



Welcome to the October installment of "The Potting Bench"! As autumn arrives in North Florida, many traditional garden flowers begin to fade, but the **Firebush** (*Hamelia patens*), also known as **Scarletbush** or **Firecracker Shrub**, is just reaching its fiery peak. Native to Florida, this invincible perennial produces mass clusters of vibrant, tubular orange-red blossoms from late spring continuously until the first winter frost. If you want to transform your suburban yard into a buzzing autumn sanctuary for hummingbirds, Gulf Fritillary butterflies, zebra longwings, and berry-loving songbirds, Firebush is an absolute essential.

Continued

Sourcing Your Firebush & Top Cultivars:

True native Firebush features fuzzy, hairy leaves and deep reddish-orange tubular flowers. Be mindful when shopping, as non-native varieties (*Hamelia patens* var. *glabra*), often sold under the name "Dwarf Firebush," feature smooth leaves and lighter, yellow-orange blooms.

Compact & Variegated Selections:

Standard native Firebush grows rapidly into a large shrub reaching 8 to 12 feet tall (or up to 15 feet if given support). For smaller suburban flower beds,

look for '**Firefly**', a compact cultivar with leaves and flowers half the normal size that stays neatly between 3 and 5 feet tall. For striking foliage contrast, seek out '**Lime Sizzler**'™, which showcases bold chartreuse-and-green variegated foliage alongside bright blooms.

Transplanting and Placement

Sunlight is Key:

To enjoy the maximum number of flowers and dense growth, plant Firebush in full sun where it receives 8 to 10+ hours of direct light daily. While it tolerates



Potting Bench



partial shade, shaded plants grow noticeably leggy and set far fewer blooms.

Soil Tolerance:

Firebush is remarkably adaptable and thrives in any well-drained soil across a wide pH range.

Transplanting Care:

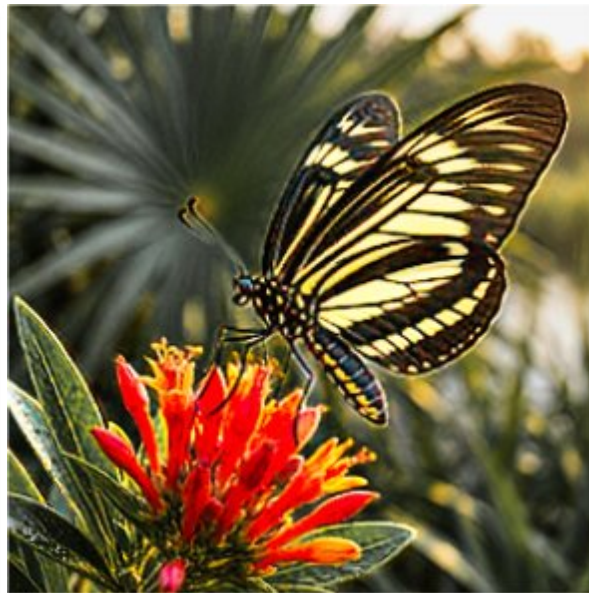
Late spring or summer is the ideal time to install

8–9 (which cover North Florida), cold winter freezes will kill the soft-stemmed top foliage back to the ground. Don't worry: Firebush acts as a "root-hardy perennial" in our region, sprouting back vigorously every spring to push 5 to 9 feet of fresh growth in a single season.

Pruning Schedule: Leave the frost-damaged foliage alone during the winter to protect the crown. In late

winter or early spring (after the last freeze), cut the entire plant back hard to about 6 inches above ground level. Avoid frequent or severe shearing during the summer blooming season, as over-pruning will reduce flower production.

Ultra-Low Maintenance: Once established, Firebush is exceptionally



potted plants in USDA Zones 8–11. Keep the newly transplanted shrub well-watered until its root system becomes fully established.

heat- and drought-tolerant, needing water only during severe dry spells. It requires no fertilizer to grow into a thriving, lush shrub and is virtually free of serious disease or insect pests.

Ongoing Maintenance & Cut-Back

North Florida Root-Hardiness: In USDA Zones

- STORY, PHOTOS: EDITOR

