

# GARDENIA: THE FLOWER WITH THE FRAGRANCE OF VANILLA, JASMINE & NUTMEG

For those who have a gardenia in their landscape, you have been enjoying the elegant fragrance produced by the waxy-white flowers for the past month or so. In addition to the potent flowers, the glossy green foliage is an added asset to this favorite Florida plant. Named after botanist Dr. Alexander Garden by British naturalist John Ellis in 1761, the gardenia, *Gardenia augusta*, is a great woody plant for use as a specimen, hedge, or border.

Grown for centuries in China, gardenias were brought to Europe and Colonial North America and became an instant hit. In the 1920's and 30's, gardenias were popular as corsages and in cut flower arrangements. Today, gardenias are grown mainly as an ornamental with special emphasis on the fragrance. Key to success with gardenias is the proper site and cultivar selec-

tion. While gardenias do best in acid soil with a pH of 5.0 to 6.5, unfortunately most of our residential fill soils are very alkaline and this may prove challenging. Acid-loving plants such as gardenias will experience nutrient deficiencies if planted in highly alkaline soils. A planting bed as a whole could be amended with peat moss or compost to add organic matter and increase the acid condition of the soil. However, this practice will not be very practical in most landscapes. If your soil is very alkaline (as documented by a soil test) you might even consider container culture for gardenias. Plant your gardenia in a full sun to light shade site away from foundations, walkways and other concrete structures that may leach alkaline conditions. While most gardeners like to have gardenias close to a windows or walkways so that their fragrance can be best appreciated, keep in mind that gardenias can grow

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up to six-feet tall. They can be pruned to keep in bounds making sure to complete this task just after they flower. Don't prune too late in the growing season as this will result in you actually cutting off next years buds.

For best results in our area, select a gardenia cultivar that is grafted on rootstock from *Gardenia thunbergia*. Gardenias grafted on this rootstock will be resistant to nematodes in our region of Florida. There are many cultivars of *Gardenia augusta* that can be found in local garden centers. Cultivars vary somewhat in flower shape and size as well as blooming time. Some types available include 'Miami Supreme', 'First Love', 'Coral Gables', 'Mystery', and 'Belmont'.

*For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Turner, at 764.4351 or email [Allison.Turner@CharlotteFL.com](mailto:Allison.Turner@CharlotteFL.com). Allison can help educate you about the FYN Program so you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.*

*contact a  
**MASTER GARDENER**  
on the Plant Lifeline from 1:00pm-  
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*You can also visit them at  
one of our many **Plant Clinics**  
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Careful fertilizer applications will help your gardenia grow and flower successfully. Two to three applications of a granular, acid-loving plant fertilizer with a slow-release nitrogen and potassium component is ideal. Apply this fertilizer as per label directions concerning what time of year and amounts. Generally, an application in February and one in October in our area is fine. Micronutrients are essential for good growth and warding off yellowing leaves. Supplemental applications of foliar nutrient sprays containing iron can be helpful. Be careful as foliar nutrient sprays will stain concrete. While yellow leaves can be a sign of nutrient deficiencies, they can also result from lack of light, poor drainage or disease. Also, even "evergreens" such as gardenias will shed the oldest leaves in the fall and winter - this is perfectly normal and expected.

Every landscape should have at least one gardenia. I have one and have enjoyed that seasonal fragrance of vanilla, jasmine and nutmeg for the past five years!

#### Resources:

- Bradshaw, J. & Brown, S.P. (2009) *Growing Gardenias in Florida*. UF/IFAS Extension Service.

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