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GARDEN BENCH

The Manatee County Master Gardener E-Newsletter

UF IFAS Extension
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA



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A Florida Native Weed: Spanish Needle

By Nancy O Porter, Master Gardener Volunteer



Spanish needle (*Bidens alba*)

It is called “Spanish needle,” “beggar’s ticks,” or by its scientific name, *Bidens alba*. There are eight species here in Florida. Spanish needle is a powerhouse with pollinators. And it thrives just about everywhere and all year long.

Spanish needle is happy in moderately dry, full-sun areas, as well as in grasslands or pastures, clearings in wooded areas, in wetlands, along roadsides, the banks of ditches, in nurseries, and in your very own yard! You can even find them growing happily in the containers of your most prized plants!

It assumes an upright growth pattern as tall as 36 - 48 inches. The stems are a bit hairy and the leaves resemble celery. The seeds are long and slender with barbed hooks at each end, which have great potential to affix themselves to your pants legs, socks, shoes, and any animal that brushes up against them!

They have cute little white daisy-like flowers, with yellow centers. The Florida Wildflower Foundation says “*Bidens alba* is likely the most underappreciated of all Florida’s native wildflowers.” That’s because this plant is the third most common source of nectar for honey production.

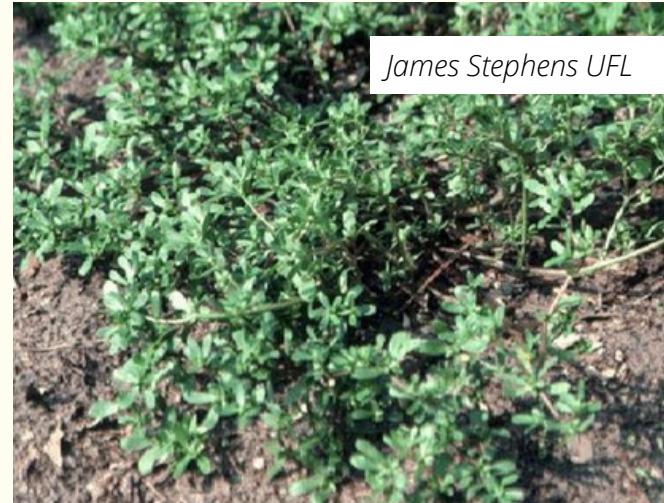
It is also edible: you can eat the young leaves raw in salads. Dry them and use as tea, or smoke them like tobacco. *B. alba* contains nutrients similar to kale, as it is high in fiber and proteins, and can also be fermented to make wine. How’s that for versatility?

To Weed or Not to Weed...

By Jennifer Tonge-Martin, Master Gardener Volunteer

...Is that a question? All gardeners must weed, that is, remove the plants that pop up spontaneously between, under or in their desired plantings. When and how to weed are the more common questions. We must decide to pull them up, mow them down, poison them, burn them and kill them any way possible!

Except many “weeds” are quite useful in the environment. Some, like purslane and dollar weed are edible. Some are important for butterflies and other pollinators, some make wonderful groundcovers, and many constitute the greater part of a “Freedom Lawn”. Let’s stop judging weeds as “bad”, and consider their usefulness. Ask “is this plant useful to my yard in this particular place?” If “yes”, then it stays. If “no”, then it gets moved either to another spot in the garden or to the compost pile.



Purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*)

Keeping planting beds and lawns edged, ground cover plantings dense and mulched as deep as is healthy for plants will minimize the number of decisions necessary. Pull weeds as soon as you see them; killing weeds before they set seeds will result in fewer weeds in the future.

Weeds also give indications of the health of the garden. For instance, sedge and dollar weed thrive in compacted, over-watered areas: exactly what lawn grasses hate!

These weeds in the lawn show the problem is too much irrigation or not enough organic mulch in the soil. Treat the problem rather than just poisoning the weeds.

Herbicides must be approached cautiously. More is NOT better, and always follow the label instructions exactly. Pre-emergent herbicides will keep ALL seeds from germinating, not just weed seeds. They can be put down preventatively, but not indiscriminately. Organic or “natural” herbicides like soap or vinegar, can still be dangerous if not used as directed.

These weeding strategies will increase the effectiveness of your solutions, and decrease your workload in your yard.

Consult <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/EP141> for weed management in turfgrass and <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/entity/topic/weeds> for broader topics about weeds.





Ask a Master Gardener

By Karen Holleran, Master Gardener Volunteer

Q: Do I have to wait until these seed pods blossom before I can remove them or can I cut them off any time?

A: This is the sheath of the flower panicle of a foxtail palm (*Wodyetia bifurcata*) that will fall off naturally. You can prune it off before the flowers emerge, but be cautious since the sheath is very close to the trunk and it would be easy to damage the shaft. If you have a landscape company prune the tree, I would strongly advise that you insist they sterilize their pruning equipment before they prune. There is a fungal disease, *Thielaviopsis*, that can be spread from palm to palm by pruning equipment. An open pruning wound is also an opportunity for fungal spores to infect the palm. I'm including a link to a publication about *Thielaviopsis* for your reference.

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/PP143>

Master Gardener Volunteer Karen Holleran answers your email questions when you send them to ManateeMG@gmail.com. Or, call Master Gardener Volunteer Plant Clinic at 941-722-4524 9:00 A.M.to 4:00 P.M.every weekday except Wednesday.



Foxtail Palm

What's This?: Torpedograss

By Nancy Porter, Master Gardener Volunteer



Have you noticed a grass appearing in your flower beds, poking up amongst shrubbery, or invading your retention pond? It is torpedograss (*Panicum repens*), and is a dickens to control, let alone eradicate, especially when growing in your ornamentals or turfgrass.

Torpedograss spreads by rhizomes (underground stems). It will go as deep as 12 to 18 inches and if you leave even a minuscule piece behind it will regrow quickly. It will also grow as tall as 3 feet and, boy oh boy, you should see it when it hits the water! It has stems that are stiff and stand up straight and tall, along with leaves that are kind of flat. It is call "torpedo" for its pointed leaf tips.

Torpedo grass can be deterred using glyphosate (e.g., Round-Up), a non-selective that will also kill everything else! A selective herbicide, such as fluzifop (Fusilade II) or imazapyr (e.g., Arsenal), can be applied without harm to your shrubs if they are listed on the label.

Torpedo Grass

Community Gardens

By Joy Derksen,
Master Gardener Volunteer



Do you wish you had a place to garden; a place to grow your own herbs, vegetables, and flowers? Perhaps you don't have a sunny lawn or even a sunny balcony where you can dedicate space for growing your own vegetables. The one container of cherry tomatoes on your porch just isn't enough.

A community garden is defined by the University of Florida as, "a collaborative greenspace where the participants share in both the maintenance and the rewards." Community gardens are great places to grow plants and improve your access to nutritious foods; but they are also a place to meet other gardeners, to enjoy fresh air and physical activities, and to become educated on when and what to grow in Florida.

Memberships are available in several community gardens in Manatee County. There is a garden at the Health Department which has individual plots and group plots. The City of Bradenton also has a community garden for its residents. Several churches have community gardens as part of their agrarian ministry. At the moment there are also six schools that sponsor during- or after-school gardens for the students.

Sesame plant in a community garden



Plots at Manatee Square Garden



Community Garden Participants

At IFAS/UFL Manatee County Extension office Mack Lessig is the Community Garden Program Assistant. He helps with the educational aspects of gardening; he knows what plants work well in our county and how to nurture them. He stresses that he is not the boss of the various gardens. He is an advisor and educator to the groups of avid gardeners who actually manage their community gardens. Mack also helps groups who wish to develop a community garden by discussing what is needed for a good site, in terms of soil and sun, community participation, and legal questions. He can also direct participants to sources of funding. He won't write your grants, but can provide tips!

Manatee County Master Gardener Rebecca (Becky) Moreland has experience with grant writing and community projects. Concerned about "food deserts" (areas without easy access to fresh fruits and vegetables), the Manatee County Health Department worked with Becky to plan a community garden for the neighborhood. They gave the use of land and water to supply the garden. Becky and the Health Department applied for funding from several sources to start and maintain the community garden. Recently they were awarded funding from the Manatee River Garden Club. With those funds they are able to purchase soil, vermicompost, and needed equipment and supplies.

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/EP124>

<https://www.soils.org/about-soils/community-gardens/>

Photos from UF/IFAS Manatee



WATER STEWARDSHIP

By Maureen Hirthler, Master Gardener Volunteer

Here in Manatee County, we connect to water through fishing, recreation, bird-watching, gardening, tourism, and many other ways. The IFAS/UFL Manatee County Extension offers a program in the new year for anyone interested in improving and maintaining the quality and health of our rivers, bays, and seas.

Through expert presentations, field experiences, and other tools, the Florida Waters Stewardship Program will meet the program's objective of enabling Water Stewards to encourage conversations and action around water conservation to help protect and conserve our water resources.

The six-week program will be offered in Spring 2022. Some of the topics covered are changing waterscapes, regulations and policies, future water supply, emerging water issues, and communication skills.

Join us for an introductory online presentation on Tuesday, November 16, 2021, from 4-6 PM to learn more about this program.

Register at <https://tinyurl.com/fwsp22>

Joro Spiders (*Trichonephila clavata*)

By John Dawson, Master Gardener Volunteer



Many people irrationally fear or hate spiders, especially large ones like the Joro spider. Originally from Asia the joro has stowed away and made a new home in northeastern Georgia. First documented in 2014 just 80 miles from Atlanta, this spider has expanded its range into just north of the South Carolina/Georgia border to Atlanta itself. This year has seen an explosion of these spiders in twenty-five counties. The female is brightly colored yellow and black and can span almost 3 inches with males about half that size. Each female can lay as many as four hundred eggs. The emerging young spiders can cast webs into the air like kites and can fly long distances. Joros are orb weavers and can spin large sticky golden webs as much as ten feet across.

They are no threat to humans and small pets; they are more of a nuisance in urban areas as they spin their sticky webs in many inconvenient places. Farmers appreciate the fact that they seem to be the only predator of the brown marmorated stink bug (*Halyomorpha halys*), an invasive insect which causes crop damage and likes to invade homes in the winter. Not surprisingly, these stink bugs originated in the same parts of Asia as the joros, a reason the spiders are venerated there. Entomologists are still uncertain or ready to classify these spiders as invasive as they so far seem to be no threat to the ecology or to native orb weavers, which have been seen spinning webs near joro webs. Unlike the local orb weavers, joros tend to stick together in small groups. I saw eight in webs spanning across two crepe myrtles while visiting Georgia last September. UF and UG entomologists are keeping an eye on their expansion, using the black and yellow mud-dauber wasp (*Sceliphron caementarium*), a natural predator of orb weavers. The wasp stuffs the dead spiders into nests for their emerging pupa to feed upon. Collecting samples of their mud tubes just outside of the present infestation area provides data on population and rate of expansion. So far, there have been no sightings of joros in Florida, but we're just a short drive down Interstate 75!



University of Georgia

Joro Spider (*Trichonephila clavata*)

FARMERS AND CONSUMERS TEAM UP

By Jim Haupt, Master Gardener Volunteer

Growers of fruits and vegetables face many challenges in order for their produce to reach your table at their highest peak of flavor. They tackle issues of labor, urban development, regulations, shipping costs, soil conditions, diseases, and pests. Manatee County farmers and others throughout the state are becoming more creative in their marketing strategies; at the same time, consumers are more attuned to health and nutrition, and rising prices! (sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/manatee/agriculture/vegetable—rowcrops/)

UF/IFAS Extension Manatee County Agent Lisa Hickey is building awareness of local farms that sell directly to the consumer through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs.

(blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/new/2020/04/09/uf-ifas-extension-helps-get-food-directly-from-farmers-to-customers-during-pandemic/)



Hunsader Farms

Hunsader Farms

CSA involves different marketing models. (explore.research.ufl-ifas-extesnion-helps-get-food-to-customers-during-pandemic.htm) and sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/agriculture/community-supported-agriculture/). One involves farms being open for the public to pick their own produce (so called "U-Pick".)

Head out SR64 in Manatee County and U-Pick at BellaBlue Berry Farm in March when blueberries are in season or bring your containers to Blue Lilly Farm in Parrish. Bunker Hill Vineyard and Winery specializes in growing muscadine grapes, and offers U-Pick opportunities, complimentary tours, and wine tastings. At the East Bradenton Food Forest, you can pick plums, peaches, lychees, starfruit, bananas, and blueberries for free! Although dedicated to the Washington Park

community, anyone in Manatee County is welcome. Presently, at Hunsader Farm, fields are open for U-Pick eggplant, a variety of peppers, and tomatoes. A market, small zoo, and an antiques store are on site. Honeyside Farms have adapted their operations to a CSA model and also offer U-Pick opportunities. It is recommended that you get on their email list and follow them on Facebook. Mixon's Fruit Farm offers U-Pick educational tours, a gift shop and cafeteria, and citrus you can buy or ship. These are just some examples; a directory of U-Pick farms for the county is being updated and will be featured in an upcoming issue.

U-Pick farms vary in the crops they grow and when they are open. Call ahead! Wear comfortable clothing and suitable shoes for walking in fields, bug spray, water to keep hydrated, and containers for the fruit and veggies you pick.

Buying produce directly from the farmer benefits the local economy and guarantees that fruits and vegetables are fresh, ripe, high in nutritional value, and just a short distance from your kitchen table. If you have any left-over green beans, tomatoes or berries, freezing and canning are excellent ways to preserve them.



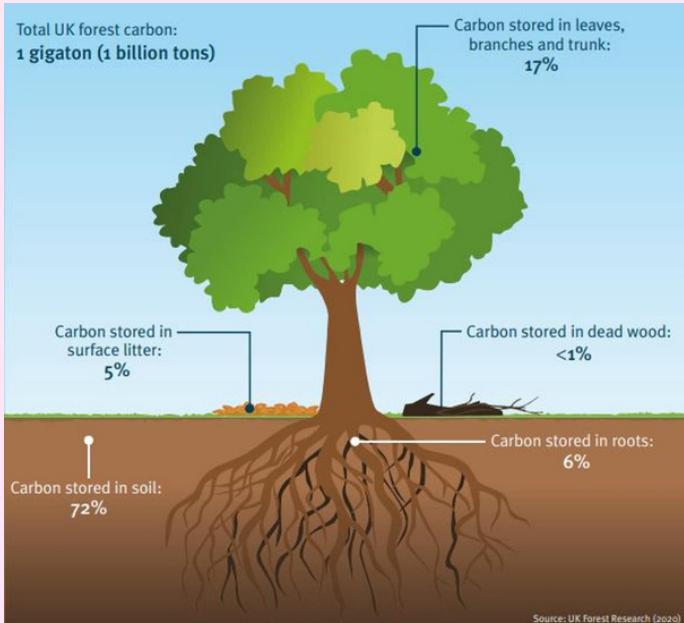
BellaBlue Berry Farm

Blueberries



Palms vs. Trees: Carbon Sequestration

By Maureen Hirthler and Amy Stripe, Master Gardener Volunteers



Tree Carbon Graphic

An October 24, 2021 report by CNN meteorologist Allison Chinchar stimulated calls to our Extension Office from homeowners and homeowners' associations about whether they should be replacing their palms with hardwood trees to fight against climate change.

The report, entitled "Florida is Ditching Palm Trees to Fight the Climate Crisis"

(<https://www.cnn.com/2021/10/23/weather/weather-trees-adapt-climate-change/index.html>), featured Miami Beach and West Palm Beach officials stating they would be decreasing their new plantings of palm trees in public places to less than 25% by 2050 in favor of hardwood trees, such as oaks, mahoganies and magnolias. Their rationale: palms store (sequester) less amounts of carbon dioxide (CO₂), a greenhouse gas, than do hardwood trees. (Refer to the graphic provided here as a theoretical model

of how CO₂ is stored in trees and soil.) CO₂ has been identified as a culprit of climate change, specifically the warming cycle our planet is currently experiencing.

As with most issues, you cannot take this at face value. For starters, the report (despite the headline) did not advocate cutting down palms and replacing them with hardwood trees. In fact, the planting of hardwood trees has to be carefully managed. Age, species, and ecosystem make a difference in the ability of a hardwood tree to sequester carbon.

According to arborists and forest managers, the wholesale enthusiasm for planting trees to sequester carbon and/or reforest has put too much emphasis on quantity of seedlings versus proper management of these new trees, diversity of species planted, soil biomass, surface reflectivity, and, frankly, scientific topics way beyond these authors' pay grade! Go to <https://extension.psu.edu/how-forests-store-carbon> for perhaps the most lucid explanation of CO₂ tree sequestration we could find. Keep in mind that these topics are subject to constant debate among scientists.

However: since ALL plants absorb CO₂ to fuel growth via photosynthesis, it makes no sense to remove a live one in order to plant another that might not be mature enough or appropriate to the job. If you are a palm lover, there is nothing at all wrong with installing one, especially if it's a native species. These include cabbage palm (*Sabal palmetto*), royal palm (*Roystonea regia*) and thatch palms (*Thrinax* spp.), among others!

January Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Event
Friday 1/21 - Monday 1/31	All day	TreeQuest Join UF/IFAS Extension and Manatee County Parks and Natural Resources for a community scavenger hunt for trees. Participants will have two weeks starting on Florida Arbor Day, January 21, to find the tagged trees at Emerson Point Preserve, Conservatory Park, and Tom Bennett Park. The scavenger hunt will be submitted via online form. Prizes for winners!
Friday 1/21/22	1:00PM	Trees and Me: The Gift of Trees Join UF/IFAS Extension Manatee County for a celebration of all things tree! We will be discussing the many benefits that trees provide to us and providing detailed instructions for how to participate in this year's TreeQuest community scavenger hunt. https://ufl.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJAudemtrz8sEtegpyaqwJciiz_FO3Z5hsza
Monday 1/24/22	1:00PM	Trees and Me: Our Gift to Trees Join UF/IFAS Extension Manatee County for a celebration of all things tree! We will be discussing the ways we can support healthy and numerous trees in our communities. https://ufl.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJUldQqorzkrH9e8bPx2GIDY8-GJpDSiYO0W
Tuesday 1/25/22 & Wednesday 1/26/21	2:30PM & 9:30AM	Trees and Me Join UF/IFAS Extension Manatee County for a celebration of all things tree! We will be covering; The Gift of Trees, Our Gift to Trees and What Trees are These? Discussion will be centered around the reciprocal relationship we have with trees in our communities and how to identify what trees you see. https://www.eventbrite.com/e/trees-and-me-palmetto-library-tickets-228361353957 https://www.eventbrite.com/e/trees-and-me-braden-river-library-tickets-228396900277
Friday 1/28/22	1:00PM	Trees and Me: What Trees are These? Join UF/IFAS Extension Manatee County for a celebration of all things tree! We will be discussing how to identify the trees that you see. https://ufl.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJUqc-2hqzwvG9NJp62MFHchsYB-uLqsZLj-

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