



UNIVERSITY OF
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IFAS EXTENSION

Friday's Feature

By

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Firebush is a hot addition to any landscape

Firebush—the name says it all. This tropical perennial is known for two attributes. First, its clusters of reddish-orange flowers add a blaze of color to landscapes in late summer. And second, it is one of the few plants that blooms and thrives in the midst of our August heat along the Gulf Coast.

The firebush, known botanically as *Hamelia patens*, is a heat and sun loving plant. Also known as the hummingbird bush and scarlet bush, it is native to central and south Florida. It is a member of the Rubiaceae family. Other notable members of this family include *Ixora*, *Gardenia* and *Penta*.

Firebush is a densely branched perennial that will get about three to four feet tall in the Florida Panhandle. In south Florida, this plant can reach heights of up to 15 feet. The pointed leaves are handsome with their pinkish veins and red petioles. It is a tender perennial along our Gulf Coast, freezing back in the winter and resprouting each spring.

Blooming begins in late summer when the plant explodes with terminal clusters of scarlet to orange colored flowers. The individual flowers are tubular and about one inch long. The small tubular flowers are a favorite of butterflies and hummingbirds and are regarded as a premier butterfly nectar plant. Flowers are followed by small, purplish berries that are eaten by a number of birds and other small animals.



Firebush grows in a wide range of soil types as long as it drains well. Once established, it is drought tolerant and has moderate salt tolerance. Full sun or partially shaded locations are preferable to shady ones which will result in reduced blooming and leggy growth. This shrub requires little maintenance. It naturally has a somewhat rounded form but some pruning will keep it bushy and in scale.

Firebush is the right plant for the back of a border, as an accent plant or in a large container. This is a must have for the butterfly and hummingbird garden.

To be successful in keeping hummingbirds around your house, you must garden for them. The ideal flower color is red, orange, or pink. Hummingbirds are not born with an attraction to certain colors but learn by trial and error which flowers give the best results. Because most nectar-bearing flowers within the range of the ruby-throat are red and orange, they quickly come to favor those colors.

Plant at least three firebush for a nice show. Space plants approximately two to three feet apart in fertile, well-drained soil in the full, scorching sun. Apply a good layer of mulch after planting. Feed occasionally while growing with a slow-release, balanced fertilizer. For a bushier plant, prune lightly during the long growing season. In the winter, an added layer of mulch just may help you have a spring return.

You can propagate firebush by seed, cuttings or air layering. Plants will grow rapidly and cuttings will flower when only a few months old.



The tubular flowers of Firebush make it a favorite of hummingbirds

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others. For additional information about all of the county extension services and other articles of interest go to: <http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/extension>