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#### Lake County MGV Mission Statement

The mission of UF/IFAS Lake County Master Gardener Volunteers is to assist extension agents by providing horticultural education programs and current research-based information to the public through plant clinics, community outreach and Discovery Gardens.

# Garden Scoop

## Native Weeds for Butterflies

BY K.S. Kennen

In any garden or lawn a weed is a plant in an unwanted place and the determination can be considered subjective. I know I don't get upset when milkweed sprouts unexpectedly in my side flower beds, when it first started in my backyard flower beds. But I am sure my neighbors would not want any milkweed in their yard and would consider it a true weed and remove it quickly. The five weeds that are mentioned in this article are all host or nectar plants for butterflies.



Milkweed K.S.Kennen

Milkweed is one type of plant that has the word "weed" as part of its name and is more accepted in gardens and cultivated by many gardeners, especially those with a "butterfly garden". There are 21 native milkweeds in Florida and it can be confusing since the monarch caterpillar will munch on all of them but seems to prefer the following three: common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*), swamp milkweed (*A. incarnata*), and butterfly weed (*A. tuberosa*) which I have in my yard.

Porterweed (*Stachytarpetta jamaicensis*) is another plant with weed as part of its common name. It is a short-lived perennial with delicate blue flowers on a spike like stem. It is a popular nectar plant and host to the tropical buckeye butterfly which is sometimes seen in central Florida.

The next weed to consider is frogfruit (*Phyla nodiflora*) which can become a problem in lawns because it grows low like a ground cover and may not be noticed until its small white flowers bloom. This plant is not only a great nectar plant but also is host for the white peacock, phaon crescent, and common buckeye.

Virginia pepperweed (*Lepidium virginicum*) is another host plant for both the great southern and checkered white butterflies. This plant is very troublesome in pastures. The plant has small white flowers and a seed that has a peppery taste. The plant is edible and was in the past used as a substitute for pepper and the leaves were used in salads.

One weed that seems to have been so prolific this year not only in yards, but in our highway medians is the Spanish needle or *Bidens Alba* which has a small, white flower that attracts not only butterflies but other pollinators. It is host for the little, yellow butterfly called dainty sulphur (*Nathalis iole*).

The nature of weeds is to be highly prolific because of the large number of seeds and easy dispersal as evidenced by the "needle" of *Bidens Alba* that can hitchhike on any article of our clothing. Coexistence with weeds can be achieved by containing them in a controlled area such as pots or even walled off areas. So think "to weed or not to weed?" is that the question?



Porterweed UF/IFAS



Frogfruit UF/IFAS



Pepperweed K.S.Kennen



Bidens Alba K.S.Kennen

For more information contact: UF/IFAS Extension, Lake County Office [lakemg.ifas@ufl.edu](mailto:lakemg.ifas@ufl.edu) ▪ (352) 343-4101 ▪ FAX (352) 343-2767

# To Weed or Not to Weed

BY Reggie Doherty, MGV

I've been attending several webinars these past few years and some have been on weeds. Last month the [opening article](#) defined weeds as, "any plant that is unwanted in your yard or garden." With this in mind, the following weeds have pretty flowers and are attractive to pollinators, so I let SOME of them (seen below) grow in my [lawn](#) and sandy areas.

Henbit, *Lamium amplexicaule*, is a winter annual or biennial and a member of the mint family. It is a broadleaf, square stemmed weed with an attractive blue-purple flower arranged in whorls which are tubular in shape and usually blooms in springtime.

More info: [Henbit](#) | [Henbit Control](#) | [MREC](#) | [IPM](#)



Photos by Rutgers N JAES CE



Photo by Dr. John Meade, weed scientist emeritus  
Rutgers NJAES Cooperative Extension



Photos by R.Doherty, MGV



Red Spiderling or Punarnava, *Boerhavia diffusa*, is a fuzzy, trailing stemmed perennial weed with pink/red five lobed flowers that grows in both turf and bare areas. Historically it has been used medicinally for pain relief and other herbal remedies.

More info: [Red Spiderling](#) | [Uses](#)

Tassel flower is of the genus *Emilia* and both *Emilia fosbergii* (red bloom) and *Emilia sonchifolia* (purple bloom) can be found in lawns, gardens, pastures, etc. These annuals have seed dispersal by wind.

More info: EDIS [ENH1342](#) | Chris Marble [Video](#)



Chris Marble, UF IFAS



Photos by R.Doherty, MGV



Wood sorrel is of the genus *Oxalis* and is a cool season perennial with a three sectioned, heart-shaped leaf on each stem. The flowers can be pink, white, or yellow with five petals. In the past it was used to treat such things as scurvy, fever, nausea, mouth sores to name a few things.

More info: Chris Marble [Video](#) | [MREC](#) |

*Oxalis triangularis* AKA false shamrock or purple wood sorrel is often grown as a house plant in the northern states. It has leaves that close up at night or when disturbed. It is normally found only in Alachua and Leon counties.

<https://florida.plantatlas.usf.edu/plant.aspx?id=4317>

More info: [Purple shamrock](#) | EDIS [ENH1253](#) | [Caring for Oxalis](#)





# Plant Clinic Clatter

**Dear Master Gardener,**

I've heard some tricks to make my tomatoes grow better, such as adding sugar to the soil around the land to make the crop sweeter and adding Epsom salt to help them grow. Do you know if any of this is true? How and when can I grow tomatoes in Central Florida?



**DEAR HOMEOWNER,**

Tomatoes are not an easy crop to grow in Florida - or anywhere you try to grow tomatoes! First, let's address the statements you've heard from other tomato growers. Tomatoes absorb sugars through photosynthesis, not the soil. So, adding sugar to soil does nothing for your vegetables, but makes the ants very happy. Although Epsom salt contains magnesium, necessary to good growth of tomatoes, adding it to your soil also adds in a lot of salts. Over time, excess will destroy soil structure and leave your soil in bad shape. The better alternative is to simply add compost or worm castings to the soil to add natural nutrients that will help now and in the long term. However, some soils that may lack magnesium can benefit from a bit of Epsom salt.

Second, consider those things you can control to help your tomatoes grow better. The best time to plant tomatoes in central Florida is January through March then again September until frost. The most important thing about growing tomatoes is:

- 6-8 hours of full sun
- Well-drained soil
- Close to a water source (needs 1"/week when small then 2"/week)
- Area with good air flow and free of root competition

Learn more about how to grow/maintain: EDIS [publications](#) | UF/IFAS Vegetable [Gardening Guide](#) | *Florida Fruit & Vegetable Gardening* by Robert Bowden | EDIS: Tomato [Diseases](#) |

## Garden of the Month

The southwest garden has been chosen as the garden of the month. The master gardener for the lead in this garden is Diane Toth. The goal in this garden is to have only drought tolerant plants and plants that can survive in the hot, humid Florida summers. The main plants in this garden are in the Cactaceae family of which prickly pear (*Opuntia* spp.) is a central one since there are six that are native to Florida. This is a low maintenance garden filled with slow growing plants. For further information refer to:

<https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/houseplants/cactus.html>.



### Master Gardener Volunteer Plant Clinic

Bring your plant, insects, and soil problems to our Plant Clinic for advice Monday through Friday 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. The plant clinic is staffed by volunteers. Please call ahead at 352-343-4101 to be sure that someone is in the clinic to assist you with your question. You may also send photos of your local problems to Jamielyn Daugherty at [jdaugherty@ufl.edu](mailto:jdaugherty@ufl.edu) or to the plant clinic at [lakemg@ifas.ufl.edu](mailto:lakemg@ifas.ufl.edu).

# What's Cooking?

## Sweet Potatoes Two Ways

BY Lori Johnson  
Family & Consumer Science Agent

Did you know: Sweet potatoes are packed with Vitamin A to keep our vision strong and Vitamin C to give our immune system a boost? They also have fiber, remember to eat the skin! Fiber helps keep our hearts beating strong and our digestive system on track. We also get some heart health from potassium which is also found in sweet potatoes

Storage Tips: Make to store in a cool dark, dry, place and keep out of the refrigerator.

### Sweet Potato Fries 2 Ways

Recipes adapted from: All Recipes and Taste of Home

#### Sweet Potato Fries with Blue Cheese

##### Ingredients:

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 medium sweet potatoes
- 1 tablespoon apricot preserves
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 3 tablespoons crumbled blue cheese

##### Directions:

1. Clean, peel and cut sweet potatoes into ½ inch thick strips.
2. In a large skillet, heat with oil over medium heat.
3. Add sweet potatoes and cook until tender and light brown, turn occasionally, about 15 minutes.
4. Add the apricot preserves, stir to coat.
5. Sprinkle with salt and top with blue cheese.

#### Roasted Sweet Potato Fries

##### Ingredients:

- 2 medium sweet potatoes
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- ½ teaspoon paprika

##### Directions:

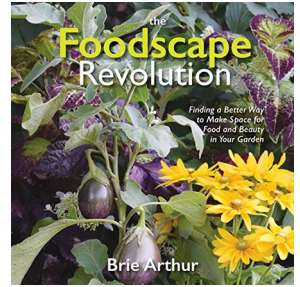
1. Pre-heat oven to 450°F
2. Clean, peel and cut sweet potatoes into ½ inch thick strips.
3. Whisk olive oil and seasonings together in a large bowl.
4. Add potatoes and toss to coat.
5. Line a baking sheet with foil.
6. Spread potatoes out in a single layer on baking sheet.
7. Roast in oven for 15-20 minutes, turning halfway through baking time.



# Growing Sweet Potatoes

By Bev Parsons, MGV

A couple of years ago at one of the Master Gardener meetings, we had a speaker named Brie Arthur who had just published a book entitled *Foodscape Revolution*. One of the concepts she was promoting was planting food crops in the landscape. Such a great idea. One crop that worked especially well was sweet potatoes. As many of you may know, there are black and green ornamental potato plants used primarily in pots that spill over the pots attractively. Regular sweet potato plants also work well as a ground cover growing 8–15' in length and look beautiful in the landscape. I did this one year and was pleased with the results as well as the harvesting of sweet potatoes.



Sweet potatoes are a warm weather crop and love sandy soil so they're a natural for Florida. They can be grown in the ground or in containers. These warm weather plants can be planted throughout the spring up until June. They take about four months to develop and don't require much fertilizer. They are typically grown from slips which are baby plants that sprout from a mature sweet potato. While you could grow slips yourself, it is good to start out with certified disease-free plants or cuttings from a reputable garden supply or you can get them mail order as well. Florida favorite varieties include "Centennial", 'Beauregard,' and 'Vardaman' which is a bush type that's great for smaller gardens.

If you want to grow your own slips, which sounds like fun, each sweet potato can produce up to 50 slip sprouts. Just be aware that some potatoes are treated so they will not sprout and may not be disease resistant. But, if you want to try growing your own plant take a sweet potato and cut it in half or in large sections and place each section in a jar or glass of water with half of the potato below water and half above using toothpicks to hold it in place. Put in a warm place for a few weeks and hopefully your potato cuttings will be covered with leafy sprouts on top and roots on the bottom.



Barbara H. Smith, ©2016 HGIC, Clemson Extension

Then take each sprout and twist it off of the sweet potato. Place this sprout in a shallow bowl with the bottom of the stem in water and the leaves hanging over the rim of the bowl. In a few days roots will emerge from the bottom of each new plant. Slips are ready to plant when the roots are about an inch long. Try planting them in the late afternoon on a sunny day that is NOT windy. They should be planted about 12-14 inches apart in prepared loose soil.

When harvesting they need to dry to thicken their skin. Place them in a dark, warm room for at least two weeks before eating. This allows the starch in the roots to convert to sugar. Once done curing, store them in a cool, dry pantry –NOT the refrigerator.

<https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/edibles/vegetables/sweet-potatoes.html>



## Treemendous: Buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*)

Jamie Daugherty, RHA

Are you looking for a plant with a wide range to add interest to your landscape? Look no further! The button bush is a large shrub or small tree (10-20ft) found throughout much of the US. With an extensive range from USDA Hardiness Zones 5-10, this plant can grow in at least part of all but 2 of the lower 48 states. In central Florida, this native plant has distinct flower balls present from March through August. Naturally found in wetlands, this plant is a wonderful option for a rain garden, lake shoreline, or other wet location with full sun to part shade.

In addition to the visual interest this plant offers, there are also several environmental benefits. Wildlife love this plant! Pollinators are attracted to the flowers and birds to the seeds and shelter its branches offer. While this is a great plant for wildlife, the leaves and other parts are toxic to us, so be sure to wear gloves when pruning.

If you want to keep the shrub small, you can prune it to your desired size. Keep up with the pruning for the long-term health of the shrub. With no major pests or diseases to worry about, this can be a great addition to your landscape.



Photo by Jim Davis, UF/IFAS



This tree/bush is deciduous and is a slow grower but its spring and summer flowering can add interest to the landscape. This plant is considered native and often used in butterfly gardens as a nectar source. For more information refer to the university publication FPS117 (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/FP117>).

# Classes and Events

## 3/13: Facts of Growing Fruit Trees

2-3pm Free and no registration

Mount Dora Public Library

MGV Leslie Lightbourne presenter

## 3/15: Planting for Butterflies

11am-12pm Free and no registration

Marianne Beck Memorial Library, Howey-in-the-Hills

MGV Karen Kennen presenter

## 3/15: Homeowner Tree Pruning

11am-1pm Register at: [https://ufl.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_yRHkNsEpSfGhV9jOaVTUzg](https://ufl.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_yRHkNsEpSfGhV9jOaVTUzg)

Webinar: Zoom

Jamie Daugherty, Agent

## 3/19: Saturday in the Garden – Composting (Fee - \$7)

10 am – 11 am Register at: <http://lakediscoverygardensprogramseventbrite.com/>

Discovery Garden – Lake County Extension Tavares

## 3/30: Water Education Day (Fee - \$15)

Discovery Gardens.

Event is limited to 120 registrants.

Register at: <http://lakediscoverygardensprogramseventbrite.com/>

This closed garden event offers education in 8 different areas related to water conservation in the home landscape.

## Discovery Gardens

Please plan a visit to over twenty different gardens located at 1951 Woodlea Road in Tavares. The hours are Monday through Friday and the third Saturday of the month from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. Just like your yard, Discovery Garden changes with the seasons and will reveal something new with each visit. The spring plants are beginning to bloom.



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