



Lovegrass

By Joy Derksen, Master Gardener 2004

Valentine's Day is coming up next month, so what could be more appropriate to talk about than lovegrass, the common name for two native ornamental grasses: Elliot's lovegrass (*Eragrostis elliottii*) and purple lovegrass (*Eragrostis spectabilis*).

Species of lovegrasses live on most of the continents. The name lovegrass is a direct translation of the Greek scientific word *Eragrostis*, meaning eros = love and agrostis = grass.

These Florida grasses are native bunch grasses that form tight, neat clumps. They spread slowly by underground rhizomes and seeds. Both grasses have fine textured leaf blades. Elliott's is a silvery-blue green and purple lovegrass foliage is green with a slight reddish tip. Lovegrasses bloom in late summer and fall. Elliott's lovegrass blooms in white, gray, and tan.

Purple lovegrass, not surprisingly, has flowers of purplish red cast. The University of Florida describes the grasses: "the delicate wispy blooms resemble a tinted mist above the foliage."

These grasses are smaller than Fakahatchee grass or Muhly grass—reaching 2 ½ feet when in full bloom. Love grasses work well as ground cover, in mass plantings, in borders, and along pathways. Birds and butterflies are attracted to the tiny flowers and the seeds.

Lovegrass likes to live in almost all Florida soils (except in clay), but it loves sandy soil best. It should be planted in full sun or light shade. Once established, it is very drought tolerant and won't need supplemental irrigation or fertilization.

It doesn't mind occasional salt spray and it can also survive short periods of flooding! Lovegrasses will survive a hard freeze, reappearing from the rhizomes in spring. If you want to get after weeds or just want to neaten up the beds, you can cut lovegrass back to just a few inches above the ground after it finishes blooming.

A grass that likes Florida sunshine and soil; doesn't need mowing, water, or fertilizer; attracts birds and butterflies; and looks so lovely when floweringwhat's not to love!



Dear Master Gardener:

I am watching a Tarzan film (the recent one with Morgan Freeman, etc.) and am curious as to what type of vine Tarzan is swinging from around the jungle. My husband says "Liana" but I am not familiar with this. If he's correct, is it tropical, sub-tropical, or could we grow it in our area? I've no plans to emulate Tarzan, just wondering what plant could make such a tough vine!

Thanks in advance,
S. W., Parrish

Dear SW,

Thank you for contacting the Manatee County Extension Master Gardeners.

I must confess my total ignorance on the subject, however, your question has prompted research that taught me a lot and hopefully will answer your inquiry.

"Liana" is broadly correct. Liana isn't a taxonomic group but a description of the way a plant grows, like "shrub" or "tree". Lianas are woody vines that grow very long, some more than 3,000 feet. Found mostly in tropical rainforests, there are many plant families of lianas across the tropical regions of Africa, Asia, South and Central America, and Mexico. Examples of temperate zone lianas include *Clematis* and *Vitis* species (wild grape vine.)

By climbing up into and often covering the canopy of trees, lianas create a passageway for arboreal animals like lemurs, monkeys, and sloths, which is probably where Tarzan learned this handy mode of transportation in a rainforest where travel on the ground would be problematic.

Regards,
Karen Holleran, Master Gardener

Master Gardener Karen Holleran answers your email questions and looks at photos for identification of problems at ManateeMG@gmail.com. Or visit our Plant Diagnostic Clinic Monday through Friday (closed Wednesdays) from 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. at 1303 17th St. W., Palmetto, FL. Or call us with questions at 941-722-4524 and ask for a Master Gardener.

What's This? Pa-Rum-Pum-Pum Palm!

By Rob Hinz, Master Gardener 2016

The "Little Drummer Boy" lyric is a hint to naming this palm, known as the Christmas palm (formerly *Veitchia merrillii*, now *Adonidia merrillii*). Other common names include Manila palm (native of the Philippines) or dwarf royal palm since it resembles a miniature version of a royal palm (*Royestonia regia*.) It is named for the clusters of red fruit that adorn in early winter, giving it a festive holiday feeling.

The palm can be used at an entryway, as a central anchor for a small garden, or in patio or pool containers. Quick growing, it reaches ten feet then slows, eventually attaining a height of twenty feet or more. The canopy spread is five or six feet. Pinnately compound leaves (feather-like) emerge from a prominent green crown shaft atop a 6-inch diameter trunk. This palm is solitary or planted in clusters of three to four with proper spacing to reduce root competition.

Advantages of the Christmas palm are size, beauty, a small planting area, and the flare it can give a landscape. Full sun is best, but it tolerates partial shade. It is drought tolerant, moderately salt-spray tolerant, and self-cleaning (pruning is unnecessary). Florida's nutrient-poor soils do not hinder its growth, but a slow-release palm fertilizer is suggested. Being cold intolerant is a disadvantage; prolonged cold (30 degrees F) or frost can kill the palm. Zone 10b is a "hardiness zone" where the palm does best. The Christmas palm may suffer from Boron deficiency and can be susceptible to lethal yellowing and Ganoderma butt rot. If this tree fits your landscape, it can "provide you with red-hot cool season color!"



Photo: Rob Hinz, Master Gardener

Chasing Away Mosquitoes with Beautyberry?

Text and Photo by Norma Kisida, Master Gardener 2012



DEET (or N,N-diethyl-m-toluamide) has been the gold standard for mosquito control since it was registered for use by the public in the U. S. in 1957. However, some people are opposed to using this chemical repellent for a variety of reasons; fear of toxicity, sensitivity, or smell. Could controlling those pesky mosquitoes which spread serious disease and cause endless misery result in a trip to the garden instead of the pharmacy aisle in the future?

Many folk remedies using native plants have been around for centuries, but most have not been scientifically proven. There is a folk remedy using one of our common native plants; however, that is being researched and looks promising for preventing mosquito bites.

American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) is a shrub found throughout the southeastern United States. Growing in hammocks and pineland woods, it has become popular in home landscapes, especially with gardeners who like to use native plants. In the spring, it has soft lavender-pink blossoms and magenta berries in the mid-summer to fall.

Beautyberry was used by several Native American tribes medicinally both internally and externally for such conditions as malarial fevers, rheumatism, dysentery, and skin conditions. The crushed leaves of beautyberry, which have a very pungent odor, have traditionally been used to ward off mosquitos and other pests such as deerflies and horseflies. There is a

centuries-old practice of placing beautyberry leaves under the harnesses of mules and horses to deter biting insects.

Now, scientists at the United States Department of Agriculture-Agriculture Research Service (USDA-ARS), housed at the National Center for Natural Products Research at the University of Mississippi, have isolated three naturally occurring chemicals in beautyberry leaves that are known to repel mosquitos. These chemicals (callicarpenal, intermedeol, and spathulenol) all repel the mosquitoes known to transmit yellow fever and malaria. Mosquitos that carry West Nile virus were not tested.

A patent has been filed to use one of the ingredients, callicarpenal, as an arthropod (insect) repellent. Unfortunately, to bring a product to market it must be registered with the EPA, rigorously tested for safety, dosage, and efficacy, and a cost-effective production method must be found. In the meantime, using the leaves of beautyberry for mosquito or other insect control is not a University of Florida recommendation as some people have allergies or sensitivities and may have an adverse reaction.

Other ethnobotanical uses of beautyberry by Native Americans include using it in ceremonies, producing dye and fish poison, and making rafters and support for bean vines. The berries are edible and are used in jams and jellies.

Ornamental Grass Care

By John Dawson, Master Gardener 2007



Creeping Rhizome



Clumping Roots



Pruning



Pruned

Ornamental grasses are easy to maintain once established. Provided they are given adequate light, good drainage, and proper water, they pretty much take care of themselves. Bugs seldom bother them and they really do not require much fertilizer. There are two types of ornamental grasses: “creeping” and “clumping.”

The **creeping** grasses can be divided into categories “long rhizomes” and “short rhizomes.” The long rhizomes can grow and spread rapidly from the initial planting spot; whereas, the short rhizome grasses grow more slowly and do not spread as far. Grasses with rhizomes can become invasive, but are kept in check if corralled with a barrier.

The **clumping** grasses have roots and spread slowly in diameter. Most ornamental grasses grow in an arching fashion to form a wide mound and may produce seed stalks which give it the attraction most people desire. Grasses can also be deciduous or evergreen. Most problems with ornamental grasses occur when the wrong plant is put in the wrong place. Before you buy/plant you should do some homework. When selecting a plant, it is important to know if it will grow in your USDA planting zone, how tall it will get and how wide will it spread, and if it will produce large amounts of wind-blown seeds. Without proper planning for space and growth patterns, ornamentals can cover over and displace nearby plants or mash together. Fortunately, most grasses tolerate transplanting. If they get too big or out of control, you can simply divide them or dig them up to relocate. Large grass clumps can be divided using a sharp flat edged shovel.

Large grasses (>2 ft.) such as pampas, full-size Fakahatchee and zebra grasses should be planted at least 5 to 6 feet apart and away from a house/structure, sidewalk, or driveway. Medium grasses (<2ft.) such as dwarf Fakahatchee, muhly, or fountain grass should be planted at least three feet apart and that far away from such structures, unless you are using the grass to hide something. Smaller grasses (<1ft.) should be kept at least one foot from structures or edging.

Grasses should be mulched to conserve moisture and deter weed growth. Weeds may pop up in and amongst your ornamentals as the leaves, especially the tall ones, act as a net, catching wind-blown seeds. You will want to pull these young weeds before they get too entangled. Grasses can be fertilized during their growth periods using a granular fertilizer formulated for grasses. Established plants do not need much fertilizer and if given too much may grow too quickly, become spindly, and flop over. If this occurs, cut back the floppiness mid-way and reduce further fertilization.

Pruning of ornamental grasses should be done just prior to new emerging growth in spring for deciduous grasses; in our area (February and March). Dead portions of grass (thatch) can be removed at any time. This is especially true with colored grasses such as red fountain grass, where the thatch detracts from the overall presentation. Grasses should be cut at least two inches above emerging growth. The best method for cutting large clumps is to tie off the top, gathering it with string or a bungee cord then cut it off just below with clippers, shears, serrated knife, hedge trimmers or brush cutters. Evergreen grasses can be trimmed back to promote new growth or simply remove the top portions after flowering stalks brown out and become unsightly.

For more information on care and selection of ornamental grasses, go to “Considerations for Selection and Use of Ornamental Grasses” <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep233>.



Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake



Dusky Pygmy Rattlesnake



Florida Cottonmouth



Eastern Coral Snake

SNAKE ENCOUNTERS

HOW FAST SHOULD I RUN?

By Norma Kisida, Master Gardener 2012

The purpose of this article is to acquaint you with references for identifying snakes, make you aware of the many beneficial aspects of snakes, and allay some of your fears and instincts to destroy any snakes encountered.

Snakes play an important role in controlling rodent populations which spread many diseases. Some non-venomous snakes even eat venomous snakes. Snakes are also important in our environment as a food source for many other animals.

Although any snake will bite if provoked, most snakes you will encounter are non-venomous. Most bites occur during human interaction with the snake such as handling, harassing, or trying to kill, capture, or relocate the snake.

In all the U.S., only five to six people die each year from venomous bites while humans kill thousands of snakes each year. Of the 46-native species that call Florida home, six are venomous and only four of those occur in Manatee County. These include the eastern coral snake (*Micrurus fulvius*), the Florida cottonmouth, also called the water moccasin (*Agkistrodon piscivorus*), the dusky pygmy rattlesnake (*Sistrurus miliarius*), and the eastern diamondback rattlesnake (*Crotalus adamanteus*).

These are all pit vipers except for the eastern coral snake. These venomous snakes reside in a variety of habitats, from dry woods to wet swamps. An excellent and inclusive publication by UF entitled “Dealing with Snakes in Florida's Residential Areas—Identifying Commonly Encountered Snakes” <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/uw258> has excellent photos and information about both non-venomous and venomous snakes of Florida. This article has links to other helpful publications about snakes.

Another source of information for both venomous and non-

venomous snake identification and information is published by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and may be found at

http://myfwc.com/media/1321792/Guide_to_venomous_snakes_in_FL.pdf and http://myfwc.com/media/1321795/Guide_to_nonvenomous_snakes.pdf

For Facebook users, there is a group site called “Snake Identification Public Group”

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/22137638452/>. You must apply to join and there are strict guidelines to keep comments educational and non-judgmental. If you can safely take a photo of the snake and upload it to the site, there are very knowledgeable people who monitor the site and respond promptly.

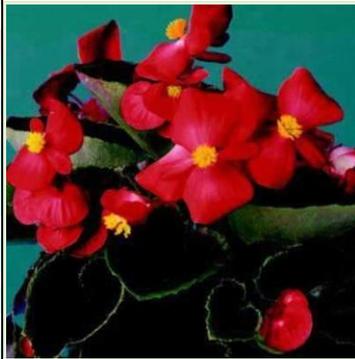
A fellow Master Gardener uploaded photos of a cottonmouth and diamondback rattlesnake for positive identification and received comments within two minutes. She was encouraged to submit her findings to a mapping site for reporting snakes encountered <https://www.herpmapper.org/submit>.

The group remarks usually include the common and scientific name as well as some information about the snake such as whether it is harmless or venomous. Note: This site is not associated with the University of Florida and anyone in the group may comment, but guessing is not allowed, and the site is monitored by administrators.

Learning to identify snakes and respect them is important in learning to live with them as their habitat shrinks and they show up in our yards. An excellent UF publication is “Dealing with Snakes in Florida's Residential Areas—Preventing Encounters” <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/uw260>.

Splendid Color

Visit the Extension Master Gardeners at the Manatee County Fair (January 11-21, 2017) to pick up one of these beauties free!



Begonia (*Begonia spp.*) Favored for multicolored leaves and lovely flowers, this annual grows well in pots, beds, and hanging baskets. Keep soil moist but not soggy and feed lightly. Depending on the species, they do well in partial shade to full sun. Plant in late February in slightly acidic soil.



Angelonia (*Angelonia angustifolia*), also known as summer snapdragons or angel plants, can live in summer and winter here. When exposed to Florida summers, it prefers to be in partial shade. In the winter, it can tolerate full sun. It likes fertile, moist soil rich in organic material. Either amend our sandy soils or grow angelonia in a pot. Once established, it only needs to be watered weekly, although potted plants may need more.



Dianthus (*Dianthus spp.*) This low-growing herbaceous annual sports an enormous quantity of fringed flowers. It comes in a variety of colors including pink, white, lavender, purple, salmon, and red. Plant in partial shade to partial sun in fall, winter, and spring.



Pentas (*Pentas lanceolata*) is an evergreen perennial sporting abundant clusters of brightly colored flowers in red, white, lavender, or pink. It stays in constant bloom in warm weather and is one of the best garden plants for attracting butterflies and hummingbirds. It is moderately drought tolerant. Fertilize regularly during the growing season. Pentas grow in sun and shade, but blooms best in full sun.



Free Help for a Beautiful, Low Maintenance Landscape: The Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Assistance Program

By Susan Griffith, Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program Coordinator

Applying just a few principles from the scientifically-based Florida-Friendly Landscaping Assistance Program (LAP) will help you save money, enhance your landscape, reduce maintenance, and increase your enjoyment of your outdoor spaces.

The LAP brings you together with experienced Master Gardener volunteers and me, the Florida-Friendly Landscaping Coordinator. We provide advice on plant choices, irrigation, fertilization, pest control, mulching, control of storm water runoff, attracting wildlife, protecting the waterfront, and recycling of yard waste.

Here's how it works:

First, get a soil sample tested at our Extension Service office (1303 17th St. W, Palmetto, FL 34221.) The fee is only \$3 for pH. It costs \$5 if you'd like to include soluble salts; salts are important if you're on a well or near the coast.

How to take these samples? Dig down 6" - 8" in a proposed landscape bed and extract

a scoop of soil. Take scoops from approximately five spots in the area and combine them into one sample (only bring a 1-2 cup sample from the composite samples). If you want to test multiple areas of the yard, do the same for each location and individually identify the samples. Soil samples should be as dry as possible before testing. Bring in your sample two weeks prior to your consultation (reminder the Extension Master Gardeners' Plant Diagnostic Clinic is closed on Wednesdays.).

Once you have soil test results, call me at (941) 722-4524 Ext. 1825, to schedule your LAP consultation. We will set a day and time convenient for you to come in and sit down with us for an hour and a half. It is useful to bring site plans, photos, ideas of plant preferences, a few technical details about your irrigation system, and any other pertinent details about your yard.

We look forward to meeting you and creating a Florida-friendly yard at your home!

January

CALENDAR OF EVENTS



Photo Credit: Frankenschulz, <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/all/acer-rubrum/>

Date	Time	Event				
1 st Saturday	10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.	Ask a Master Gardener – Island Library – 5701 Marina Drive, Holmes Beach. Visit the Extension Master Gardener information table and get answers to your gardening questions.				
2 nd & 4 th Saturday	10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.	Ask a Master Gardener – Rocky Bluff Library – 6750 US Highway 301 N., Ellenton. Visit the Extension Master Gardener information table and get answers to your gardening questions.				
2 nd Saturday	10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.	Ask a Master Gardener – South Manatee Library – 6081 26 th Street West, Bradenton. Visit the Extension Master Gardener information table and get answers to your gardening questions.				
Saturday January 13	9:00-11:00 a.m.	Extension Master Gardener Plant ID Tour – Emerson Point Preserve - Stroll through Emerson Point Preserve to learn more about Florida’s native plants and inhabitants of a coastal habitat. Suitable for all ages. Tour begins in tower parking area at 5801 17 th Street West, Palmetto. Call the Extension Master Gardeners at (941) 722-4524 to register.				
Saturday January 13	9:00-11:00 a.m.	Extension Master Gardener Plant ID Tour - Riverview Pointe Preserve – DeSoto National Memorial – Stroll through Riverview Pointe Preserve to learn more about Florida’s native plants and inhabitants of a coastal habitat. Suitable for all ages. The hike begins in the parking area of the DeSoto National Memorial Park and enters into the Riverview Preserve at 8250 DeSoto Memorial Highway, Bradenton. To register call the Extension Master Gardeners at (941) 722-4524.				
Saturday January 13 Monday January 15 For Children Only Saturday January 20		<p>Come Join Us at the Fair! The Extension Master Gardeners are hosting mini-workshops during the County Fair! No registration is required. While enjoying the fair, stop by the Extension Master Gardener educational gardens/greenhouse to receive a free plant seedling (one per family) or attend one of our free mini educational workshops:</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Saturday January 13</p> <p>1:00-1:30 - Fruit Tree Ideas and General Care 2:00-2:30 - Growing Herbs in the Landscape 3:00-3:30 – Winter Vegetable Gardening</p> </td> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Monday January 15th</p> <p style="text-align: center;">FOR CHILDREN ONLY:</p> <p>1:00-1:30 – Worm Composting 3:00-3:30 – Butterfly Life Cycle</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;"> <p>Saturday January 20</p> <p>1:00-1:30 – Florida-Friendly Edible Landscaping 2:00-2:30 – Monarchs, Milkweed, and More 3:00-3:30 – Micro-Irrigation for Your Garden</p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p style="text-align: center;">Saturday January 13</p> <p>1:00-1:30 - Fruit Tree Ideas and General Care 2:00-2:30 - Growing Herbs in the Landscape 3:00-3:30 – Winter Vegetable Gardening</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Monday January 15th</p> <p style="text-align: center;">FOR CHILDREN ONLY:</p> <p>1:00-1:30 – Worm Composting 3:00-3:30 – Butterfly Life Cycle</p>	<p>Saturday January 20</p> <p>1:00-1:30 – Florida-Friendly Edible Landscaping 2:00-2:30 – Monarchs, Milkweed, and More 3:00-3:30 – Micro-Irrigation for Your Garden</p>	
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Saturday January 20	9:00-11:00 a.m.	Extension Master Gardener Plant ID Tour - Rye Preserve - 805 Rye Wilderness Trail, Parrish 34219. Meet at Rye Preserve on the east side of Rye Road and North of Manatee River. Drinking water and hiking sticks are recommended. There are places to enjoy a picnic lunch, if desired. Register by calling the Extension Master Gardener Plant Diagnostic Clinic (941) 722-4524.				
Sunday January 21	9:00-11:00 a.m.	Extension Master Gardener Plant ID Tour - Robinson Preserve – Stroll through the Robinson Preserve’s salt marshes to learn more about Florida’s native plants and inhabitants of a coastal habitat. Suitable for all ages. Tour begins in parking area by main entrance at 1704 99 th Street Northwest, Bradenton. To register call the Extension Master Gardeners at (941) 722-4524.				
Wednesday January 31	1:00-3:00 p.m. at Rocky Bluff Library	Ground Covers - Plants that Work - In this workshop, held at the Rocky Bluff Library, discusses how landscaping with low-growing ground cover plants has become a popular trend in landscape practices because these plants need little to no water. Learn noteworthy plants, site considerations, and management of these plants. This class satisfies the landscape educational class requirement for the Manatee County Outdoor Water Conservation Rebate. Register on-line at http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu or call Joann (941) 722-4524.				
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