

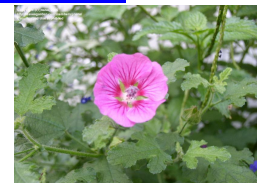
This month's jewels are the hibiscus and their relatives, the **malvaceae**, or mallow family. Everyone in Florida is familiar with hibiscus, including some colorful hybrids not often seen in other parts of the country. Hibiscus 'Snow Queen', the so-called "exotic tropical hybrids", *schizopetalus*,



tiliaceus and *acetosella* (the cranberry hibiscus) have all been in our raffles more than once. There have been a few raffle plants from the genus *Malva* as well, but the malvaceae includes more than just Hibiscus and *Malva*. Cotton (*Gossypium* sp.) and okra are mallows, and according to some sources, so is the baobab tree!



Some of the lesser-known, but interesting members of the mallow family which do very well in Florida are: [*Abelmoschus manihot*](#), a close relative of okra with edible leaves, [*Abutilon megapotamicum*](#), a flowering maple with bi-colored pendant flowers, [*Alyogyne huegelii*](#), the blue hibiscus, and [*Anisodonteia capensis*](#) and its hybrids.



The family malvaceae includes many useful and edible species. Hibiscus *tiliaceus*, often found in its variegated form

in Florida, is a 40 foot tall tree with flowers similar to okra flowers. They start out yellow, then turn red before they fall. In its native Asia, all parts of the tree are used. The young leaves are eaten, and in Hawaii, the light-weight trunk is used to make outrigger canoes. Known as the mahoe in Florida, it is tolerant of drought, wet soil, and salt.



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The seed pod of okra is the part we eat, but its relative *Abelmoschus manihot* has edible leaves. Both thrive in our hot, humid climate. Of course, so does cotton, which has probably the most useful fibers in the plant kingdom, also from the seed pod. An annual relative of the cranberry hibiscus, [*Hibiscus sabdariffa*](#), has an edible, fleshy calyx (the sort of cup that encloses the developing flower). Called Jamaican sorrel, roselle, or Florida cranberry, it produces a drink similar in taste to cranberry juice, very popular in Mexico and Africa.



Over the past year I've been cross-pollinating many of my exotic tropical hibiscus. Some of the seed pods have developed, and I'm anxious to see what they produce. If anything interesting comes of them, I'll be sure to put some in the raffle, along with some of the other malvaceae listed above. I hope to see our members experimenting with these and others in the coming years. Be sure to let me know of any new discoveries!

Notice

Several months ago I wrote a column on peanut grass, or perennial peanut, as a groundcover. I found a source for it that will only deliver very large quantities. Anyone interested in splitting a shipment please contact me soon. Thank you, Jim