

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

Out of This World

By Debi Ford, Master Gardener

We're all familiar with common vegetables such as lettuce, broccoli, and red radishes. So how about trying some new varieties that are unusual? Look for these produce items in your market, farmers market, or specialty grocer.

Romanesco Broccoli (*Brassica oleracea* var. *Botrytis romanescos*)

With heads of pale green conical clusters, this certainly doesn't look like the green variety we're used to seeing or even like anything from this planet.



Left: Romanesco Broccoli.
Below right: Chinese Long Beans.
Photo credits: Creative Commons

Although it's a member of the brassica family and more closely related to cauliflower, it looks as though it could fit in any rock garden! As it's still new, not many nurseries or plant vendors carry seedlings. Your best chance of having this vegetable in your garden is to start your plants from seed indoors. Because it takes 90 to 100 days to maturity, plant these early.

Chinese Long Beans (*Vigna unguiculata*)

Favored in Asian cuisine, these beans live up to their name. The beans can grow up to 36 inches tall while the plants can grow 9 to 12 feet high. Be sure



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to have some plans for trellising the plants as they grow. These plants can produce crops two times a year, so take advantage of the opportunity to enjoy them almost all year long. A bonus is the lovely lavender colored flowers that become the beans themselves.

The long bean is similar in taste to regular green beans. You can cut them into smaller pieces for easier cooking and eating. Long beans are a direct-sow crop. This means you can plant directly into your prepared soil. Harvesting is 40 to 75 days after sowing.

Easter Egg Radishes (*Raphanus sativus*)

An unusual variety of radishes that has been popping up in produce departments and farmer's markets is the Easter Egg variety. Easter Egg radishes mature in about 25 days and come in pretty shades of pink, lavender, and white along with the traditional red.



Left: Easter Egg Radishes.
Right: Candy Cane Beets.
Photo credits: Creative



Candy Cane Beets (*Beta vulgaris*)

In addition to the traditional red beets, there are also golden and white varieties. An unusual variety is “candy cane”—the red exterior gives way to an interior of red and white rings that resemble the colors of a candy cane. Harvest takes place at around 50 days, so plan your plant date accordingly.



Rainbow Carrots (*Daucus carota*)

We're all familiar with the typical grocery store carrot that's bright orange. There's another variety, rainbow carrots, that live up to their name. Ranging in colors from orange to yellow to white they have the same shape and taste as their orange cousins. One truly odd color is purple. Its deep purple outside yields to a creamy yellow orange when cut open. Carrots can tolerate cooler temperatures, so they're ideal for the fall into winter garden in our area. Direct sow the seeds in a prepared bed. You can also grow carrots in a pot providing you allow for the correct depth to let the carrots develop deep roots.

Growing and serving these unusual varieties will make for a colorful and interesting dining experience!



Rainbow carrots. Photo credit: Creative Commons.

References:

Romanesco Broccoli <https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/agriculture/broccoli/>

Chinese Long Beans <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/hs1268>

Easter Egg Radishes University of Illinois Extension <https://extension.illinois.edu/veggies/radish.cfm>

Candy Cane Beets <https://extension.illinois.edu/veggies/beet.cfm>

Rainbow Carrots <https://extension.illinois.edu/veggies/carrot.cfm>

Hops Field Day

By Carol and Ray Marshall, Master Gardeners

On May 23, 2019, UF Gulf Coast Research and Education hosted an informative “Hops Field Day”.

With the explosion of craft breweries in Florida, interest in growing hops (*Humulus lupulus*) locally has increased. In the United States, hops primarily grow in the Pacific Northwest. Florida’s subtropical climate did not initially appear suitable for growth. However, UF researchers, with support from several sponsors, have created a hop yard to study the viability of growing them here.

There are 200 varieties of hops, 80 of which are used in commercial production. 14 cultivars are on trial at the research center in Wimauma. Under evaluation are hop yard construction, cultivar selection, photoperiod manipulation, cultural practices, and pest management. They have determined there are two seasons for harvesting hops in Florida—May/June and October/November.

Hops grow vertically on a trellis. The research center is experimenting with different trellis heights and configurations as well as plant spacing. A soil with good drainage, enhanced with two inches of compost and with a pH of 6.0 to 6.8 is the optimal environment. Two drip irrigation lines run alongside each row of plants to provide optimal watering to plant root areas. Landscape fabric provides weed control. Research is presently determining the best fertilization and water rates.



All photo credits: Ray Marshall.

Two varieties seem to be performing best in our Florida climate. The 'Cascade' cultivar performed well in the spring planting. 'Galena' performed better in the fall. These varieties seem to resist diseases and pests affecting hops more effectively than most other cultivars. Seedlings should be from tissue cultures and not from rhizomes. This helps avoid disease.

Hops require an extended day length for Florida growing. They need a five- to six-hour extension in order to receive 17 hours of light per day, beginning when the plants are three feet tall. LED flowering lamps, spaced 20 feet apart, provide the extended hours. The extended time controls flowering and promotes bine growth. A bine is a plant that climbs by its shoots growing in a helix around a support. This distinguishes it from a vine, which climbs using tendrils or suckers.

Pests most often seen affecting the crops were spider mites and root knot nematodes. Constructing windbreaks around the perimeter of the hop yard can minimize bine and cone blight.

The initial results are promising but more research is necessary to assess the long-term viability of hops growing in Florida. They are presently expanding the hop yard from 0.8 acres to 2.2 acres in order to study different trellis configurations.

Good communication between growers and brewers is key to making commercial hops growing successful in Florida.

For additional information about hops, see <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/ep/ep48800.pdf>.



Invasive Plants: On Sale Now!

By James Stevenson, UF/IFAS Pinellas County Extension Services
Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center

The Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council (FLEPPC)'s 2019 list of invasive plants is now available. Every few years they update this list. Sadly, each time there is at least one new plant added.

If you are not familiar with this publication, this list categorizes plants proven to “alter native plant communities by displacing native species, changing community structures or ecological functions, or hybridizing with natives” (FLEPPC 2019 list). These are Category 1 invasive plants. You can bet the big, baddies are on this list, the ones that even non-horticulturists would have heard of. These include species such as Brazilian peppertree (*Schinus terebinthifolia*), water hyacinth (*Eichornia crassipes*), and melaleuca (*Melaleuca quinquenervia*).



But surprisingly, there are plants on this list that are not only familiar landscape plants, but are also still available for purchase! The reason is that this is not a regulatory list. Rather, it's an educational tool. Those of us who provide outreach and education in our communities can use it to inform homeowners about better choices for their landscapes. Nearly 20 professionals and amateurs with great experience in the field and knowledge of established populations of exotic plants in the state create this list. There is no “plant police” nor would it be likely that we would ever create such an entity. Americans don’t like to be told what to do; that’s why we came here in the first place! But seriously, this list is advisory; creating a demand for plants not on this list is preferable to shutting down a nursery for producing plants, invasive or not, that are in-demand by the consumer.

We checked the online search database for wholesale plants, Betrock’s Plant Search, and found the following plants still in production. Now, these are just those offered by nurseries that participate in Betrock’s site. There may be many more “under the radar.” Here’s what we found for plants still for sale, and in demand that are Category 1 plants:

- Asparagus fern, *Asparagus aethiopicus* (sold as *A. densiflorus*, including ‘Springeri’ and ‘Myersii’ cultivars)
- Orchid tree, *Bauhinia variegata*
- Taro, *Colocasia esculenta*

- Surinam cherry, *Eugenia uniflora*
- Lantana, *Lantana strigocamara*
- Glossy privet, *Ligustrum lucidum*
- Wart fern, *Microsorium grossum* (*M. scolopendria*)
- Nandina, *Nandina domestica* and cultivars
- Guava, *Psidium guajava*
- Mexican Petunia, *Ruellia simplex*
- Schefflera, *Schefflera actinophylla* (the dwarf schleffera, *S. arboricola*, is not on the list)
- Arrowhead vine, *Syngonium podophyllum*
- Oyster plant, *Tradescantia spathacea*

Category 2 plants are those that we're keeping an eye on. These are plants "that have increased in abundance or frequency but have not yet altered Florida plant communities to the extent of Category 1 species" (FLEPPC 2019 list). These plants are naturally reproducing in natural areas, but do not "take over." Some surprises here!

- Wax begonia, *Begonia cucullata*
- Pothos, *Epipremnum pinnatum* 'Aureum'
- Mother of millions, life plant, *Kalanchoe x houghtontonii* and *K. pinnata*
- Chinese fan palm, *Livistonia chinensis*
- Bottlebrush tree, *Melaleuca viminalis* (*Callistemon viminalis*)
- Senegal date palm, *Phoenix reclinata*
- Wedelia, *Sphagneticola trilobata*
- Queen palm, *Syagrus romanzoffiana*
- Washington fan palm, *Washingtonia robusta*
- Chinese wisteria, *Wisteria sinensis*
- Elephant ear, *Xanthosoma sagittifolium*

Pick up a copy of this year's list from your local UF/IFAS Extension office or view it online (with lots more information) on the FLEPPC website: www.fleppc.org

Florida Fresh Native Fruit

By Theresa Badurek, Urban Horticulture Extension Agent and Master Gardener Coordinator

Florida is a wonderful place to grow all kinds of delicious things to eat. Some of those things can even be native plants. Let's explore some tasty native fruit we can grow and enjoy in our home gardens!

Beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*)

You probably already know and love this plant as a low maintenance ornamental with graceful arching branches. But, as you may have heard, the fruit is edible for us too—not just the birds. What the fruit lacks in flavor and texture it makes up for in bright, beautiful color. Beautyberry jelly made from fruit you grew yourself makes a lovely addition to your morning toast or a great gift. You can also get creative with the fruit and top salads and other dishes with the colorful little berries. Beautyberry flowers from spring into summer with fruit ready in fall and into winter. Plant some now if you don't already have them. Be sure not to gather all of the berries—leave some for the birds! For more information from UF/IFAS on beautyberry:

<http://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/trees-and-shrubs/shrubs/beautyberry.html>.

Blackberry (*Rubus* spp.)

Blackberries are in the rose family with sweet little white flowers. Blackberries are ripe right now—May through June in our part of Florida. There are native, wild species of this plant for wet or dry locations so you can pick one to suit your site. There are also many commercially available improved varieties. Choose your cultivar carefully unless planting a wild blackberry; many have chilling requirements we may not achieve. The ones with the lowest chilling hour needs are 'Kiowa', 'Arapahoe', and 'Shawnee'. Blackberries are delicious right off the canes or in jams, jellies, and pies. You can also visit the blackberry planter in the tropical fruit garden at the Florida Botanical Gardens to see them in person. For more information, check the UF/IFAS factsheet on blackberry:

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/HS/HS10400.pdf>.



Top: Beautyberry fruit. Middle: Beautyberry flowers. Bottom: Blackberry. All photo credits: UF/IFAS.

Elderberry (*Sambucus nigra ssp. canadensis*)

If you have a wet area in your landscape or live near a pond or stream then this is a great plant for you. Both flowers and ripe fruit can be eaten but you must cook them first. The plant is a large deciduous shrub that needs moist soil, growing up to 10 ft. tall or so, and about as wide. Lovely umbels of delicate, small white flowers bloom throughout the year, but especially in spring and into summer. Ripe berries are a tempting purplish-black that hang down in clusters from the ends of branches. The most common uses are in jelly and syrup but you can use them to make elderberry wine too—just don't forget to share! For more information, read the UF/IFAS factsheet on elderberry:

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/files/ST/ST57800.pdf>.

Sea Grape (*Coccoloba uvifera*)

But what about the coast-dwellers? What can you grow in your salty-air backyards? Sea grape, of course! You will need both male and female plants for fruit production (that's right, it's dioecious). Plant this large shrub with big round leaves as a privacy hedge you can harvest. Sea grape is sensitive to frost so plant it in a protected area if there is a risk of cold temperatures where you live. You can eat the fruit fresh off the plant or make it into jelly. By the end of each summer, you will have juicy, dark purple fruit to enjoy. They don't ripen all at once either, so you can pick and enjoy a little at a time. For more information, visit the UF/IFAS website on sea grape: <http://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/trees-and-shrubs/trees/sea-grape.html>.

Recipes for all these plants and more can be found in "Florida's Edible Wild Plants" by Peggy Sias Lantz.



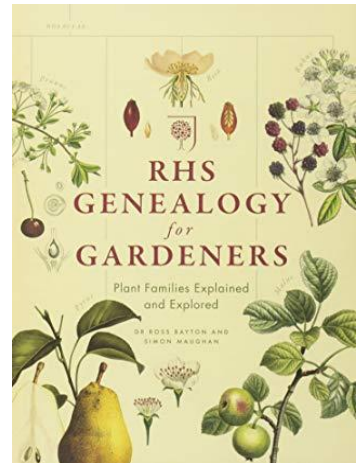
Top: Flowering elderberry.
Middle: Sea grape.
Bottom: Sea grape hedge.
All photo credits: UF/IFAS.

Book Review: RHS Genealogy for Gardeners

By Dianne L. Fecteau, Master Gardener

Browsing in a garden shop recently, I came across the book, "RHS Genealogy for Gardeners" by Dr. Ross Bayton and Simon Maughan.

This book is an easy to understand reference guide to 73 of the most common plant families. As the authors write in the preface, the family groupings help make sense of the "enormous biological diversity of the plant kingdom, by piecing together family likenesses and genealogical connections" (p.6). This information can lead to becoming a better gardener. For example, in designing a garden, knowing that plants in a plant family share certain characteristics can help you decide on individual plants with similar needs or help you mix plants to create effective displays.



The book includes a plant "family tree" created by comparing DNA samples from a range of plants. This family tree shows the progress of plant evolution from now extinct ancestors to the modern plant families we know today. There are keys to help with identification.

In two- to four-page descriptions of each family, the authors provide information on that family's characteristics, size, origins, and range. Each family description includes colorful botanical illustrations and diagrams. Scattered throughout are "Uses For" boxes that discuss the family as to its food, economic, or landscape value. In a few cases, the authors provide gardening tips but this is not the focus of the book. There is a glossary of botanical terms and a comprehensive index.

Reference books can often be dull. This book, though, with its easily read descriptions and illustrations, is one you could enjoy browsing through on a summer afternoon.

Save the Date!

36th Florida Master Gardener Volunteer Conference

The 36th Florida Master Gardener Volunteer Conference will be returning to the Embassy Suites Lake Buena Vista South in Kissimmee, Florida on October 20-23, 2019. Get more information and reserve your room. <https://conference.ifas.ufl.edu/gardener/index.html>

We Have a Facebook Page!

MG Dolores McCoy has created a Facebook page for us. Send photos, event announcements, and posts to Delores at dmccoy639@gmail.com if you want to contribute to the page. The link for the page is: <https://www.facebook.com/pinellascounty.mastergardeners/>



Send your Articles and Photos

The next Issue of *The Dirt* is October 2019. The deadline for articles is September 30. 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 dianne@kendiacorp.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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