

A quarterly online magazine published for Master Gardeners in support of the educational mission of UF/IFAS Extension Service.

## Little Gardens Everywhere

By Amy S. George, Master Gardener Volunteer

Pandemic boredom hit me hard in July of 2020. My daughter, Rachel, and I spent one evening in full pity-party mode, whining about the monotony of the days. We noted that even our 5:30 a.m. walks had become dull. We both knew every street and house within a two-mile radius of our homes. We were desperate for some new scenery.

Then Rachel had an inspiration: what if we tried to visit every park in St. Petersburg on foot — even if we had to drive to get there? We soon learned that there are 150+ parks in this city! But we were overly ripe for a challenge, plus it was a way to learn more about our newly adopted city.

As the year draws to a close, we can now boast that we have visited 130 parks in St. Pete, with only 23 to go. However, this little tale is not about the parks themselves, for that is a whole other story; this story is about the many wonders we encountered *between* the parks.

From the Gulf to the Bay, and everywhere in between, we delighted in the many beautiful and often whimsical home garden landscapes. The little “Paradise” boat container garden off Park Street was one such treasure.

We also stumbled across at least a half a dozen Little Free Libraries, or “gardens for your mind,” as I like to think of them.



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Then there are the art and sculpture gardens! Of course, there are the incredible wall murals that adorn downtown and other areas. But we also found a variety of creative and artistic structures and statuary that lent personality and identity to individual homes, both large and small.

However, our favorite “little garden” finds have been the community gardens. These small gems spoke to both of our gardening hearts. I liked to imagine the gardeners who work these beds, the young and old, the novice and experienced, working side by side in a labor of love.



A community garden reflects love, teamwork, and the perpetual hope that all gardeners hold onto as we sow our seeds into tidy rows. These tomatoes will be the juiciest ever. This luscious eggplant will provide many meals to my family. And the herbs! They will tickle our noses with their intoxicating smell and infuse our table with flavor.

As we near the end of our personal “Walking St. Pete Parks” challenge, we reflect on how this little project has saved us, both in body and mind. We found a way to stay safely active while we grew closer through the intimate conversations that only a long walk will stimulate.

By exploring the city on foot, neighborhood by neighborhood, we have seen our community from a unique and personal perspective. All of these “little gardens everywhere” were the unexpected salve to a challenging year.



## A Hard Lesson in Garden Safety

By Ellen Mahany, Master Gardener Volunteer

In the garden, always there are weeds to pull, shrubs to trim, plants to water—the list goes on. Yet, as we tend to our precious dependents, our most important concern should be safety. This is a lesson I learned the hard way on November 1 in the infamous year 2020 when a trip to the emergency room because of nausea and dizziness descended into hospitalization for the dark misery of a blood infection.

“You don’t think you are going to die, do you?” asked Dr. Hoffman, one of my sympathetic infectious disease specialists. “Don’t worry, we’ll get you through this,” he reassured me. As it turned out, the dangerous bacteria in my blood was a rare variety of gram positive (found in dirt) caused by a rose bush thorn that punctured my right arm.

After eleven days of receiving antibiotics and testing negative for the last three, as well as thorough testing to assure my heart valves were not infected, I was sent home with a midline and an IV, which had to be attached to a special machine (kept in a fanny pack) to deliver an hour of penicillin six times a day. I was trained by a nurse and then expected to make the daily medicine change independently, for me a complicated procedure I dreaded doing until the treatment ended on Dec. 1. However, I am grateful that this treatment was available and that I am healthy again.

I trust, dear readers, that you are much more careful than I have been. I have tended to ignore any cuts until finishing an hour or two of gardening. I also ignored thoroughly treating cuts, sometimes even



Daily Change: The penicillin bag had to be connected to the IV and the operating machine.

All photo credits: Ellen Mahany



being unaware of them. Such carelessness could be fatal. At this point, a change in my habits is imperative, especially if I want to care for my Heritage or Old Garden Roses, treasured survivors of former times.

At a follow-up appointment, my primary care doctor advised me to clean all cuts and scrapes immediately with hydrogen peroxide and to bandage any that continue to bleed. She emphasized that I should call her whenever a more serious wound occurs.

I have always been careful to apply facial and body sunscreen and to wear a hat. After this event, I have expanded my precautionary measures. I now have a pair of longer and shorter thorn-and-bramble-resistant garden gloves. I have ordered new sunscreen sleeves that feel like air conditioning on my arms. I will continue to depend on the safety that my sturdy kneeler and shoes provide. In addition, I know that sunglasses not only provide protection from the sun but also from parts of plants too near my eyes. And most important, while gardening, I plan to be more observant of my diverse surroundings in order to avoid tripping or slipping—or stabbing myself with a thorny shrub.



Sunscreen sleeves and reinforced gloves provide garden safety.



Nine thorny Heritage bushes grace the rose garden, so neglected due to my forced absence caused by the blood infection.

## Stoppers in a Native Landscape

By Susan Ladwig, Master Gardener Volunteer

I recently moved to Florida and purchased a home with a perfectly green, irrigated, bug- and weed-free lawn. After years of struggling to maintain a perfect lawn, I decided I would finally put my money where my mouth is and “go native”. I hired an amazing local nursery who designed and installed a landscape of all natives. Once it was planted, I looked around my yard and realized I was not familiar with most of the plants. The species that I found most intriguing were the “stoppers.” I have both a Simpson Stopper (*Myrcianthes fragrans*) and a Spanish stopper (*Eugenia foetida*) in my new front garden.

When I looked up “What’s a stopper?” I discovered a couple of theories on the origin of the term. The one that I find most memorable is the theory that native Americans used the berries to help stop diarrhea. Not nearly as memorable is the possibility that the shrubs are very dense, and “stop” anyone from getting by.



Hedge at the Florida Botanical Garden including *Myrcianthes fragrans*.  
All photo credits: Susan Ladwig

Stoppers belong to the family *Myrtaceae*. They are a varied group of plants, including numerous shrubs and trees, and even the plant from which we get the cloves spice (*Syzygium aromaticum*). The UF IFAS datasheet describes the Simpson stopper with “fragrant, white flowers that ... develop into attractive, red berries that are edible. The flowers attract many species of butterflies, and the fruits are appealing to birds, especially the state bird of Florida, the mockingbird.”

Stoppers are not super showy, but not fussy either, tolerating a range of soils and are quite drought tolerant. They are versatile plants and commonly used in a hedge as seen in the above picture at the Florida Botanical Gardens.

They can grow to 20’ or 25’ depending on the variety. Stoppers, if kept clipped, work as foundation plantings. They can also grow into small, multi-trunked trees.

Native species include:

- Spanish stopper (*Eugenia foetida*): height 12 to 20 feet, spread 8 to 15 feet, partial shade.
- Simpson stopper (*Myrcianthes fragrans*): height 20 to 30 feet, spread 15 to 20 feet, full sun to partial shade.
- White stopper (*Eugenia axillaris*): height 15 to 25 feet, spread 8 to 15 feet, part shade to part sun.



Ripened berries



## Bats

By Kaitlin Hammersley, Master Gardener Volunteer

One of my neighbors recently expressed concern about seeing fewer bats recently so my neighborhood association felt it was a good opportunity to gather some information on bats. How can we be stewards of their survival and success?

First, some facts:

- Bats are the only mammals who can truly fly.
- There are 13 resident bat species in Florida.
- Florida's bats are the primary predators of night-flying insects. One bat can consume hundreds of insects a night! This is a major ecological and economic service that bats provide for free, worth billions of dollars annually.
- Most Florida bats are "colonizing species", meaning they roost together with other bats.
- The incidence of rabies in bats is rare and they are afraid of people.
- Due to habitat destruction and widespread pesticide use, bat populations are declining.

So, what should we do, you ask? The Florida Bat Conservancy ([www.floridabats.org](http://www.floridabats.org)), an important bat conservation non-profit, outlines ways we can help bats. The first step is to learn about bats and be willing to share the knowledge with others. Preserving natural habitats—leaving dead palm fronds and Spanish moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*)—provide "tree species" a place to roost. Putting up bat houses provide a roosting habitat for "colonizing species". It is also important to support bat conservation efforts by donating to the Florida Bat Conservancy.



Left: The evening Bat occurs throughout Florida except in the Florida Keys.  
Center: Florida bonneted bat  
Right: Free-tailed bats.  
All photo credits: UF/IFAS

For anyone interested in a DIY project, you can find plans for building bat house plans here: [https://www.floridabats.org/uploads/1/0/9/6/109611565/bat\\_house\\_plans.pdf](https://www.floridabats.org/uploads/1/0/9/6/109611565/bat_house_plans.pdf).

Ready-made bat houses are available for purchase through Bat Belfrys, Florida Bat Conservancy's conservation partner. The houses come ready to install and include detailed installation instructions. The cost of each bat house is \$100.00 + FL sales tax, and all proceeds financially support Florida Bat Conservancy's initiatives. To order, email: [batbelfrys@gmail.com](mailto:batbelfrys@gmail.com)

For those of you who would like to learn more, the Florida Bat Conservancy has helpful information on their website ([www.floridabats.org](http://www.floridabats.org)). There is a great list of publications available through UF/IFAS EDIS at [https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic\\_bats](https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic_bats).



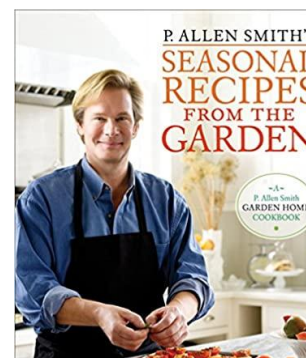
Bat Houses from Bat Belfrys brochure



## Book Review: Seasonal Recipes from the Garden

Reviewed by Debi Ford, Master Gardener Volunteer

To a gardener there are few things better than a tomato warmed by the sun, picked at the optimal time so it's at its best! Cooking seasonally has many benefits both from availability of the best produce and health-wise. Time was, cooking seasonally was all pioneers had unless they preserved produce to use during the non-growing seasons.



Allen's book guides the reader through the four seasons with wonderful recipes for savory and sweet dishes, always with an eye on freshness and food at its peak flavor and ripeness.

Using fresh peas to create a wonderful chilled pea soup or strawberries to create a refreshing strawberry lemonade, there is variety in each season that reflects what is growing in the garden in spring.

Summer bounty is revealed by using easy-on-the-cook salads that can be made early in the day to beat the heat of summer. Produce accents a Niçoise salad and okra fritters make use of a good hot weather vegetable at a time when most vegetable gardens are not producing much. Fresh berries figure in desserts such as cobblers. A bounty of zucchini turns into zucchini bread.

Fall brings the last bounty of the summer. Roasted red peppers become a lovely soup and who could resist spiced red cabbage with apples and thyme, perfect as a side dish with pork.

Winter dishes bring comfort foods with a fresh focus. Even though we're in a milder climate here in Pinellas County, we still have days where a warming sweet potato gratin or sweet onion tart can be a welcome meal or side dish.

Filled with beautiful photography and wonderful stories about each dish, Seasonal Recipes from the Garden will be a great addition to your cookbook shelf.



### Send your Articles and Photos

**The next Issue of *The Dirt* is April 2021. The deadline for articles is April 5.** Share your passion for gardening with your fellow Master Gardeners by writing an article for *The Dirt*. Include images where possible. However, if you include images they must fall under one of the following guidelines:

- your own
- UF/IFAS image
- open access image, as in wiki-commons, where all rights are open and the photographer is credited
- used with the express permission of the photographer

When you do send images, please do not embed them within the article. Include them separately. Please send all files as Word files. I cannot edit .pdf files.

Do you like to photograph plants or trees but don't like to write? Send me your photos with a description, even without an accompanying article, and I'll publish them with the description as well as a credit to you, the photographer.

Send your articles, images, and your photos to Dianne Fecteau at [fecteaudianne@gmail.com](mailto:fecteaudianne@gmail.com). My phone number is 727.366.1392.

All articles are subject to editing. In addition, Theresa Badurek, Urban Horticulture Extension Agent and Master Gardener Coordinator, reviews and approves all articles prior to publication.

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