Welcome to the 1st Edition of Extension Insights. We aim to keep you informed by highlighting some of our best work and noteworthy educational events. This spring and summer we will be providing educational programs for all of our target audiences, many of which will be outdoors, allowing for that fresh Florida air and sunshine we have all been craving. Some of these include our Florida Water Stewards program, Preserve Tours led by our Master Gardener Volunteers, mushroom hikes, the MRSWCD Spring Farm tour and our 4-H Golf Tournament in June, just to name a few. So far in 2022, we celebrated a very successful Manatee County Fair themed, “There’s no Time Like Fair Time.” Extension faculty and staff decorated an informative vendor booth and participated in youth livestock and plant exhibits and show sales with a total of 460 exhibitors. Our Master Gardeners hosted informational sessions and plant giveaways at the Barbara Davis Educational Gardens during the fair. Florida Sea Grant Agent, Dr. Angela Collins, hosted “Dock Talks” at the 2021 Cortez Commercial Fishing Festival on February 19-20, celebrating the community’s commercial fishing heritage. Residential Horticulture Agent, Alyssa Vinson, hosted “Treequest” tagging prominent trees throughout our preserves to teach our citizens about important native tree species. Our Agriculture agents have been out and about meeting producers and landscape professionals face-to-face again, providing research-based information and practical solutions. In 2021 we sharpened our virtual teaching skills learned in 2020 and have emerged in 2022 with a “new normal.” We use virtual learning to broaden our reach, while resuming much needed in-person interactions. In November of 2021 we welcomed a new Dean for Extension, Dr. Andra Johnson, who will bring a fresh set of ideas and lead in reaching our Extension goals in 2022 and beyond. Find out more about Dr. Johnson here: https://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/news/2021/09/07/andra-johnson-extension-dean/
Awards and Accomplishments

Residential Horticulture Master Gardener Volunteer Program

- Award of Excellence Communications at the State Level
- Award of Excellence Individual Communications at the State Level
- David Gibby International Search for Excellence Award

Florida Sea Grant

- Florida Sea Grant 2021 Leveraged Funding Award, presented to Angela Collins in recognition of the multiple externally funded grants she has attained.

Fast Facts

**36**
Irrigation & Landscape Evaluations were completed by our Mobile Irrigation Lab

**49**
pesticide exams were administered

Over **110**
students attended the Manasota Regional Environton at Oscar Scherer State Park

The 18th Annual Farm City Week Beef Workshop and Prospect Show was held on November 20th with approximately **70** animals entered and **65** youth participants

Master Gardener Volunteers delivered children’s tree education programs to **70** individuals in the demonstration garden during the county fair
Featured Article

By Michelle Atkinson and Brad Buck, UF

Michelle Atkinson, Environmental Horticulture Agent, sees potential for Lakewood Ranch to teach the state important lessons about how to reduce the incidence of green rivers and red tides without homeowners having to do a thing. Atkinson and her colleagues at the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences are conducting experiments at five stormwater ponds to see whether they can clean water — and not just hold it. What they learn at these ponds could have huge implications for Florida. But until recently we had no idea how huge.

As the rainy season approaches, stormwater from lawns, driveways and roofs drains onto hard surfaces or across lawns making its way to stormwater ponds. As stormwater flows into these ponds, it can bring excess nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen with it. The pollutants can come from such sources as excess fertilizer, yard and pet waste and are captured in any of the 76,000 stormwater ponds scattered around Florida.

Left untreated, phosphorus and nitrogen can wind up in natural bodies of water, such as nearby lakes and rivers. While stormwater ponds are built primarily to control flooding from rainwater, they’re also designed to remove nutrients that run off urban landscapes. Stormwater ponds don’t always meet this goal.

The University of Florida researchers are trying to change this. Specifically, researchers with the UF Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) want to use plants to absorb the nutrients in stormwater ponds. They have started in Manatee County, thanks to $50,000 given by the county to install plants in and around stormwater ponds — and, if they see success, they’ll take their project statewide.

“What we learn can be applied to existing and new stormwater ponds in Florida’s rapidly expanding residential landscapes,” said Basil Iannone, a UF/IFAS Assistant Professor of Urban Landscape Ecology. “This is important because we need to find ways to limit the nutrients getting into Florida’s valuable water resources.”

Data are scant on how well plants control nutrients from escaping stormwater ponds. That’s why UF/IFAS...
UF/IFAS Extension Manatee County researchers are using a four-year, $197,000 EPA grant to find out more about how well plants control nitrogen and phosphorus. If the data show plants as beneficial, researchers hope to educate residents and businesses statewide to install plants as a Best Management Practice.

Iannone, principal investigator on the project, said the team will compare planted versus unplanted ponds in the plants’ ability to remove nutrients during the project.

“We want to see if the plants improve stormwater pond quality,” Iannone said. “We also want to gauge people’s willingness to adopt the idea of plantings, and we want to identify the best ways to educate people about the benefits of installing plants in and around stormwater ponds.”

In a prior project in Lakewood Ranch, also in Manatee County, UF/IFAS researchers found 20% less phosphorus in areas of stormwater ponds with plants grown in the water.

As helpful as plants might be, many residents view them as unsightly, according to UF/IFAS research. So, not only do scientists need proof that the plants keep the nutrients from escaping the stormwater ponds, they need the public to buy into the aesthetics of the plants.

Paul Monaghan, a UF/IFAS Associate Professor of Agricultural Education and Communication, will work with Atkinson to lead efforts to identify the best educational approaches to promote planting as a Best Management Practice. That includes speaking to, and getting feedback from, stakeholder groups, such as residents and business owners.
Program Highlights

Residential Horticulture
- New butterfly garden demonstration site in Holmes Beach
- Partnership with Parks and Natural Resources staff to develop tree education at the Nest at Robinson Preserve
- TreeQuest 2022, where prominent tree species were tagged in County Parks and Preserves, engaged 36 individuals, 75% of whom intend to spend more time in county parks/preserves

Livestock
- Hosted the 2022 Agriculturalist of the Year winner Mr. Cliff Coddington at the Kiwanis Club of Bradenton’s annual Farm City Week luncheon.
- Manatee County Fair Livestock Events including Beef, Steer, Goat, and Swine Breeding Weigh In and Show Assistance.
- Environmental Lands Management.

Soil Conservation
- Provided Soil and Water Conservation District and Natural Resources Conservation Service information at the November 5th quarterly meeting of the SW District Ag BMP Team.
- Coordinated and hosted Manasota Regional Envirothon at Oscar Scherer State Park attended by over 110 students from seven high schools in Manatee and Sarasota counties.
- Assisted with Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) FY2022 applicants

Sustainable Food Systems
- International presentation on Marketing Adoptions during Pandemic.
- Ag BMP Summit presentation on soil moisture sensor installation success stories.
- State School Garden Leadership presentation on seed saving – by Mack Lessig.

Family & Consumer Science
- Research projects: Pest Control for Homeowners, Homeflow Maintenance for homeowners, Family Nutrition Program (FNP), and SMART Couples Florida Celebration.
- Presented at the Southern Region NUEL Meeting. Theme “Social and Emotional Well Being”- SMART Couples Florida.
- Florida Marriage Handbook English/Spanish.

4-H
- Hosted the AgVenture program, where 3rd grade students learn about agriculture, during Farm City Week.
- FPL & Kiwanis Public Speaking Program where kids can hone their speaking skills and receive feedback.
- 135 items were exhibited by 45 exhibitors in the Manatee County Fair 4-H booth. Many clubs decorated hay bales and all of the shows/sales were a success. Three Manatee County 4-H youth recently participated in the Southern Region Teen Leadership Conference in Tennessee.

Environmental Horticulture
- Healthy Ponds Program - Online course started Jan 10 for 8 weeks.
- All In for Landscapes and Ponds podcast – topics to cover maintenance practices, etc. recording in Jan. Will start to release in March 2022.
- Pesticide Exams – 49 pesticide exams were administered in Manatee this quarter.

Gumbo Limbo tree tagged with a TreeQuest sign
Marine Extension / Florida Sea Grant

- Florida Sea Grant (PI): Developing optimal release strategies for the protected Goliath grouper relevant to recreational fisheries in Florida.
- All Clams on Deck, an initiative to restore estuaries and grow our coastal economy.

CED

- Farm City Week Proclamation to BOCC to celebrate the 2021 theme, "Pathways to Preservation."
- Presented “Writing Effective Self-Appraisals” at UF SW District Faculty meeting.
- Melich-1 and Melich-3 Advisory group for SW Region — This research reevaluates Nitrogen and Phosphorus fertilizer recommendations in Florida tomato and potato crops.

Commercial Horticulture

- Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association (FNGLA) Plant Show and Sale at the Manatee County Fair.
- Extension Faculty Development Academy held in Gainesville in both March and April.
- Provided educational materials for ornamental producers, pesticide applicators, as well as the general public.

Family and Nutrition Program

- Provided continued support to Manatee County community gardens in collaboration with the Community Gardens Program.
- Healthy Corner Store Initiative in Samoset.
- New Food Pantry in Palmetto.
- Supported produce vendors at Oneco Farmers Market to accept SNAP.

Recent Blog Posts

February

- Florida’s Fab Five: Plants by Alyssa Vinson (02/15/2022)
- Growing Alligator Pears by Lisa Hickey (02/08/2022)
- Manasota Regional Envirothon by Gail Somodi (02/02/2022)
- Gearing Up! A Coastal Community Celebrates the Return of the Cortez Commercial Fishing Festival by Angela Collins (02/01/2022)

January

- Strengthen your relationship through the Art of Effective Communication by Nelly Nelson (01/26/2022)
- Mulch is Magic by Alyssa Vinson (01/06/2022)

December

- The Gift of Trees by Alyssa Vinson (12/29/2022)
- Soils Subject of Farm City Week Speech Contest by Gail Somodi (12/09/2022)