

# DON'T THROW THAT PINEAPPLE TOP AWAY!

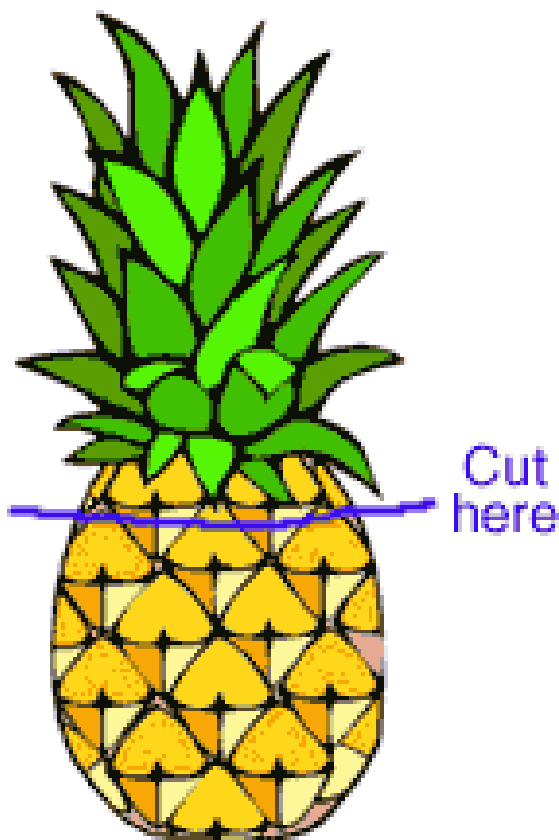
By Ralph E. Mitchell, *Director/Horticulture Agent of Charlotte County Extension Service*

Did the pineapple originate in Hawaii? No, actually the pineapple, which is a type of bromeliad like Spanish moss, originated in the tropical Americas and the Caribbean. Explorers moved the pineapple around the tropical parts of the world and export from the West Indies developed through the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, significant production moved to Hawaii, Asia and Africa. Central America and Puerto Rico are also now major producers of this fruit. In 1860, pineapples were first introduced into Florida. In fact, there was even a pineapple industry for a time in early days of our very own Punta Gorda. Pineapples in Florida these days are pretty much a backyard crop. Mine are setting flowers right now, so I thought it timely to share some information on this interesting fruit.

Even if they never produced any fruit at all, pineapple plants are attractive subjects for the landscape all by themselves. A whorl of sword-like leaves form the actual pineapple plant which may grow up to six feet wide. Once the pineapple plant produces about 70-80 leaves, a flower is produced. Cool weather and short days naturally help induce a pineapple to flower. The flower is another very ornamental sight as a compressed reddish oval of flower buds emerges from the center of the plant. The individual flower is white with a violet colored tip that opens up, several at a time, as the pineapple fruit forms. The fruit develops as a result of a fusion of smaller individual fruitlets into one big fruit. The green peel eventually ripens to a golden color accompanied by an attractive scent. With a fruit weight of up to five pounds, staking may be required to keep it from tipping over. A pineapple may take anywhere from 18-36 months from planting to harvest. On average, you can expect a pineapple from flower to ripe fruit in about seven months. Wait until 1/3 to 2/3 of the pineapple peel have turned from green to yellow for best sweetness. Then, allow the fruit to completely ripen at room temperature indoors. Once fully ripe, you can store the fruit in the refrigerator for a week.

There are numerous varieties of pineapple, but many may be difficult to find. However, one called 'Smooth Cayenne' is the most commonly available pineapple worldwide. This cultivar has

high sugar content with yellow flesh. The leaves have some spines on three foot long leaves. Another variety, not as available as 'Smooth Cayenne', is 'Red Spanish' which is noted for a square-shaped fruit and spiny leaves. A very different type is 'Sugarloaf'. The leaves of 'Sugarloaf' are completely smooth and the flesh is white in color. There are even some super sweet new varieties in commercial production noted for retaining their quality when shipped.



We can grow pineapples here in Charlotte County! To start pineapples, you first need either a crown from the fruit, slips, hapas, or suckers. The crown from the fruit is of course the pineapple top that you would ordinarily cut off and throw away. A slip is a sprout that comes from below the fruit on the fruit stalk. Hapas are like slips, but develop below the base of the fruit. Suckers form at the base of the leaves of the old mother plant. Don't be too quick to remove slips, hapas, or suckers from the mother plant. The bigger and more developed that all of these propagation materials are, the quicker they will develop into a fruiting

plant. Whichever plantlet type you use, detach it from the mother plant and let it dry in a shaded location for about two days. Pot these plantlets up in clean potting medium to start new plants. Set rooted plants out in full sun locations situated in planting beds enriched with compost about 36 inches apart to help develop large and vigorous plants. The larger the pineapple plant at flowering, the larger the resulting fruit. Pineapples are also well suited to small space gardening and can be easily grown in a seven gallon container.

Pineapples can produce a second fruit or ratoon crop if a sucker that emerges from below the fruit is allowed to grow. Make sure to remove all of the suckers and hapas except one which is then allowed to develop and produce a second fruit.

A granular fertilizer such as 10-10-10 or its equivalent every eight weeks will help plants grow well. Also consider using a liquid fertilizer as per label directions. There are also foliar nutrient mixes with micronutrients that will benefit pineapple plants. Applying an organic mulch will also help maintain moisture and suppress weeds.

So, don't throw away that pineapple top! While there is certainly an investment in time, growing your own fresh pineapples is a worthwhile effort!

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For more information on growing all types of backyard fruit, please contact our Master Gardeners on the Plant Lifeline at 941.764.4340 from 1:00pm-4:00pm Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Our office is located at 25550 Harbor View Road, Suite 3, in Port Charlotte. Our Plant Clinics are available across the county:

- **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.
- **South Gulf Cove Learning Garden** 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of month 9:00am-12:00pm.

Monthly Plant Clinics are Saturdays 9:00am-12:00pm at the following locations:

- **Peachland Promenades Publix** 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of month.
- **Home Depot Murdock & Home Depot Punta Gorda** 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of month.
- **Lowe's Garden Center Murdock** 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday of month.

Ralph Mitchell is the County Extension Director/Horticulture Agent for the Charlotte County Cooperative Extension Service. You may contact him by email ([Ralph.Mitchell@charlottefl.com](mailto:Ralph.Mitchell@charlottefl.com)). You may also contact a volunteer Master Gardener 1:00pm-4:00pm Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 941.764.4340 or by email ([Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com](mailto:Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com)).

For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Steele, at 941.764.4340. 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.

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*Resource:*

*Crane, J.H. (2005) Pineapple Growing in the Florida Home Landscape. UF/IFAS Extension Service.*