



These gray buttonwood and pink impatiens are a warm entryway greeting.



Bright red salvia are eye-catching and perhaps improve safety by serving as an excellent road divider.



This stunning arrangement of white alyssum, geraniums, begonias, salvia and impatiens is an award winner...a bit of heaven at Quail Creek West in Naples, FL (pic taken 4-22-04)

## The Icing on the Landscape Palette The “bling-bling” in the Landscape?

*Doug Caldwell, Collier County Extension, Commercial Horticulture*

The use of dazzling brightly colored flowers is **huge** in south Florida! Being from Ohio, it has taken me a few years to get used to people rushing out of stores with

their carloads of impatiens on Sunday after church in December. Color-scaping is a 12 month delight in Naples and a completely different ballgame with lots to learn if you are from “up north”.

**Lesson 1: Improve the sand.** That means you need to add some organic matter so that the roots will have longer lasting moisture and nutrient availability. Incorporate some compost or potting soil into the top three inches of the bed area. Potting soils should contain Canadian peat, pine bark, and vermiculite but no perlite. Fafard #4 is highly recommended potting soil as well as some of the Scott's Miracle Grow or Metromix products. As a gauge, use the contents of one bag (three cubic foot size) per four flats of plants. Make sure that you don't over do the potting soil, as the bed could become water-logged and not drain, thus killing the roots. Using a good potting mix reduces the transplant shock phase. This adjustment lag can retard the plants' development and delay flowering. So, using a good mix will fool them into thinking that they haven't left home and they just keep on growing. Soil may have to be removed and replaced annually if nematodes become a problem (see below).

**Lesson 2: Plant selection.** When I first moved here, I refused to plant impatiens, because they reminded me of Ohio, even though they are a tropical plant. There has to be something that is more typical of Florida, I thought. Information on different plant species, from African daisy to zinnias, is listed at the bottom of this article. Also take into consideration the seasonal adaptation of the species. Snapdragons and pansies are cool weather plants and will melt down once we get into the 80 degree days of spring. A good seasonal planting guide is available at:

[http://vtgrec.ifas.ufl.edu/seasonal\\_planting\\_guide\\_for\\_bed.htm](http://vtgrec.ifas.ufl.edu/seasonal_planting_guide_for_bed.htm).

In south Florida there may be four color rotations ( periods when new plants are installed) in the touristy areas where “curb-appeal” is the focus in an effort to grab people's attention and pocketbook. In the home landscape there are usually two planting times, October-November and April-May. Be creative and use two or three species for more flash and interest. Red, white and blue schemes are popular with different varieties of ageratum, salvias, petunias, and impatiens. Also, please consider using a color wheel (page 25 of the Florida guide below) to come up with a complementary color scheme. I've seen landscapes where it looks like all the discounted leftover plants were thrown into a bed and the colors clashed so bad it looked like Walt Disney regurgitated. Don't forget foliage plants such as coleus, caladium and certain begonias and ornamental sweet potato or pothos.

**Lesson 3: Pest problems are different.** There are more species of slugs and snails and cutworms to keep a close eye on than you can imagine. Do night patrols to see what is chewing on your plants. Select plants that aren't prone to these pests. Some varieties of petunias are relished by slugs and snails. Also avoid using too much mulch (one inch or less in annual beds) and avoid placing mulch against the stems of these plants. Mulch is good, but along with the good comes the fact that it provides a great breeding ground for some of these chewing denizens of the night. However, the most serious pests in our sandy

soils, are the nematodes. These are tiny worm-like creatures that cause a subtle decline by attacking plant roots. For information on plants that aren't as susceptible, see, " Nematode Management for Landscape Ornamentals." at: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/NG013>.

Avoid over watering with certain plants such as petunias, impatiens and especially periwinkles. Root rot diseases will set in and wipe out the entire bed. Bob Cook refers to these as the "stepped on" diseases. By the way. Bob reports that periwinkles could be grown more successfully as a fall-winter planting, to avoid our wet summer rainy season which kills many a flat of periwinkles.

**Lesson 4: Maintenance.** For optimum flowering one needs to be diligent with proper watering and fertilizing. Most bedding plants, especially impatiens, are heavy "feeders". Fertilize when you plant with a slow release 14-14-14, use five to seven pounds per 100 square feet to trickle feed the plants for three months. Don't use this much fertilizer with a quick-release fertilizer, drop the rate to two pounds per 100 square feet for a 6-6-6 and repeat as the foliage color fades. I like to goose the plants intermittently with quick release liquid fertilizers with micronutrients, be sure to follow the label rate to avoid burning the plant roots. For more on planting and fertilization in Florida's different climatic zones, see: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG018>.

Careful selection and planting, as well as proper care of the bling-bling beds can add a rewarding eyeful to the landscape. Stay on top of the new varieties as there will be many more exotic plants being introduced other than those that you are used to finding in Ohio!

For research results on varieties being trialed in south Florida see: [http://vtgcrec.ifas.ufl.edu/pages/research\\_papers.htm](http://vtgcrec.ifas.ufl.edu/pages/research_papers.htm) and <http://flrec.ifas.ufl.edu/>.

Go here to for seed companies:  
[http://vtgcrec.ifas.ufl.edu/pages/seed\\_companies.htm](http://vtgcrec.ifas.ufl.edu/pages/seed_companies.htm)

Learn how to select and grow over 60 species in the 71 page SP 185, "Your Florida Guide to Bedding Plants: Selection, Establishment and Maintenance." by Black and Gilman, University Press of Florida, to order, call 800-226-1764. Also much thanks for information in this article goes to Bob Cook and Ray Pelletier at Ray's Lawn & Garden.

*Doug Caldwell is a Certified Arborist and the commercial horticulture extension agent with the University of Florida Collier County Extension Service. The Cooperative Extension Service is an off-campus branch of the University of Florida, Institute of the Food and Agricultural Sciences and a department of the Public Services Division of Collier County government. E-mail [dlcaldwell@mail.ifas.ufl.edu](mailto:dlcaldwell@mail.ifas.ufl.edu); call 353-4244. Extension programs are open to all persons without regard to race, color, creed, sex, handicap or national origin. For updates on the Southwest Florida Horticulture Learning Center visit: <http://collier.ifas.ufl.edu>*

