

# **Gardening Facts for Newcomers**

Welcome to Okaloosa County! Our area is one of the most beautiful on the Gulf Coast. We hope this information will help you learn to garden here and enjoy one of the benefits of living in Okaloosa County.

## **Weather**

Our plant hardiness zone is 8a and 8b Our heat zone is 9.

Average annual temperature is 76°.

Summer highs can be in the 90's and winter lows occasionally dip below freezing. Temperatures vary between the north and south parts of the county.

Growing season is from mid-March to mid-November.

Average rainfall is 62 inches yearly. Monthly average rainfall is 5.1 inches. Expect the most rainfall in July; least rainfall is from October to February.

## **Soil**

Soil is extremely sandy and pH varies widely throughout the county. A soil test by the University of Florida is recommended.

Use of renewable organic supplements is recommended to enhance soil.

## **Plant Selection**

Native plants are a good choice for home landscapes. These plants tolerate local conditions and help conserve water. They must be planted in areas they are adapted to.

## **Right Plant, Right Place**

Choosing plants to fit specific locations is critical to success in the garden. Sun, shade, salt spray and soil pH are factors to consider.

Recent hurricane damage has shown some landscape plants are better able to withstand wind damage than others

### **Lawns & Watering**

Water conservation is essential to maintaining our quality of life in Florida. Please do your part. Proper watering of your landscape will save water for us all.

Water only when the landscape needs it.  
Watch for

- grass blades that begin to fold in half
- footprints that stay in the turf after walking across
- blue-grey areas in the lawn. All are indicators that your lawn now needs water.

Lists of plants that do well in our area are available from the Extension Office.

### **Protecting Our Resources**

If you pull a thread in nature, you will find it is connected to the rest of the earth. Protecting our natural resources is the responsibility of us all.

Reduce the use of pesticides and fertilizers and apply only the water the landscape needs. Information on insect pest management, proper use of fertilizers and ways to reduce water consumption are available from the Okaloosa County Extension office.

“Your yard is the first line of defense for Florida’s fragile environment. The health of Florida’s estuaries, rivers, lakes and aquifers depends partly on how you landscape and maintain your yard.” (Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Handbook <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/EP079>)

Landscapes that survive hurricane force winds can reduce damage to your property. Advice on planting a landscape that is less susceptible to high winds is available from the Extension office. Ask for Circular 1183 or check online at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/FR010>. Some trees that showed a better survival rate after recent high winds were slash and longleaf pines, Sabal palm, live oak and magnolia. Sound cultural practices should be observed in tree selection, location and maintenance.

An Educational Landscape Garden Is located at the Okaloosa County Extension building. The garden is open to the public.

5479 Old Bethel Road  
Crestview, Florida  
32536-5512

---

Soil pH can be tested at the Extension Office. Complete soil tests are available from the University of Florida. These soil test kits are available at either of our locations. Call or come by.

---

### **Plant Clinics**

March through October, Extension Horticulture Agent Larry Williams invites county residents to bring in samples of plant material for identification. Mr. Williams and the Master Gardener volunteers will diagnose diseases and pests of turf and landscape plants as well. The free clinics are held at 127 Hollywood Blvd in Ft. Walton Beach. Call the Extension Office for dates and times.

### **Speaker's Bureau**

Master Gardeners provide programs for garden clubs, civic groups, church groups, etc in Okaloosa County. Call the office for more information.

Okaloosa County Extension Agents: Gerald Edmondson-Ext. Director/Agriculture Agent; Larry Williams-Residential Horticulture Agent; Sheila Dunning-Commercial Horticulture Agent; Elaine Courtney-Family & Consumer Sciences Agent; Jennifer Heady-4H Agent; Brook Saari-Marine Science Agent.

Help with gardening questions is available through the Okaloosa County Extension Service. Phone support is provided by the Okaloosa County Master Gardeners. Find answers to your gardening questions. We can help with plant selection, watering questions, lawn care, soil pH testing, pesticides, insects, plant diseases, and landscape ideas.

Call 850-689-5850 (north of the Shoal River) or 850-729-1400 ext. 5850 (south of the Shoal River)

Master Gardeners are at 127 Hollywood Blvd. on Fridays. Call 850-651-7476 or stop by.