

# The Green Thumb



Dear Gardeners,

Like many Florida gardeners, summer is a time to try to tame the weeds. Here, Sara Brunger, MG since 2006, sits among the weeds in Bed 6 during the monthly demo garden workday. It's amazing how many weeds a group of dedicated gardeners can pull in a few hours! Weeding as a group is pretty fun, too!

Sincerely,

*Mark Jamig*

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## Project Makeover

Since our last newsletter, many garden renovations are in the works and two have come to fruition at the Leon County Extension Office. Beds 4 and 5 have undergone the most changes, with new landscape designs created by Master Gardener Martha Williams for both of these beds. The vision of the updated Bed 5 was to place plant groups together within the bed to enhance organization. There is a rose garden, tropical plant area, pollinator plant area, succulent garden and a giant circular vegetable garden. With the amazing hard work and diligence of Master Gardener Howard Kirk, new paths were installed by laying lighter-colored mulch, which highlighted the darker-colored mulch in the plantings areas. In Bed 4, a pollinator garden was installed, thanks to Master Gardener Clara Mullins and her team. Native plants were chosen when possible to provide many host and nectar plants. Pollinators are already visiting the plants. A trellis was installed to hide the AC unit, and are now being entwined with all native vines, including wisteria, Dutchman's pipe, coral honeysuckle, and passion vine. Please come by the Extension Office to check out these new eye-popping and plant highlighting bed designs.



## Diehard Natives for your Florida Garden

There are several native plants worth recognizing right now in our demonstration gardens. These natives are easy to maintain, eye-catching, have visual appeal throughout the seasons and survive our variable weather year to year.

One might ask why should one plant native? Professor Sandy Wilson from the University of Florida's Department of Environmental Horticulture states that native plants are great Florida-Friendly options for your landscape because they are already adapted to our local temperatures and rainfall patterns, are low maintenance, provide food for wildlife, have lower nutrient requirements, and have fewer pest and disease problems. In her classes, Dr. Wilson defines a native plant as a species that occurred within Florida state boundaries prior to European contact according to the best available documentation.

Norcini (2006) estimated that native plant sales in Florida were  $\approx 11\%$  of all ornamental products produced in 2005, or worth roughly \$316 million. This percentage has risen steadily in the past ten years as the demand for native plants increases.

In our demonstration gardens, *Rudbeckia fulgida* (top picture) and *R. hirta* 'Indian Summer,' *Vaccinium darrowii* (bottom picture) and *Zamia integrifolia* are the three outstanding plants currently catching our eye.

*Rudbeckia fulgida*, or Black-eyed Susan, has high salt and drought tolerance. It easily re-seeds itself and provides warm yellow-orange flowers in the late spring, summer, and fall. *R. hirta* 'Indian Summer' is an All-American Selections winner similar to *R. fulgida*, but has huge blooms with an egg-yolk orange center.

*Vaccinium darrowii* is a native blueberry that is perfect for containers or garden beds offering bright, indirect light. A low pH, well drained soil is best. This blueberry is compact, staying around 3 feet tall and wide and produces small, but flavorful blueberries. Its foliage turns red/pink during winter, offering year long visual appeal.

*Zamia integrifolia*, or coontie, is a small palm-like evergreen and is Florida's only native cycad. It stays green year round and is a lovely backdrop plant for the landscape. It has bright orange seeds that offer a bright pop of color in the spring/summer. It is a larval food host for the Atala butterfly in southeastern Florida.



## The Summer Vegetable Garden

Our landscapes in North Florida tend to look a little ragged come late summer as the heat becomes oppressive. Though the main goal of gardening during the summer is to keep maintenance at a low level, there are a few crops that can be planted at this time – you do not have to let your spring garden go to the weeds.

My favorite option is utilizing cover crops in the summer. This is a great way to put your garden 'to rest,' coming back to a relatively weed free and nutrient fortified garden in the fall. Using leguminous cover crops such as iron-clay pea, cowpea, or sunn hemp will add nitrogen to the soil, but all cover crops serve to prevent erosion, aid in nutrient cycling, increase soil organic matter, and conserve soil moisture. Certain cover crops such as sunn hemp are allelopathic (meaning compounds are excreted that inhibit germination and growth of young plants), which is an important factor to consider when planning your fall garden.

Heat loving crops that can be seeded currently are butterbeans, sunflowers, zinnias, loofah, chayote squash (produces fruit in the fall). Roselle, peppers, eggplant, and okra can be transplanted. There are many perennial edibles (vegetables or fruits that will come back year to year) to choose from as well, such as banana, ginger, arrowroot, and tree spinach. Most of these perennial edibles are tropical in origin, and so will do well in excessive moisture and heat. Please come and tour the UF/IFAS Extension Leon County Demonstration Vegetable Garden to see some of these summer crops actively growing.

## Event Summary

In March, Dr. Holly Ober, from the NFREC, partnered with us to host two bat-related workshops. One was a general overview of bats and their amazing biology. That workshop ended just in time to watch the bats leave our Demo Garden bathouse for the evening. We followed that with a bat-house building workshop where participants constructed their very own bat house. Each bat house can provide shelter for up to 150 bats!

We had another amazing MG CEU trip to Helen Roth's Spring Canyon property where we saw mountain laurel in all its glory, flame azalea, green-eyed sunflower, and Florida anise. These were just a few of the hundreds of native plant species to see at this piece of land that is part of the unique Apalachicola bluffs and ravines ecosystem.



In the community, we set up a Ask-A-Master Gardener booth at the Tallahassee Garden Club's Spring Bazaar, LeMoyne Chain of Parks Festival, and the Lake Jackson Aquatic Preserve Fun Paddle to spread horticulture information to the community. Hopefully you saw us there.

On the commercial side of things, classes were held to assist professional landscapers in obtaining the proper certification exams and/or CEUs needed to apply fertilizers and pesticides. Not only does this keep them legal, but educates them on the best practices to create beautiful landscapes while protecting themselves and the environment. We also hosted a fun Tree ID Walk to get arborists some needed CEU credits.

Mark and Molly talked decomposition in two separate events this past quarter – one on vermicomposting and the other on traditional hot composting. Both events were well attended and Leon County's Sustainability Office partnered with us to provide complimentary counter-top compost collection bins to attendees. Go partnership!

And finally, we can not forget about our Open House in May. Over 700 members of the community attended, and a good time was had by all. A big thank you to the garden clubs, TAPP, FWC, Apalachee Beekeepers Association, Kona Ice and others for making this event such a success. Our plant sale raised very good money for the horticulture program and 4-H, which will help to maintain the gardens and go towards improvements for this year.



## Calendar of Events

### **Demonstration Garden Workday**

July 16th

8:00am

Extension Office

### **Open House Volunteer Celebration for MG's**

July 17th

5:30pm-8:00pm

Goodwood Museum-Jubilee Cottage

### **Marine Life in Cuba C.E.U**

July 23rd

10:00am-11:30am

Extension Office



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# Enter to Win at the North Florida Fair!

Many of us have attended the North Florida Fair– but did you know that any citizen in North Florida can enter to win? There are dozens of categories to choose from and the process is as simple as filling out an application and submitting entries on time.

The North Florida Fair awards about \$80,000 in cash prizes to north Florida citizens who create and grow various items. Now is the time to begin planning for this year’s fair, which is set for November 8-18.

Anyone living within the 24 counties that comprise North Florida – from the Suwannee River, west to the Alabama line – is eligible to enter as many of the exhibit categories as they would like. But pace yourself, as there are hundreds of categories from which to choose! The exhibits are arranged into various departments, such as Poultry, Rabbits, Home Agriculture, Baked Goods, and Fine Arts and Crafts. Within each department, there are various classes that are split into certain age divisions (i.e., youth only) or experience levels (i.e., amateur vs. professional). All of the details for each department and class can be found on the [North Florida Fair website \(http://northfloridafair.com/\)](http://northfloridafair.com/), under the Exhibitors tab. Participants will want to pay close attention to the application and submittal deadlines for each specific category, as most items are due for judging the week prior to the fair opening.

Two departments Tallahassee gardeners might be interested in checking out are Department 410 Capital City Garden Club Flower Show and Department 530 Home Agriculture Department.

Classes within the Department 410 Capital City Garden Club include annuals, perennials, flower arrangements, succulents, fruiting shrubs, landscape, and tea table design with a floral centerpiece. Some examples of classes within the Department 530 Home Agriculture Department include canned fruit, juice, canned vegetables, fresh eggs, pickles, and relishes.



Mrs. Henry C. Mills in 1966 with her African violets at the North Florida Fair flower show. Photo by Dan Stainer – State Archives of Florida.



A youth showcasing his prize winning chicken. Photo by Aly Donovan.

See any class that catches your eye? The options are endless! Check out the above mentioned website for rules and regulations and details on cash prizes.