large areas of your edible ornamental landscape.

Credits: A. Marek, UF/IFAS



Figure 13. Lemongrass with seed heads in Ocala, FL.

Credits: A. Marek, UF/IFAS

Lemongrass is a large, perennial, clumping grass that originated from India. It is best to plant lemongrass in spring or summer, allowing it to become fully established before dangerous winter freezes occur. Once established, this plant requires minimal inputs. It can be harvested by cutting off

the leaf stems or stalks from ground level to a height of about two feet. Lemongrass has a strong lemon fragrance and can be used to flavor soups, dishes, or beverages.

LANDSCAPING WITH LEMONGRASS

Florida-friendly ornamental grasses can easily fill in large areas of a landscape and add diverse textures, heights and colors. In the case of lemongrass, they can also add scents and tastes as well. Consider planting lemongrass individually to showcase its cascading leaves, in mass, or as a large border plant in full to partial sun where you can enjoy the lemony scent. Lemongrass can serve as a living privacy fence, growing to approximately 6 feet tall and 4 feet wide, so plant about 4 feet apart center to center to allow proper airflow. The seed heads of lemongrass that emerge in late fall to early winter may be an additional 3 feet tall. Lemongrass is undesirable to deer and may help deter them from areas of your landscape. This perennial grass will stay green most of the year but will turn brown after a hard freeze. Cut out any dead or damaged leaves towards the end of March after the chance for freeze has typically passed.

Loquat

Eriobotrya japonica



Figure 14. Loquat is an excellent, evergreen shade tree that produces an abundance of fruit. The flowers are highly attractive to bees and other pollinators.

Credits: M. Bailey and A. Marek, UF/IFAS

Loquats originate from East Asia and are one of the best-adapted fruit trees for north-central Florida. They are very cold hardy and can endure long periods of drought. They also require minimal inputs or pruning to be highly productive. This tree thrives in both full sun and partial shade in well-drained locations. There are improved loquat varieties, though unimproved seedlings are far more readily available. Loquats are somewhat unusual by flowering in winter, with fruit becoming ripe in late winter and early spring. Fruit can be picked once they turn a golden or

orange color. The skin of the fruit, depending upon variety, may have fuzz that can be removed, and the flesh is very sweet, juicy, and slightly acidic. Each fruit will contain one or several seeds that can be easily removed. Plants usually need to grow for three or more years before becoming productive. This tree is an excellent choice for an edible ornamental plant that requires minimal inputs for high quality and quantity of fruit. More information about loquat production can be found in [HS5/MG050: Loquat Growing in the Florida Home Landscape](#) (ufl.edu).

LANDSCAPING WITH LOQUAT

Loquats (sometimes sold as Japanese plum) serve as lovely, evergreen, shade trees in the landscape, growing to about 30 feet tall. Multiple loquats in a landscape can quickly shade a large area. Oftentimes, however, one specimen loquat in the yard provides an ample amount of shade and fruit. The leaves, much like magnolias, are thick and waxy and therefore decompose slowly, which may be a nuisance to some homeowners. Blow or sweep off fallen leaves from patios and walkways and utilize the leaves as free mulch or add to compost piles. Organic mulches, such as pine bark, pine straw or melaleuca, can be put down under the shade of loquats; alternatively, consider planting shade-tolerant plants such as ferns, caladiums, Persian shield, coontie, Xanadu philodendrons, bromeliads, or edible ginger and turmeric.

Mulberry

Morus spp.



Figure 15. Mulberry trees grow rapidly and produce sweet, juicy fruit. Credits: M. Bailey, UF/IFAS

Mulberries are native to Florida as well as Europe and Asia. Commonly available species include red (native), black, and dwarf everbearing mulberry. Mulberries grow rapidly and are well-adapted to the extremes of Florida weather. Mulberries are relatives of the fig and have similar requirements.

It is best to plant mulberries in full sun and well-drained soil. Once established, they do not require fertilizer, though excessive growth may need to be managed with aggressive pruning. Like the fig, mulberry cuttings can be used for propagation. Mulberries typically begin to produce fruit during the early spring and intermittently throughout the year depending upon variety and other factors. Most mulberries produce fruit that begin green, turn pink or red, and finally darken to a purple black once fully ripe. Ripe fruit is tender, flavorful, very sweet, and juicy. Ripe mulberries can be eaten raw, juiced, dried, or turned into jam.

LANDSCAPING WITH MULBERRY

Mulberries vary widely in size depending on cultivar. The native red mulberry (*Morus rubra*) and non-native black mulberry (*Morus nigra*) can both grow to be medium-sized trees up to 40 feet tall. The white mulberry (*Morus alba*) can grow even taller, up to 60 feet. Extra care should be taken to be sure these trees are planted far enough away from wells, drainage fields and foundations. For smaller landscapes, the dwarf everbearing mulberry may be the best alternative, only growing to 15 feet tall. Homeowners can also choose to prune their mulberry trees into bushes to keep the size down and to make harvesting the fruit easier. Mulberries are deciduous and will therefore lose their leaves in winter but are great specimen shade trees in the landscape for most of the year. The dark-colored fruits can stain pavement when they fall. If that is a concern, be sure to plant your mulberry far enough away or choose light-colored fruit cultivars, such as ‘King White Pakistan’ or ‘Tehama’. Mulberry fruit are also highly attractive to wildlife, which may be a concern in some communities, particularly areas prone to bears. If you live in a homeowner association, always get HOA approval before adding new plants to your landscape, particularly edibles.

Muscadine Grape

Vitis rotundifolia



Figure 16. Muscadine grapes come in range of colors, sizes, and flavors.

Credits: M. Bailey, UF/IFAS

The muscadine grape is native to Florida and widespread across the Southeast. It is a long-lived climbing vine that produces clusters of grapes and can

grow to great lengths. In the wild, muscadine grapes are dioecious, which means they are divided into male and female plants. Most are male, which serve to pollinate fruit-bearing female plants. They grow best in moderately acidic (pH 5.5–6.5) soil that is rich and well drained. They are well adapted for conditions in the Southeast and are notably more disease resistant when compared to the European grape (*Vitis vinifera*). Muscadine grapes are most productive when provided full sun, adequate water, and seasonal pruning in mid-to-late winter. The addition of fertilizer can help increase yield and fruit quality after budbreak. Muscadine grapes come in a wide range of sizes, color, texture, and flavors. Many varieties exist with characteristics that include disease resistance, vine vigor, fruit quality, and overall yield. Some varieties are self-fertilizing, while others will need to be planted with compatible varieties that will pollinate one another. Fruit typically take about 100 to 120 days to mature and can be eaten raw as soon as they are ripe. Most varieties contain seeds, though some new varieties are “seedless.” In addition to being eaten raw, they can be juiced and turned into beverages or jellies. For more information please see [HS763: The Muscadine Grape \(Vitis rotundifolia Michx\)](#) (ufl.edu).

LANDSCAPING WITH MUSCADINE GRAPES

Muscadines are a deciduous vine, and therefore the trellis they are on will be largely bare and exposed in the winter months. Consider using a strong but decorative trellis for this reason, or simply use a sturdy fence to have a native, living border along your property line. Muscadines can become quite aggressive and can reach their tendrils onto nearby plants or structures, so be sure to keep about 5 feet of clear space around the vines. By having ample air space, the muscadines will also have better sunlight exposure and airflow to improve yield and reduce pest or disease pressure. Muscadines do not produce as well when there is competition around their roots. Avoid planting other plants around the root zone, and try to keep the area clear of weeds and grass by using a 3” layer of organic mulch and edging material of your choosing.

Passion Fruit

Passiflora edulis



Figure 17. The flower of passion fruit vine is stunning, and the pulp of mature fruit is sweet and tropical.
Credits: M. Bailey, UF/IFAS

Passion fruit is native to South America and is adapted to tropical conditions. It has a showy flower that transforms into an edible fruit with a tough outer rind. Passion fruit grow best in full sun and rich, well-drained soil with intermittent irrigation. About a year after planting, passion fruit will begin to produce flowers, which are pollinated by bees, primarily carpenter bees. Using a low-nitrogen, high-potassium fertilizer will encourage flowering once the vine becomes fully established. If freezing temperatures are expected, protect the base of the vine to ensure the survival of the plant. Excess growth should be pruned back at the beginning of each spring to encourage new growth where the flowers are produced. Once fruit are mature, they will drop to the ground, where they can be collected. The interior of the fruit contains flavorful pulp, which can be eaten raw, juiced, turned into jams and jellies, or added as flavoring to a wide variety of foods and drinks. For more information, see [HS1406: The Passion Fruit in Florida](#) (ufl.edu).

LANDSCAPING WITH PASSION FRUIT



Figure 18. Less than one year of passion fruit vine growth on an arbor in Ocala, FL.
Credits: A. Marek, UF/IFAS

Passion fruit is a fast-growing, semievergreen, aggressive vine that should be given at least 5 feet of clear space between it and other plants and structures to avoid issues of smothering and potential damage. When planted in the right place, passion fruit can serve as a highly attractive, flowering vine on a decorative trellis or arbor, or as a living fence row. It is important to know that passion fruit, like many *Passiflora* species, is a host plant for Gulf fritillary and zebra longwing butterflies. Adult butterflies will lay eggs on the vine and the caterpillars that hatch will eat the vine until they metamorphose into butterflies. Coinciding with the principles of Florida-Friendly Landscaping™, be sure to

identify the caterpillar before you treat, and have tolerance for some damage because these caterpillars will eventually turn into beneficial, pollinating butterflies. If damage to your passion fruit becomes too severe, consider adding passionflower (*Passiflora edulis*), their preferred host plant, elsewhere in the landscape to serve as a deterrent.



Figure 19. A single Gulf fritillary caterpillar feeding on a passion fruit vine.

Credits: A. Marek, UF/IFAS

Persimmon

Diospyros spp.



Figure 20. Persimmon fruit change from green to orange when mature in fall and winter.

Credits: M. Bailey, UF/IFAS

Japanese persimmon trees (*Diospyros kaki*) are native to East Asia. They are a small to medium-sized deciduous tree, typically growing 10–20 feet tall and wide with a single trunk and producing yellow-orange fruit, although the size of both the trees and fruit as well as fruit color vary widely depending on the cultivar. Persimmons grow best in full sun with well-drained soil and infrequent irrigation. Fertilizer is not necessary for this tree to grow effectively in most soils. A young tree may require two or more years before it will produce fruit. As the weather cools, persimmons

will drop their soft leaves, but the brightly colored yellow-orange fruit may remain throughout much of the winter. There are several varieties of Asian persimmon that have characteristics such as astringent and nonastringent and differences in flavor, texture, and appearance. Fruit should be picked or cut off the tree once fully ripe. Fruit may remain on the tree long after the leaves have dropped and are fully ripe after a slight softening of the fruit. The ripe fruit can be eaten raw and will have an increasingly soft texture depending upon how ripe the fruit is. The fruit can also be readily dried, used for jellies, and used by bakers for persimmon cookies and bread. For more information, visit [SP101/MG242: Japanese Persimmons in Florida \(ufl.edu\)](https://www.ufl.edu/sp101/mg242/).

LANDSCAPING WITH PERSIMMON

Japanese persimmon is an attractive, small tree for your edible ornamental landscape, particularly in the fall and early winter when orange fruit adorn the branches. It will be bare in the late winter months, however, so consider planting evergreens or winter annuals around it for year-round color. Despite its small size, be sure to keep it at least 15 feet from building foundations and be aware that the fruit will attract wildlife and may make a mess if not harvested. The native common persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*) is also deciduous but is a much larger tree, growing up to 60 feet tall and 35 feet wide. It produces smaller, more astringent fruit and is not as commonly planted in landscapes. The common persimmon is suitable for larger, more naturalized yards.

Pineapple Guava

Acca sellowiana



Figure 21. The bloom and unripe fruit of a pineapple guava tree.

Credits: A. Marek, UF/IFAS

Pineapple guava is a perennial plant native to South America that produces attractive edible flowers and fruit. It is tolerant of both high temperatures as well as mild freezing temperatures. Pineapple guava benefit from some chill

hour accumulation. It is well adapted to most conditions in Florida and grows best in well-drained soil. It flowers in spring, and fruit ripen toward the end of summer. The fruit turn slightly more yellow green and start to drop off when ripe. The flesh is best eaten raw and has a mild, sweet, guava-like flavor. ‘Coolidge’, ‘Nazemata’, and ‘Pineapple Gem’ cultivars are best for self-pollinating fruit production.

LANDSCAPING WITH PINEAPPLE GUAVA

For an evergreen, attractive hedge or small tree in your landscape, consider pineapple guava (also called feijoa). Their dark-green leaves with silvery underside add beautiful color and texture. The edible red and white blooms are quite lovely and unique and are followed by gray-green, oval-shaped fruit. Pineapple guava is an excellent edible alternative to bottlebrush tree or crape myrtles that are more commonly planted. Consider planting pineapple guava as single- or multitrunked trees in the landscape or as a pruned hedge. Left unpruned, these plants can grow 10–15 feet tall and wide but tolerate hedging well at about 4–5 feet. Pruning is best done after fruiting. Dwarf cultivars that have smaller leaves and flowers and naturally grow only 3–4 tall and wide, such as ‘Bambina’, may be more suitable for smaller spaces.



Figure 22. Pineapple guava grown as a hedge and as a tree in commercial landscapes in Ocala, FL.
Credits: A. Marek, UF/IFAS

Rosemary and Other Herbs

Rosmarinus officinalis

Rosemary is a fragrant evergreen shrub that originates from the Mediterranean region. It is extremely drought tolerant and is well adapted for high heat. Rosemary is somewhat slow growing and is most productive when planted in full sun with well-drained soil. Rosemary, like many herbs, will not tolerate soggy soils for long. The small leaves produce a fragrant scent, especially when touched or crushed. The leaves are edible and can be used as a spice for a range of foods such as flavoring for meat and breads. The leaves of rosemary and many other herbs can be used fresh or dried for long-term storage.

LANDSCAPING WITH ROSEMARY AND OTHER HERBS

Rosemary and other herbs can add great diversity, textures, scents and smells to your edible ornamental landscape. The blooms are likewise highly attractive to many pollinators. Rosemary can grow 4–6 feet tall and wide depending on the variety, so be sure to give it ample space. Consider adding a mix of annual and perennial herbs such as rosemary, African blue basil, holy basil, onion chives and more to fill in the smaller, sunnier areas of your edible ornamental landscape (see Table 1). You can also support pollinators in your garden by incorporating host plants that black swallowtail caterpillars will consume, such as fennel and parsley.



Figure 23. Left: A rosemary bush planted in a residential edible ornamental garden bed with other herbs. Right: In addition to having edible leaves, the blooms of many basil like this holy basil are very attractive to pollinators.
Credits: A. Marek, UF/IFAS

Yaupon Holly

Ilex vomitoria



Figure 24. Weeping yaupon holly trees in a commercial landscape in Ocala, FL. The leaves of yaupon holly are caffeinated and are used to make tea. The red berries are devoured by birds in the fall and winter months.
Credits: A. Marek, UF/IFAS

Yaupon holly is a native plant available in many different shapes and sizes as a tree or shrub. It is very well adapted for a wide range of conditions throughout north-central Florida. Yaupon holly is a rather unique edible ornamental plant for having naturally caffeinated leaves rich in antioxidants that have been used for centuries by Native American cultures. The leaves may be dried and steeped to produce a caffeinated tea. Yaupon holly tea production is a growing industry in Florida.

LANDSCAPING WITH YAUPON HOLLY

Yaupon holly is readily available in a wide diversity of cultivars that makes it an excellent evergreen staple in the edible ornamental landscape. For smaller spaces or for a foundation hedge, consider a dwarf cultivar such as ‘Nana,’ ‘Schillings Dwarf’ or ‘Bordeaux,’ or for a specimen tree, consider the ‘Pendula’ weeping yaupon holly or the original standard. In the winter months, female trees produce festive red berries, which birds love; if you want these berries, be sure to purchase a female tree, because males do not produce them. Also keep in mind that some of the hybrid dwarf cultivars, like ‘Schillings,’ do not produce berries, although these bushes more than make up for it with their low-maintenance, attractive, naturally rounded form. In the spring, both male and female plants will produce small white flowers that are attractive to pollinators. Yaupon hollies are highly drought tolerant and hardy, and they do well in many different site conditions, from wet to dry, acidic to alkaline, and full sun to full shade. This is truly one of the most undemanding edible ornamental plants to consider for your landscape.

For more information, see [ENH470: Ilex vomitoria: Yaupon Holly \(ufl.edu\)](#).

Other Edible Ornamentals

In addition to the plants listed above, there are countless other edible ornamental plants to consider for your landscape. Contact your local UF/IFAS Extension service for recommendations and information on these and other Florida-friendly edible plants for your yard, and refer to Table 1 on page 14.

African Blue Basil

Amazel Basil™

Beautyberry

Calendula

Chives: Onion, Garlic, Society

Holy Basil

Nasturtium

Pawpaw

Pindo Palms

Pineapple Sage



Figure 25. Nasturtium (left) has an edible flower and leaf and can be used in your landscape with other edibles, like these onion chives (center) or beautyberry bush (right).

Credits: A. Marek, UF/IFAS

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Table 1. Edible Ornamental Plants for North Central Florida.

Common Name	Scientific Name	FL Native	Edible Parts	Harvest Time	Light Needs	Drought Tolerance	*Height x Width	Hardy Zones	Notes
Vines									
Muscadine Grapes	<i>Vitis rotundifolia</i>	Yes	Fruit	Summer–fall	Partial–full sun	Average	5' x 15'	7–10	Deciduous vine. Need self-fertile or compatible varieties for pollination. Well-drained soils.
Passion Fruit	<i>Passiflora edulis</i>	No	Fruit	Summer	Full sun	High to Average	5' x 25'	9–13	Short-lived, evergreen, perennial vine. Cold sensitive.
Herbs & Flowers									
African Blue Basil	<i>Ocimum kilimandscharicum</i> x <i>basilicum</i>	No	Leaves	Year-round	Full sun	Average	4' x 3'	9–11	Blooms highly attractive to bees. May be an annual in cooler zones. Sterile.
Amazel™ Basil	<i>Ocimum</i> hybrid	No	Leaves	Year-round	Full sun	Average	3' x 2'	9–11	Annual, sterile hybrid. Downy mildew resistant.
Calendula	<i>Calendula officinalis</i>	No	Flower	Winter	Partial–full sun	Average	1.5' x 1.5'	All	Winter annual. Also called pot marigold. Flowers attract butterflies. Reseeds.
Chives, onion, garlic and society	<i>Allium schoenoprasum</i> , <i>Allium tuberosum</i> , and <i>Tulbaghia violacea</i>	No	All parts	Year-round	Partial–full sun	High	1.5' x 1.5'	3–10	Perennial. Onion chives bloom purple, garlic chives bloom white. Society garlic available in white or purple flowers.
Ginger, edible	<i>Zingiber officinale</i>	No	Rhizomes	Fall–winter	Partial–full shade	Low	3' x 3'	8–11	Grows in clumps. Dry out rhizome before consuming.
Holy Basil	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i> (or <i>tenuiflorum</i>)	No	Leaves	Year-round	Full sun	Average	3' x 2'	9–11	Also known as tulsi. Reseeds. Flowers attract pollinators.
Nasturtium, garden	<i>Tropaeolum majus</i> L.	No	Leaves, flowers, seed pods	Spring–fall	Partial–full sun	Average	Varies	4–11	Spring–fall climbing perennial or annual. Dwarf/bush cultivars don't need trellising.
Pineapple Sage	<i>Salvia elegans</i>	No	Leaves, flowers	Year-round	Partial–full sun	Average	3' x 3'	8–11	Perennial, flowers attract butterflies & hummingbirds.
Rosemary	<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i> (a.k.a. <i>Salvia rosmarinus</i>)	No	Leaves	Year-round	Full sun	High	6' x 5'	8–10	Evergreen, flowers attractive to pollinators. Sizes vary on cultivar, pruning.
Turmeric	<i>Curcuma longa</i>	No	Rhizomes	Fall–winter	Partial–full shade	Low	3' x 3'	8–10	Similar to ginger. Harvest once leaves yellow and dry out.
Grasses and Shrubs									
Beautyberry	<i>Callicarpa americana</i>	Yes	Fruit	Fall–winter	Partial–full sun	Average	8' x 8'	7–11	Deciduous. Purple fruit can be used for jams and jellies.
Blueberry	<i>Vaccinium</i> spp.	Yes	Fruit	Spring–summer	Full sun	Average	Varies	7–9	Plant two different cultivars of same type for fruit set.

Common Name	Scientific Name	FL Native	Edible Parts	Harvest Time	Light Needs	Drought Tolerance	*Height × Width	Hardy Zones	Notes
Lemongrass	<i>Cymbopogo-n citrusus</i>	No	Leaves and stalks	Year-round	Partial–full sun	Average	6' × 4'	9–11	Harvest when stalks are ~½" thick, cut at ground level.
Pineapple Guava	<i>Acca sellowiana (Feijoa sellowiana)</i>	No	Fruit and flowers	Spring–fall	Partial–full sun	High	15' × 15'	8–11	Evergreen. Can be grown as a hedge or a small tree. Also known as feijoa.
Trees									
Fig	<i>Ficus carica</i>	No	Fruit	Summer	Full sun	High	25' × 25'	8–10	Deciduous. Choose closed eye variety.
Loquat	<i>Eriobotrya japonica</i>	No	Fruit	Winter–spring	Partial–full sun	High	30' × 35'	8–11	Evergreen. Very low maintenance. Allow space at mature size.
Mulberry	<i>Morus</i> spp.	Yes/No	Fruit	Spring–summer	Partial–full sun	High	Varies	3–10	Deciduous. Red mulberry (<i>Morus rubra</i>) is native.
Pawpaw	<i>Asimina</i> spp.	Yes	Fruit	Summer–fall	Shade–sun	Average	Varies	5–10	Many species of various sizes. <i>Asimina triloba</i> is a small tree.
Persimmon	<i>Diospyros</i> spp.	Yes/No	Fruit	Fall–winter	Full sun	Average	15' × 15'	7–10	Common persimmon (<i>Diospyros virginiana</i>) is native, grows 60'
Pindo Palm	<i>Butia odorata</i>	No	Fruit	Summer	Partial–full sun	High	20' × 15'	8–11	Aka Jelly palm. Cold-hardy, slow-growing. Fruit used for jellies.
Yaupon Holly	<i>Ilex vomitoria</i>	Yes	Leaves	Year-round	Partial–full sun	High	25' × 20'	7–9	Evergreen. Dwarf cultivars used commonly as hedges.
*Heights and widths indicated are typical averages for north-central Florida. Actual size of mature plants may vary considerably depending on site conditions, cultivars, maintenance given, etc.									