

THE GARDEN BENCH



THE MANATEE COUNTY MASTER GARDENER E-NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2023 - VOLUME 22 - ISSUE 2

Green & Silver Buttonwood Trees

By Nancy Hammer, Master Gardener Volunteer

Buttonwood (*Conocarpus erectus*) is a Florida native which may reach heights of 30-45 feet with a 20- to 30-foot spread but is generally smaller. Suitable for Zones 10 and 11, it is typically multi-trunked and prefers full sun. Its name reflects its brownish button-like seeds. Buttonwood has a high tolerance to drought, wind, and aerosol salt. Salt is expelled via the leaf stalks.

This tree is tough as nails! In Florida coastal areas, twisted and gnarled multi-trunked buttonwoods can be found embedded in marshy areas with white mangroves, as well as in salty, wind-swept neighborhoods. In the past it was used in cabinetmaking and for charcoal for smoking meat and fish.

Silver buttonwood (*Conocarpus erectus* var. *sericeus*) has soft, dense hairs which impart an attractive silvery hue to the leaves. This popular buttonwood tends to be a little shorter – topping out at 15-20 feet.

The exception to the hardiness reputation applies to silver buttonwoods planted inland. Due to the dense hairs on their leaves which hold moisture, silver buttonwoods planted away from the coast are susceptible to unsightly mold on their leaves. Silver buttonwoods planted on the coast do not usually have this problem. For more information on the silver buttonwood, see the April 2020 issue of The Garden Bench Newsletter.

Green buttonwood: <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/ST179>

Silver buttonwood: <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/ST180>



Green Buttonwood
Photo: UF/IFAS



Silver Buttonwood
Photo: South-Florida-Plant-Guide.com



Buttonwood Seeds
Photo: UF/IFAS

You and Your Homeowners' Association (HOA)

An interview with Alyssa Vinson, Residential Horticulture Agent, Manatee County Extension

By Amy Stripe, Master Gardener Volunteer



Amy: One of the most common questions we get from homeowners concerns the removal of invasive plants within the common areas of their HOA grounds. Are HOAs *required* to remove them? Can a homeowner take it *upon themselves* to remove invasives outside of their own yards?

Alyssa: The answer to these questions lies in the land development plan (LDP) originally agreed between your builder/developer and your county. This LDP transfers to the HOA when that development is turned over to them by their developer. On the LDP, common areas may be designated as “preservation” or “conservation,” and you can determine this by consulting the plat map for your development. The plat is available at the property appraiser’s website, searchable by address. *HOA obligation* to remove invasives is an enormously challenging area. Most HOAs do not even know there may be a requirement in their LDP to continue controlling invasives when the property is turned over to them from the developer/builder. This is especially problematic with multi-phase developments where the build-out may take twenty years or more to complete. So, the conservation area has gone unmanaged all that time and the HOA is now looking at an enormous cost. It is complicated.

Amy: There are some county funds to help in this, right?

Alyssa: Yes, Manatee County for example has a neighborhood enhancement program that provides

funding, but it is matching and limited to \$10,000. In terms of Individual residents removing invasives, they should consult their HOA documents (deed restrictions) before removing any plant materials from common areas. Some counties require that any removal of invasive plants in these areas be done by a certified environmental professional, so that means an individual homeowner or even member of the Board of Directors (BOD) cannot remove these themselves.

Amy: Yes, I remember a case not long ago where an HOA was fined when several residents took it upon themselves to remove some invasives.

Alyssa: That is right, and there is a good reason for having only professionals do these jobs. Some of these areas are sensitive habitats, such as wetlands. Which brings up a good point about the importance of conservation areas: they may look like a scrubby mess to a homeowner but provide critical benefits as refuges for ecosystems that are under enormous pressure from development. Just look at aerial maps of our own county from twenty years ago compared to today!

Amy: Switching gears now to HOAs and Florida-friendly type landscaping: homeowners ask if there has been some legislation which says they do not have to comply with any rules in their documents about the type and amount of turfgrass and plant selection on their own properties.

Alyssa: The legislation says you can have a Florida-friendly landscape if it maintains the aesthetic requirements of the HOA's documents. By signing your deed restrictions, you have agreed to follow them. However, nothing precludes your right to petition the BOD for changes if you can convince them it meets the aesthetics of an attractive landscape. It is subjective, of course, but we always recommend you work with your BOD to build your case and not try to fight against them.

Amy: Yes, we have had several articles in the Garden Bench on how to do this! Another area we get questions on is about tree removal. For every phone call we get at Extension asking if someone can remove a tree, we get at least one phone call from a person concerned about said removal! If a tree is breaking up a sidewalk, can someone remove it without a permit? Will the HOA require them to replace it?

Alyssa: I am working on an article for the Garden Bench on this topic; stand by! But the short answer is, a tree must be designated as a hazard by an arborist

certified in risk assessment to be removed without a permit. A tree popping up a sidewalk is not a hazard. Replacement requirements for a tree in your own yard should be specified in your HOA documents.

Amy: Both the county and individual cities have street tree ordinances, correct? And do they differ?

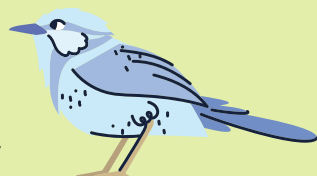
Alyssa: Yes, and yes. So, if you are in unincorporated parts of the county, you follow their ordinances, otherwise those of your city.

Amy: Any other areas you would like to address for "You and your HOA?"

Alyssa: Stormwater retention ponds is a big area. I refer our readers to a Manatee County Extension blog by Maggie Gaughan, Conservation Program Assistant Your New Go-To Site for Stormwater Pond Resources – UF/IFAS Extension Manatee County (<https://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/manateeco/2022/12/06/new-site-for-stormwater-pond-resources/>)

Spring Native Bloomer: **MARLBERRY** (*Ardisia escallonioides*)

By Sally Herb, Master Gardener Volunteer



Marlberry is an often-overlooked evergreen complement to any landscape. At a full-grown height of only 15 feet, it can be shaped into a slender, multi-trunk tree or dense shrub. Marlberry dwells in the understory of native hammocks alongside stoppers and sabal palms. The dark, shiny leaves are a terrific backdrop to the showy clusters of small, white, fragrant flowers appearing spring to fall at the ends of branches. In late spring, the round purplish-black berries are a bird magnet. Although the berries are edible for humans, they are acidic and best left to the wildlife! Seminoles used Marlberry wood to make arrows/skewers and the leaves as an extender for tobacco. Suitable for Zones 9-11 in partial sun to shade, Marlberry is remarkably resilient – not fussy about soil type, salt tolerant, drought tolerant, shaping and pruning friendly, and relatively pest free. More at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/FP048>

Native Florida Plants, Haehle, Robert and Brookwell, Joan, Gulf Publishing, 1999.

Florida's Best Native Landscape Plants, Nelson, Gil, University Press of Florida, 2003.

eattheweeds.com/ardisias-berries-on-the-cusp



Marlberry Plant
Photo: Sally Herb

WHAT'S THIS?: *Ganoderma on Palms*

By Maureen Hirthler, Master Gardener Volunteer

An unhealthy-looking palm tree with a mushroom-like growth at its base is an unpleasant surprise. The “mushroom” is called a conk, and it is a sign of ganoderma butt rot.

Ganodermas are fungi, a diverse group of spore-producing organisms feeding on organic matter. The group includes molds, yeast, mushrooms, and toadstools. Ganoderma species are wood-decaying fungi that attack many species of trees. *G. philippii* and *G. pseudoferreum* are responsible for the root rot of cacao, coffee, rubber, and tea trees. A few species are beneficial. *G. lingzhi*, called reishi in Japan, has been used in traditional medicine for thousands of years.



Ganoderma zonatum conk

Photo: UF/IFAS

There are many species of Ganoderma in the world, but only one is a pathogen of palms, *Ganoderma zonatum*. This fungus does not cause disease in any other plant family but is fatal in palms. *G. zonatum* spreads via spores that germinate in the soil, then moves to base of the palm and causes decay as it moves up inside the trunk. Since the disease is internal, you may not realize the palm is infected until the end is near. When you see a conk growing from the inside out of the trunk, the palm will not recover. There is no effective treatment; Check frequently for conks and remove infected palms quickly to slow the spread of Ganoderma. If you remove a palm with Ganoderma, any replacement palm may develop the disease also. Replanting with a hardwood tree is a better option.

For more information:

Ganoderma zonatum: <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/PP100>

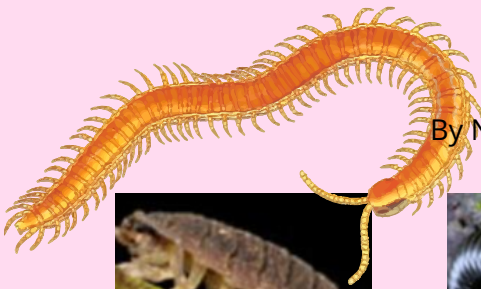
Ganoderma laccate (lingzhi): <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/PP333>

Master Gardener Volunteer Plant Clinics

Location	Address	Day(s)	Time
Bob Gardner Park	2710 White Eagle Blvd., Lakewood Ranch	Third Sundays	9AM – 12PM
Crowder Bros. Ace Hardware	5409 Manatee Ave W., Bradenton	Third Saturdays	9AM – 12PM
Central Library	1301 1st St. W., Bradenton	Third Saturdays	11:30AM – 2:30PM
Lakewood Ranch Farmers Market	Waterside Place, 7500 Island Cove Terrace, Sarasota	First Sundays	10AM – 2PM
Rocky Bluff Library	6750 US Hwy 301 N., Ellenton	Second & Fourth Saturdays	10AM – 1PM
St. George's Episcopal Church	912 63rd Ave. W., Bradenton	First and Third Thursdays	9AM – 12PM
Island Branch Library	5701 Marina Dr, Holmes Beach	First Saturdays	10AM – 1PM
UF/IFAS Extension Manatee County Tel. 941-722-4524 manateemg@gmail.com	1303 17th St. W., Palmetto	Every weekday except Wednesdays	9AM – 4PM

Compost Critters

By Norma Kisida, Master Gardener Volunteer



Centipede

Photo: Lyle J. Buss, UF



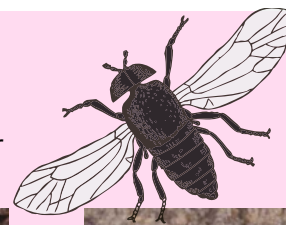
Pill Bug

Photo: Lyle J. Buss, UF



Black Soldier Fly Larvae

Photo: Lyle J. Buss, UF



Adult Soldier Fly

Photo: Lyle J. Buss, UF

If you examine your compost, you may see some strange creatures. It is helpful to identify them and to know if they are good, bad, or neutral. In turn, they can give you an indication of the condition of your compost. A few years ago, I was dismayed to find maggot-looking grubs in my compost. With research, I found out that these were the larval stage of black soldier flies which thrive in warm moist conditions and are great at breaking down kitchen scraps. The adults look like large wasps and are not harmful to humans or other mammals. Soldier flies are farmed and sold for composting and animal feed.

Other invertebrates common in compost include centipedes, millipedes, pill bugs, sowbugs, earthworms, and spiders. These are more likely to be present if the compost is not hot enough and does not break down properly, or if it is ready for use. Pill bugs and sowbugs are exceptionally good decomposers but will occasionally eat live material so should be removed when using compost. Earthworms, of course, are great at eating organic matter and leaving behind nutrient-rich castings. Other beneficials include springtails and beetles which add nutrients and keep the other decomposers in check.

Millipedes and centipedes both have multiple body segments and many pairs of legs, but they perform distinct functions in the compost. Millipedes help the compost process by feeding on dead plant matter while centipedes feed on other invertebrates. Spiders are beneficial because they feed on invertebrates and help control garden pests.

Some critters not desirable in compost include ants, bees, yellow jackets, and flies, as well as animals like snakes and racoons. Properly burying food scraps or having an enclosed composter will deter some of these creatures. Ants may take up residence in compost if it is too dry, so maintaining the right moisture level will help prevent them.

When moisture levels, temperature, and proper aeration are achieved, there is suitable habitat for the desirable critters. If there are no decomposers in the compost it may be because the temperature is too hot, or the compost is finished. Fungi are also important decomposers and work together with the other beneficial critters to produce that black gold we call compost.

Composting Organisms -

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/sarasota/natural-resources/waste-reduction/composting/what-is-composting/meet-your-composting-team/composting-organisms/>



Compost Soil

Photo: UF/IFAS



Time for Preemergent Weed Control

By Jennifer Tonge-Martin, Master Gardener Volunteer



Right now, February to no later than mid-March, we can stop weeds before they take over our yard! Most of us do not think about weeds until we are faced with an invasion of unwanted plants. But “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” so don’t miss this brief window of opportunity.

There is a class of herbicides known as “preemergent” because they stop weed seeds from sprouting. Shortly before weeds emerge from the ground, the seeds germinate and begin to put out roots. This is the moment that preemergent herbicides do their weed-killing best. This specific action makes them most effective against annual/seasonal weeds, and ineffective against the weeds you already have.

The good side of this is that they can be used safely around perennial plants such as groundcovers, bushes and trees. They are often used in perennial lawns with good effectiveness, but be aware that some preemergent herbicides, such as atrazine (often found in “weed and feed” products), also act as post-emergence herbicides and can harm lawns such as St. Augustine grass when temperatures rise above 80 degrees. Some herbicides can affect trees and bushes whose roots extend into lawns and planting beds, so read and follow the label completely. Some lawns rely on re-seeding to stay thick and lush, so grasses like Bahia should not be treated with preemergent herbicides.

Think back to last summer: were you plagued with crabgrass, crowfoot grass, spurge, cudweed, doveweed, chamber bitter, oxalis, Florida pusley or the dreaded sandspur? Try a preemergent herbicide now to control them in the coming months. University of Florida/IFAS recommends they be applied when night temperatures reach about 65 degrees for three to four days in a row. Central Florida’s traditional “last freeze day” is February 15, but it is best to monitor your own yard temperatures to find your ideal window of application. IFAS suggests a second application about sixty days after the first using a different class of preemergent as they can work better on some weeds than others. Do not apply in an area where you plan to put seeds within sixteen weeks after applying the preemergent herbicide. As most preemergent products are granular, they should be lightly watered in to improve contact with surface soil (where the seeds are). Not surprisingly, they are much less effective spread on top of mulch.

Some active ingredients to look for are: oryzalin, benefin, bensulide, pendimethalin, isoxabin, dithiopyr and prodiamine. Some products have combinations of these chemicals. The only approved organic preemergent is corn gluten, a high-protein by-product of the manufacture of ethanol from corn. There is some controversy regarding the use of corn gluten, so read the next article in this series if you are considering it.

What about your current winter weeds? In addition to all the usual methods of mowing, mulching and hand-pulling, note where the infestation is now and treat with preemergent herbicide in October-November, when night temps drop to 55-60 degrees for three to four days in a row.

The time has come, do not delay! Preemergent herbicides, when used correctly, are an important part of your weed control program.



Granular preemergence herbicide is applied on top of the soil to prevent weeds from growing.

Photo: Caroline R. Warwick, UF/IFAS

Master Gardener Volunteer Amy Stripe & Joy Dersken, Co-Editors Contents reviewed & edited by Alyssa Vinson, Extension Agent. The University of Florida is committed to providing universal access to all our events. For disability accommodations such as alternate formats of written material, please contact Katie Granberg katiebg@ufl.edu at least 1 week in advance.

Manatee County Extension Garden Activities for Children

By Mary Lange, Master Gardener Volunteer

One of my favorite volunteer opportunities has been working with fellow Master Gardener Volunteers (MGVs) Christine Callahan and Ed Upshaw as they teach gardening to fourth graders at Anna Maria Elementary School. They make it seem so easy, guiding children through basic lessons, letting them loose in the garden to put into practice what they have just learned, and quizzing them at the end to reinforce the day's lesson. Their enthusiasm is contagious as they spot "wormies" in compost, lay seedlings tenderly in planters, and watch as little green tomatoes slowly turn into big red fruit.

MGVs work with other school gardens across the county. Catherine Day leads an after-school gardening program at Bayshore Elementary, and others work with Mack Lessig, Extension's Community and School Gardens Coordinator. This work can be extremely challenging, keeping kids focused while fitting a wealth of information into one short class. However, the rewards of introducing young gardeners to the wonders of nature and gardening are priceless.

MGV Lois Panner knows this all too well. She has spent many hours working with her own children in their home garden. Recognizing an opportunity, Lois focused her 2015 MGV class project on outreach activities for children. Upon graduation, she was encouraged by MGV Barbara Davis who said, "Figure out a way to get more kids to our demonstration garden!" Since then, Lois has spent the last eight years leading our Children's Programs Committee and expanding opportunities for children in Manatee County to learn all the ins and outs of gardening. Lois's committee has developed and offers classes to children aged 4 through 12 on topics such as butterflies, bugs, native bees, worm composting, container gardens, flowers, vegetables, and herbs. They held ten classes and events in 2022 and are already planning a busy schedule for 2023. In 2022, the Children's Programs Committee was awarded the Florida Master Gardener Volunteer Program Award of Excellence for Teamwork. Children will be able to register on Eventbrite for an herb class this spring and a vegetable gardening class in the fall. They also offer a limited number of private classes and participate in several community events.



Ag Venture 2023
Photo: Manatee County

Manatee County's Ag Venture program, normally held every November during Farm-City Week, is another great opportunity for kids to learn. Ag Venture brings in around 1,000 third graders from 11 area schools to the Manatee County Fairgrounds to learn about the importance of agriculture as they rotate through 6 to 8 different activity stations. MGVs head up an activity focused on growing vegetables, teaching children how to plant their own seedlings and giving them guidance on how to care for their plants at home.

Our Plant-a-Pail Community Outreach Workshop™, headed by MGV Mike Sircy, goes into neighborhoods that lack easy access to fresh vegetables, teaching both adults and children how to grow plants in mini container gardens constructed from two five-gallon plastic buckets and a section of tubing. Children especially enjoy filling their pail with soil, mixing in fertilizer, and selecting and planting either seeds or seedlings. They are also taught how to monitor for pests and how to properly water their little garden.

One of Manatee County's most popular programs for children and young adults is 4-H. This program is run by Alex Draper, our 4-H Extension Agent. Although not technically part of the MGV program, the county's twenty-four 4-H clubs often rely on MGV volunteers, especially when teaching children about food and nutrition.

We encourage readers to regularly check the County's Master Gardener Volunteer and 4-H websites for opportunities that will be available for children 2023.

For more information:

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/manatee/lawn--garden/master-gardener-volunteer-program>

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/manatee/4-h-youth-development>

Register on Eventbrite: <https://bit.ly/3uIIIRR>

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FEBRUARY CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Date	Time	Event
Saturday 2/4/23	9:00AM	Emerson Point Preserve Tour Casually stroll through the beautiful Emerson Point Preserve and learn about Florida's native plants and inhabitants of a coastal environment. https://www.eventbrite.com/e/desotoriverview-pointe-preserve-tour-november-may-tickets-441206910747
Thursday 2/9/23	11:30AM	Talk Plants with Me Submit your questions to our Horticulture Agent for live Q&A! We will talk about hot topics in the plant world and may have a few guests join us along the way. https://www.eventbrite.com/e/talk-plants-with-me-tickets-391234883067
Saturday 2/11/23	9:00AM	DeSoto/Riverview Pointe Preserve Tour Casually stroll through the beautiful Riverview Pointe Preserve and learn about Florida's native plants and inhabitants of a coastal environment. https://www.eventbrite.com/e/desotoriverview-pointe-preserve-tour-november-may-tickets-441206910747
Saturday 2/18/23	9:00AM	Rye Preserve Tour Take a hike through upland habitats along the beautiful Rye Preserve and learn about Florida's native plants, natural history, and early settlement of the area. https://www.eventbrite.com/e/rye-preserve-tour-december-april-tickets-446062233147
Friday 2/24/23	10:00AM	Too Good to Waste: Reducing Food Waste, Compost Class, & Landfill Tour This class will help you with strategies on how to reduce food waste in your own home and perhaps in your community. It will also teach you about composting at home to prevent your excess food from becoming part of the problem. https://www.eventbrite.com/e/too-good-to-waste-reducing-food-waste-compost-class-landfill-tour-tickets-500778280317
Saturday 2/25/23	10:00AM	Trying Out Tillandsias: A "Make and Take" Workshop Learn about these lovely epiphytes that only require air and water to live. This is a "make and take" workshop where you will create a palm boot planter using Tillandsia airplants. Bring wire cutters and pliers. https://www.eventbrite.com/e/trying-out-tillandsias-a-make-and-take-workshop-tickets-500768460947
Saturday 2/25/23	9:00AM	Perico Preserve Tour Explore one of Manatee County's newest preserves and learn about Florida's native plants, how they benefit wildlife, and how they can be used in the home landscape. Learn about the wide variety of ecosystems on display and how the preserve was transformed into what it is today. https://www.eventbrite.com/e/perico-preserve-tour-jan-april-tickets-446155371727

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