

# THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF AMARANTH

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Amaranth is an interesting plant that has both edible and ornamental varieties. You may have heard of Joseph's Coat, but have you heard of tampala or callaloo? As an annual plant, Amaranth grows nicely in our area and does particularly well in our warmer months. Also known as pigweed, Amaranth is an often underutilized garden plant that you will truly enjoy.

As an ornamental, Amaranth is probably best known as Joseph's Coat or Fountain Plant. Rapidly growing from one up to four feet in height, some of the taller varieties may require staking. Fairly drought-tolerant, plant Amaranth in a full sun area that is well-drained, but not particularly fertile. Too much fertilizer will in fact reduce the colorful nature of the foliage. Generally, the colorful leaves are three to six inches long and two to four inches wide. The vivid color makes this plant good for edgings, borders and mass plantings. While the cultivar called 'Tricolor' is one of the most common types avail-

able, also look for 'Early Splendor', 'Flaming Fountain', 'Molten Fire', 'Perfecta', and 'Splendens'. Cultivars that are compact and less apt to need staking include 'Green Thumb' and 'Pigmy Touch'. Remember that it is the upper-most foliage that produces the show-stopping color, not the inconspicuous flowers! Grow Joseph's Coat from seed or purchase started plants that are often available locally in garden centers.

If you like spinach, you will love the vegetable quality of Amaranth! While vegetable Amaranth has many different names, there are several species that are available. There are green and red forms - there is even a reddish-purple on a green background type that is both edible and ornamental. Check Internet sites for a variety of leaf sizes and colors. General planting instructions would include preparing the soil and broadcasting the seed in a wide patch and covering the seed with about an eighth of an inch of

*Amaranthus caudatus*



photo courtesy of [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)

soil. Later, thin the young seedlings to about three inches apart. About a month after planting, begin to pick the Amaranth leaves. Harvest the young leaves and shoots while tender and pick often to force new shoots to develop. Amaranth is very quick growing and will eventually become tough and not as productive over time. Consider successive plantings every week or so to keep a crop always coming into production. Amaranth grows best in warm weather and production will be reduced in cool temperatures. Keep in mind that cold weather and frost will kill Amaranth. The worst pest that I have encountered while growing Amaranth has been caterpillars.

One additional type of Amaranth is used for the production of grain. Amaranth selected for seed production produce large, colorful heads of a very tiny grain. The harvested grain can be popped, flaked or made into flour. Grain Amaranth varieties are large and can grow up to seven feet tall. Some are great simply as ornamentals.

No matter what type of cultivated Amaranth you choose to grow, their ornamental and edible qualities are hard to beat!

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*Resource:*

*Gilman, Howe, T. (2007) Amaranthus tricolor Joseph's Coat, Amaranth, Fountain Plant. UF/IFAS Extension Service.*

*Stephens, J.M. (2003) Amaranth - Amaranthus spp. UF/IFAS Extension Service.*

*McAvoy, Gene (2008) Latin and Caribbean Cultures Contribute Vegetables for Summer. UF/IFAS Extension Service, Hendry County.*

*Cornell University (2006) Growing Guide - Vegetable Amaranth.*

*Myers, R.L. & Putnam, D. H. (1988) Growing Grain Amaranth as Specialty Crop. The University of Minnesota Extension Service.*

*Sullivan, P. (2003) Amaranth Production. National Center for Appropriate Technology, ATTRA.*

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- **Demonstration Garden** (6900 Florida Street, PG) Thursdays 9:00am-11:00am.
- **Englewood/Charlotte Public Library** Thursdays 10:00am-1:00pm.
- **Mid-County Regional Library** 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of month 1:00pm-3:00pm.
- **Edison College Learning Resources Library** 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of month 1:00pm-4:00pm.

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For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Steele, at 941.764.4351. Allison can help educate you about the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program so that you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.