

**UF** IFAS Extension  
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**SOLUTIONS**

**UF** IFAS Extension  
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA



**April 2026**

## What's Inside

Native Azaleas	Page 1
Leopard Plant	Page 2
Three "Sisters of Satan"	Page 3
Easter Lilies & Cats	Page 5
More Information	Page 6

### SRC Master Gardener Plant Sale

**April 18**

**9:00 am, until sold out**

**Cash or Checks Only**

SRC Extension Building  
6263 Dogwood Dr.  
Milton, FL

### April Lecture

20 Easy to Grow Wildflowers  
April 21, 10:00 am

SRC Extension Building  
6263 Dogwood Dr.  
Milton, FL



## Native Azaleas

Native azaleas bloom around the same time as other azaleas, in the early spring. While it's open shape would not be a good choice as a foundation plant, it shines in a natural woodland setting. Because it goes unnoticed for much of the year it is quite a surprise when the entire shrub comes to life in a burst of amazing color.

The Florida flame azalea (*R. austrinum*) pictured above is a native azalea. Drought-tolerant native azaleas produce flowers that may range in color from white or pale yellow to orange-red flowers. They will grow up to 8 or 10 feet tall and have a loose growth habit.

Look for this plant at your local plant nurseries, but know that it is harder to find than other azaleas.



**For more information contact: UF/IFAS Extension Santa Rosa County**  
Josh Criss via email at [joshua.criss@ufl.edu](mailto:joshua.criss@ufl.edu) ▪ (850) 623-3868

**General Information**

Scientific name: *Rhododendron austrinum*

Common name: Florida Flame Azalea

USDA hardiness zones: 6B through 9

Planting time: year round

Uses: On it's own as a highlight, in mass plantings, in containers or trained as a standard. It also attracts hummingbirds.

**Description**

Height: 6 to 10 feet

Spread: 4 to 8 feet

Plant habit: vase shape; upright

Photo credit: Jennifer Slycord

Resources:

[-https://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/trees-and-shrubs/shrubs/azaleas/](https://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/trees-and-shrubs/shrubs/azaleas/)

-*Rhododendron austrinum*, by Edward F. Gilman



*Farfugium japonicum*

## Leopard Plant

Cheryl Swanson, SRCMGV

In the last few years Leopard plant (*Farfugium japonicum*) has become popular in North Florida for good reason. While Florida is known as the sunshine state, many of us have shade gardens that are challenging when trying to find the right plant for the right place. Leopard plant grows best in shade or filtered light. Its leaves can burn in direct sunlight. It is an evergreen with glossy round leaves that resemble lily pads but whose shape suggests its other popular name, tractor seat plant. What is particularly attractive about leopard plant is that it is a fall bloomer, boasting bright yellow daisy-like flowers. It is a member of Asteraceae, the sunflower family, and attracts bees and butterflies when other flowering plants begin to lose their blooms.

Indeed, bees visit my plant into the beginning of cold weather, and the seeds from pollination can be collected for planting.



Photo Credit: Cheryl Swanson



Photo: Cheryl Swanson

*Farfugium japonicum* is native to Japan and grows in hardiness zones 7 to 10. During one particularly cold winter I didn't cover the plant, and while the leaves died, it grew back fully in spring. The next winter it survived 8 inches of snow with a frost blanket and had no leaf die-back. The plant grows best in moist, rich soil and will wilt if it gets too dry. It is not particular about pH and grows in a wide range of soil types. It is insect resistant although sometimes susceptible to slugs or snails. The plant reaches an average height of 2 feet and grows in clumps that can be divided and shared with friends.



'Aureomaculata'  
leopard plant  
Photo Credit: WSU Clark  
County Extension

If leopards have spots, where are the spots? The plant that local greenhouses most frequently carry has solid green leaves. However, there are several cultivars, and one, 'Aureomaculata,' has leaves with yellow spots, making this variety more fitting to its common name. This plant is a bit shorter in height at about 20 inches and grows in zones 7-12. One gardener with the Clemson University Garden Extension Service notes that some people are attracted to this cultivar while others think it looks like bleach was poured on the leaves!

The largest of the *Farfugium* cultivars is 'Giganteum', a more dramatic plant, which can grow 3-4 feet tall and whose leaves can measure 15 inches across. Two other interesting cultivars are 'Bad Hair Day' and 'Crispatum,' which have fluffy curved edges and are commonly known as parsley ligularia. All of these varieties can be grown in North Florida's hardiness zones, but you may have to search for them on-line.

Leopard plant has many uses. It can be planted as a border in the back of the garden or as a groundcover in front of shrubs. 'Giganteum' can stand alone as a container plant in a shady spot on the patio. In my garden I plan to add hostas and mahonia as companions to leopard plant.

My leopard plant doesn't have spots, but I am more than happy to have it as part of my landscape. With several large trees shading a portion of the yard, *Farfugium japonicum* has been a welcome addition. Its hardiness along with its ability to attract pollinators in the fall has been an added bonus.

#### References:

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/farfugium-japonicum/>

<https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/leopard-plant/>

<https://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/charlotteco/2021/08/13/have-you-spotted-the-leopard-plant/>

## The Three "Sisters of Satan"

Mark Howard SRCMGV intern

Most people in Northwest Florida who have spent any time in the woods cleaning a fence row, have encountered a poisonous plant. In some cases it was either poison ivy, Oak or Sumac. Contact with any of the three can produce a very irritating rash because all of these plants contain urushiol. Either direct or indirect contact will trigger the allergic reaction. Smoke from burning the plants can cause lung irritation.

**Poison Ivy** grows throughout Northwest Florida. It can be a woody shrub up to 6 feet tall or a vine up to 150 feet long. All parts of poison ivy contain urushiol all year long. The leaves always consist of three leaflets. The leaflets can be 2-6 inches long and may be toothed or have smooth edges. Leaves will emerge with a shiny reddish tinge in the spring and turn a dull green as they age. They turn red or purple in the fall. The flowers and fruit are always in clusters on slender stems. The fruit is berry like and are round and grooved with a white waxy coating.



Poison Ivy  
photo credit: James Whitney unsplash



Poison Oak  
photo credit: Larry Larhnak UF/IFAS

**Poison Oak** is a low growing upright shrub that is about 3 feet tall. It is usually found in dry sunny locations and cannot tolerate heavy shade. Like poison ivy a single poison oak leaf consists of three leaflets. The distinguishing feature of poison oak is its lobed leaves, giving the appearance of an oak leaf. The leaves are generally 6 inch-es long. The leaf stem and leaflets have a coating of fine hairs. Leaflets have a reddish tint in the spring and turn green before turning yellow and red in the fall. Like poison ivy the flowers and fruit are in clusters. The small flowers are white and the ripe fruit is round, light tan and waxy.

**Poison Sumac** is more allergenic than poison ivy or oak. It is a deciduous woody shrub or small tree. It grows 5-20 feet tall and has a sparse open form. It is almost always found in swamps and other wet areas, pine woods and shady hardwood forests. Its leaves consist of 7-13 leaflets arranged in pairs with a single leaflet at the end. Its most distinctive features are reddish stems and peti-oles. Leaflets are elongated, oval and have smooth margins. They are 2-4 inches long and 1-2 inches wide. They are smooth and have a velvety texture. In early spring the leaves emerge bright orange. Later during the year, they become dark green and glossy. In the fall they turn a red-orange or russet shade. The flowers are small and yellowish green in color. The fruit is ivory-white to gray resembling those of poison ivy and oak.



Poison Sumac leaf photo credit: Larry KorhnakUF/IFAS  
Poison Sumac shrub photo credit: Cook

Remember to look out for these three sisters of Satan when you are in the woods or around any brushy area. If you do encounter them wash the affected area with warm soapy water and apply hydrocortisone cream. Wash any clothes that come in contact, separately from other laundry.

Hopefully you can avoid these three and never have to put up with the aggravating rash. Just remember to keep your eyes on what you are encountering when you are in the woods. Interaction with these plants is largely preventable. Children should be taught to recognize these plants, particularly poison ivy, as it is the most common. The rash from these plants last 2-5 weeks, is not contagious and will not spread. I hope this information is helpful in keeping you from coming in contact with any of these 3 plants.

## Easter Lilies and CATS

The Easter lily (*Lilium longiflorum*) is a popular Spring flower. However it is lethally toxic to cats (but not to dogs, people, or livestock.). Eating small amounts of any part of the plant, even licking pollen, can cause symptoms such as vomiting, lethargy, loss of appetite, and dehydration. If left untreated, kidney failure can happen in a matter of days and bring on more severe reactions including seizures. If you expect your cat has ingested any part of an Easter lily, you should seek veterinary care immediately.

Reference:

<https://www.dakinhumane.org/blog-full/easter-lilies-pose-toxic-threat-to-pets>

### Identifying Poisonous Lilies

Some lilies can be extremely dangerous to cats—even just exposure to their pollen can lead to acute kidney injury or toxicosis. Learn which lilies pose the most risk for your feline friend:

Exposure to these lilies can lead to acute kidney injury. The most common clinical signs to watch out for include vomiting, anorexia, and depression.



Exposure to these flowers does not result in acute kidney injury but can still make your pet sick.

**Call your veterinarian or the ASPCA® Animal Poison Control Center if your cat has any exposure to a lily. It is imperative that an accurate identification is made to determine toxicity risk and treatment needed, so take pictures of the flowers, stem, and leaves to help experts identify the plant.**

For more information, visit [aspc.org/apcc](https://www.aspc.org/apcc)



**ASPCA** | (888) 426-4435  
 Animal Poison Control Center

## Where can I find more information?

The UF/IFAS Extension Solutions for Your Life website and Gardening Solutions website offer online material, including pre-recorded webinars and videos, that can be accessed at your convenience.

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/lawn-and-garden/>

<https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/>

In addition, we have our Master Gardener webinar page and our Gardening in the Panhandle web archives full of educational content.

<https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/mastergardener/volunteers/education/webinars.html>

<http://nwdistrict.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/>

For a listing of local offices visit

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/find-your-local-office/>

Follow us on Facebook for updates

<https://www.facebook.com/SRCEExtension/>

<https://www.facebook.com/GardeningInThePanhandle/>

The Santa Rosa County residential horticulture agent, Josh Criss can be reached at 850-623-3868. [joshua.criss@ufl.edu](mailto:joshua.criss@ufl.edu)



Come see us at the  
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