

## BLUE PORTERWEED – A WORKHORSE GROUNDCOVER

By Sally Herb, Master Gardener Volunteer

Blue porterweed (*Stachytarpheta jamaicensis*) is a lovely and versatile groundcover (0.5 – 1' height) for large areas of the garden or yard that need filling. This short-lived perennial has year-round, delicate bluish-purple flowers on thick flower spikes that attract numerous pollinators and is the host for the tropical buckeye butterfly. Happiest in Zones 9B-11, blue porterweed will tolerate poor soils and is extremely drought tolerant. It has a short, central stem with radiating branches. Like many groundcovers, be aware that it may need to be pruned occasionally to keep it within bounds. The name “porterweed” comes from a foaming brew (resembling porter) that was made for medicinal use.

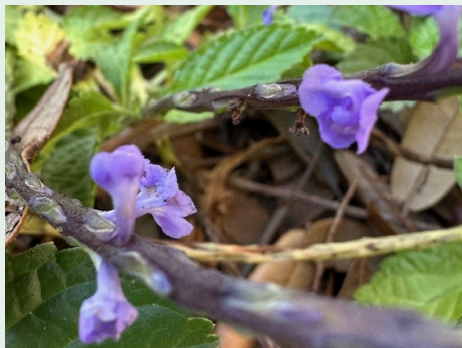
Purchase from a native nursery as there is a non-native (*Stachytarpheta urticifolia*) that has an erect growth habit and will easily reach 5'. Unfortunately, this is causing hybridization (*Stachytarpheta x intercedens*) and when this happens, the native plant is put at risk.

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/media/sfylifasufledu/monroe/docs/Blue-Porterweed-Stachytarpheta-jamaicensis.pdf>

<https://www.fnps.org/plant/stachytarpheta-jamaicensis>

<https://pinellas.fnpschapters.org/native-plant-profiles/porterweeds/>

Editor's note: *S. urticifolia* is usually considered a synonym of *S. cayennensis*. However, other reputable sources consider these to be separate species. In any case, take Sally's point to ONLY use the true native, *S. jamaicensis*!



Photos courtesy of  
Sally Herb

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# ASK A MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER



Master Gardener Volunteer Karen Holleran answers your email questions at [ManateeMG@gmail.com](mailto:ManateeMG@gmail.com). Or call our diagnostic plant clinic 941-722-4524 weekdays except Wednesdays from 9am to 4pm. In person visits are welcome at the Manatee County Extension office at 1303 17th St. W., Palmetto or at our mobile plant clinics (see below).

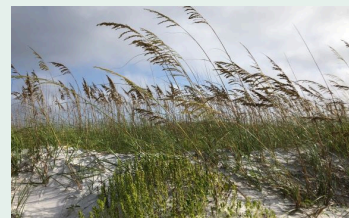
Dear MG, I just became the owner of this property on a saltwater canal in Palmetto, Florida. I would like to have groundcover placed in the area on the bank of the canal for the purpose of maintaining the integrity of the bank. Can you please suggest solution options for this purpose?



Resident Submission

Dear resident, There are very few plants that can tolerate their roots being exposed to salt water, especially for any length of time. Some options are Florida native sea oats (*Uniola paniculata*) and several species of cordgrass (*Spartina patens*, *S. spartinae*, *S. alterniflora*.) Low-growing groundcover plants include, shoreline purslane (*Sesuvium portulacastrum*) and silverhead or saltweed (*Gomphrena vermicularis*; formerly classified as *Blutaparon vermiculare*.) A colorful alternative is native railroad vine (*Ipomoea pes-caprae*) which will grow along the ground and up adjacent plants and structures.

These plants aren't going to be available in big box stores. I called a local native plant nursery and they carry all of them. For more information about these plants visit Florida Native Plant Society at: <https://www.fnps.org/> For silverhead, see: [http://floranorthamerica.org/Blutaparon vermiculare](http://floranorthamerica.org/Blutaparon_vermiculare)



Sea oats  
Photo Credit: Carrie Stevenson,  
University of Florida



Railroad vine  
Photo Credit: Stephen Brown,  
UF/IFAS

## MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER PLANT CLINICS

Location	Address	Day(s)	Time
Bob Gardner Park	2710 White Eagle Blvd., Lakewood Ranch	Third Sundays	9AM – 12PM
Crowder Bros. Ace Hardware	5409 Manatee Ave W., Bradenton	Third Saturdays	9AM – 12PM
Central Library	1301 1st St. W., Bradenton	Third Saturdays	11:30AM – 2:30PM
Lakewood Ranch Farmers Market	Waterside Place, 7500 Island Cove Terrace, Sarasota	First Sundays	10AM – 2PM
Rocky Bluff Library	6750 US Hwy 301 N., Ellenton	Second & Fourth Saturdays	10AM – 1PM
St. George's Episcopal Church	912 63rd Ave. W., Bradenton	First and Third Thursdays	9AM – 12PM
Island Branch Library	5701 Marina Dr, Holmes Beach	First Saturdays	10AM – 1PM
UF/IFAS Extension Manatee County Tel. 941-722-4524 <a href="mailto:manateemg@gmail.com">manateemg@gmail.com</a>	1303 17th St. W., Palmetto	Every weekday except Wednesdays	9AM – 4PM



# THEY'RE HATCHING NOW: EASTERN LUBBER GRASSHOPPERS (ROMALEA MICROPTERA)

By Lindell Townsel, Master Gardener Volunteer Intern

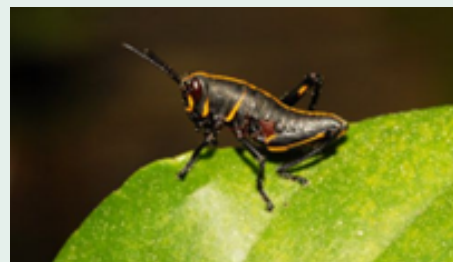
The Eastern lubber grasshopper goes through incomplete metamorphosis which includes the following stages:

**Egg Stage:** Adult females lay eggs in pods, typically containing 30-50 eggs, in shallow holes in the soil. The eggs overwinter underground and hatch in the spring.

**Nymph Stage:** Nymphs are small and black with yellow, orange, or red stripes, that emerge from the soil in spring. The nymphal period lasts about 45 days. These are voracious eaters of all garden plants. Control is easiest at this stage with appropriate pesticides.

**Adult Stage:** Adults emerge in late summer and are much larger than nymphs, with wings that are about half their body length. They have one generation per year. Adults are present in late summer through fall. Control now is mechanical, meaning hand-picking and destroying the insect.

Visit: <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/in132>



**Nymph**

Photo Credit: Lyle J. Buss,  
University of Florida



**Adult**

Photo Credit: John Capinera,  
University of Florida

Editorial correction to March 2025 issue:

The article "Soil and Water Testing at Extension" was written by Lindell Townsel. His surname was improperly cited.



*Marlberry (Ardisia escallonioides)*

Photo Courtesy of  
Sally Herb

## THE NATIVE GARDEN TOUR RETURNS!

Back by popular demand on Friday, April 4th (10:00 to 11:00 A.M.) is the native plant gardens tour at the Manatee County Extension office. Learn how to select and where to plant popular natives! Florida native plants support biodiversity. There are about 2,850 native plant species in Florida. Close to 10% of these are found nowhere else in the world. Most native plants are cultivated close to where you buy them. They have already acclimated to our hot, humid environment.

# BEFORE YOU LEAVE

By John Dawson, Master Gardener Volunteer

Photo Credits: Shutterstock

It's that time of year again when some of our friends and neighbors head up north to cooler climes. If you are one of them, there are a few things you need to do outdoors before you head off. It is foolish to believe nothing will ever go wrong while you are away, but a few preparations will go a long way to ease your anxieties.

The best defense is to have a good friend or neighbor who is willing to keep an eye out for your property, or lacking that, you may wish to hire someone. Let them know how to contact you and show them what needs to be done in case of an emergency.

Weeks before departure, check your irrigation system on your watering days. Make sure spray patterns have not changed, and all sprayers are functioning normally, so you can fix or replace (Garden Bench Issue – Jul/Aug. 2021, pg.3). Check micro irrigation and drippers for clogs, clean or replace as necessary. Make sure your rain sensor is working properly (Garden Bench Issue – Apr. 2016, pg.6). If your timers work on batteries, replace them with new ones. If your irrigation system control panel is located outside or in a place your house-sitter has access to, show them how to turn it off/on and make sure it has the proper time and programming.

Check all hose bibs for leaks/drips. Make sure your gutters/downspouts are clean. Clean off all covers for potable and reclaimed water meters and show your friend where they are located and how to shut the valve if necessary (Garden Bench Issue – Jan. 2020 pg.6). Clear a two-foot space surrounding your outdoor A/C unit from any vegetation. Let your lawn/landscape/pest control providers know what additional tasks may need to be added for those tasks you may normally do yourself.

If you have indoor plants that will not be moving with you, make sure they are attended to; some house-sitters may do this task. Let them know your watering/fertilization schedules. If you move them outdoors, you will need to acclimate them slowly to their new outdoor environment in a place that receives the same light conditions as their spot indoors and make sure they are in a place where they will not be over/under-watered (remember summer is our rainy season!)

Summer is also hurricane season. Make sure outdoor planters are secured in a place where they will not be blown about. Check that tree branches are clear of house roof surfaces and dead limbs are removed. Do not "hurricane prune" palms but do remove dead fronds. While up north keep abreast of our weather. If there is a hurricane heading our way; hopefully you have made provisions for a home hurricane preparation service to prep your home ahead of the storm (it's usually too much to ask your friend or neighbor to do it for you). You may want to place grills (make sure propane tanks are shut off), outdoor furniture, pool floats, etc., indoors. If you have plants on shelves/tables/benches or hanging outdoors, place them on the ground in a secure area. My outdoor orchids survived hurricane Milton on the ground under benches without a loss. Some of these tasks may require time to complete, so don't wait until the last minute to act. When the yearly migration heads south, our Plant Clinic often hears "What happened to my ..... while we were gone?"



*Get a certified arborist to inspect and prune trees*



*Give a friend or neighbor access to your property*



## A CONVERSATION WITH EXTENSION'S NEW RESIDENTIAL HORTICULTURE AGENT

As of this writing, Mack Lessig is one week into his new role as the Manatee County Residential Horticulture Agent. But Mack is not new to Extension; he is a ten-year veteran in the Master Gardener Volunteer (MGV) program and a staff member for the last seven years in charge of the county's community gardens. A native Floridian, Mack is currently enrolled in the University of Florida College of Agriculture and Life Sciences' graduate program majoring in entomology. One of Mack's hobbies is beekeeping, and don't get him started on the fascinating lives of ants and termites!

The Bench: Describe your new position at Extension.

Mack: My role is, supporting the Master Gardener Volunteers and Extension staff. My emphasis is on leadership, training, creating relationships, and team building. There are, of course, administrative aspects of my job, but I want Master Gardeners to know that I am present for them and my door is always open – literally – unless I'm out of the office! Residential Horticulture will now include Community Gardens as well as the Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ and MGV programs.

The Bench: What are your priorities?

Mack: Outreach and education! We have multiple opportunities to extend our horticultural knowledge into the community including demonstration gardens on and off-site, mobile diagnostic plant clinics, library programs, preserve tours, and community gardens. Fostering camaraderie amongst MGVs, staff and other partners, and building teams are also top of my list.

The Bench: What message do you have for Manatee County residents?

Mack: I'm here to help. Identifying problems is the first step towards arriving at solutions, and since teaching is my passion, my goal is to clearly communicate research-based solutions.

The Bench: What is your favorite plant?

Mack: That's an intriguing question! My tried-and-true is the native firebush (*Hamelia patens* var. *patens*) for its many, many desirable features. It's drought-tolerant, grows in any type of soil, flowers off and on year-round, can handle shade or sun and attracts bees, butterflies, and birds, including hummingbirds. Firebush can take a beating – as many did this last hurricane season – and, they come back strong. In the right location, another native, teabush, (*Melochia tomentosa*) is fantastic. It's a smaller shrub that blooms year-round with blue-green foliage and small pink blossoms that bees love. Teabush literally hums with activity, but the site has to be on the dry side for it to thrive.



Mack Lessig  
Photo Credit:  
Manatee County  
Government

## SPRING PLANT SALE!



Join us Saturday, May 3 between 8:00 A.M. and noon to shop affordable plants grown by Manatee County Master Gardener Volunteers. Blooming and native plants, succulents, orchids, and butterfly plants will be featured. For the best selection, sign up for “early bird” admission from 8:00 A.M. to 9:00 A.M. for \$10 per person or \$15 for the family. All shoppers are asked to please register on Eventbrite at: [2025mgvplantsale.eventbrite.com](https://2025mgvplantsale.eventbrite.com). All proceeds from this event go to the operation and maintenance of the Master Gardeners’ Educational Gardens and Greenhouse, and to support Master Gardener educational and outreach programs.

## WHY CHECK PLANT ZONES?

By Sally Herb, Master Gardener Volunteer

Walking through a nursery, sometimes plants just call out to your “gotta have it!” impulse; research before you buy! Nurseries – especially in big box stores – stock plants that may not do well in your zone. “Just because it’s sold here doesn’t mean it’ll grow here!” is a good maxim to follow. In 2023, the USDA redrew the Planting Zone Map so most of Manatee County is now Zone 10A. Zones are redrawn every 10 years based on lowest minimum temperature averages; Manatee County low went up 2.5 degrees. This indicates how well the plant will overwinter in each area. But plants have HIGH temperature preferences as well, that are not reflected on any map. The native purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) is an excellent example. A staple of gorgeous gardens pictured in magazines and available (labeled perennial) in most nurseries, it’s not a good long-term fit for Manatee County.

The Florida Native Plant Society’s description of purple coneflower indicates Zone 8A-9A with the caveat that “the further south you go, the more short-lived this species gets.” The FNPS natural range map shows it in a very small portion of the Panhandle. I can attest to the “short-lived” description.

Before purchasing a “gotta have it!,” take the time to do a bit of research. Learn about zone and growing conditions by using the plant name (the scientific name will give you the most accurate results) and websites AskIFAS and/or FNPS (for natives) If a plant is barely in our northern-most zone, consider a bit of shade and/or extra water. If to the south, extra protection from cold snaps may relieve plant stress.

<https://www.fnps.org/plant/echinacea-purpurea>

<https://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/manateeco/2023/11/15/zone-changes-what-you-need-to-know/>



# VISIT OUR NEWEST EDUCATIONAL GARDEN: GROUNDCOVERS!

By Susan Griffith, Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Coordinator

We took a disused and weedy patch of ground between buildings at the Extension office to create a demonstration of groundcover alternatives to turfgrass. Turfgrass has its place in home landscapes for pets and kids, but is largely unproductive in terms of supporting pollinators and requires tons of inputs (mowing, fertilization, pest control). It is a major source of angst for many a Florida homeowner!

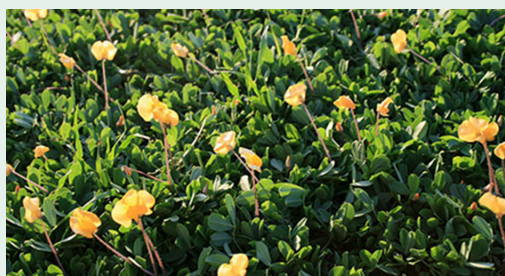
Our groundcovers include perennial peanut (*Arachis glabrata*) which flowers year-round; native frogfruit (*Phyla nodiflora*); and Asiatic jasmine (*Trachelospermum asiaticum*), a viney plant that thrives in sun or shade. A fourth area is an assortment of native and non-natives.

This garden was the result of a grant from the Tampa Bay Estuary Program (<https://tbep.org/>). Consult the links below for culture details on these plants. Should you wish to tour this mini-garden and / or other demonstration gardens at Extension, please call 941-803-0137 to schedule a time.

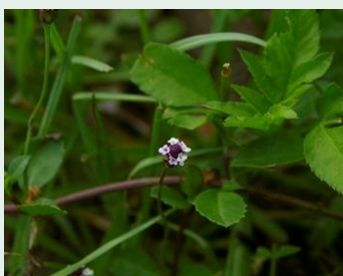
<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/AG358>

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/media/sfylifasufledu/monroe/docs/Frogfruit-Phyla-nodiflora.pdf>

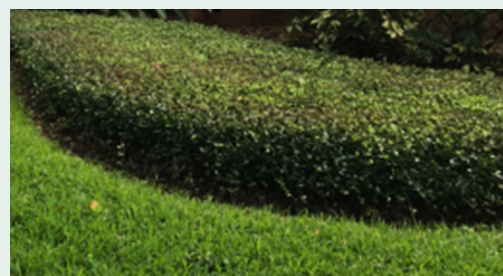
<https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/ornamentals/asiatic-jasmine/>



*Perennial peanut*  
Photo Credit: UF/IFAS



*Frog fruit*  
Photo Credit: UF/IFAS



*Asiatic jasmine*  
Photo Credit: Tia Silvasy, UF/IFAS

## "YOU CAN CATCH MORE FLIES WITH HONEY"

By Jim Haupt, Master Gardener Volunteer

Homeowners often ask about "safer" and less expensive ways to control weeds. They are concerned about pets and the impact of chemicals on the environment. Firstly, understand that things like household bleach, vinegar and salt are not "organic." (My grandmother used salt and vinegar to kill weeds, assuming anything good for pickling her cukes was okay).

Household vinegar contains a concentration of 5% acetic acid. According to UF/IFAS, household vinegar is effective when sprayed uniformly on young broadleaf weeds two weeks following germination, BUT may require multiple applications and results may be only temporary.

According to the UF, vinegar can be combined with salt and dish soap. Salt helps to quicken dehydration drawing moisture out of a weed, but takes longer to leach out of the soil which can disrupt the pH and harm those plants you want to save. Adding soap to the mix helps to adhere it to the weed. The mixture is best used when trying to eradicate weeds in the cracks of sidewalks and in between patio pavers away from desirable ornamentals. HOWEVER, these household products are not labeled as herbicides, no combination rates are standardized, will require multiple applications, and cost more in time and money than application of synthetic herbicides.

To kill more difficult weeds, like perennials with their extensive root systems, a concentration of 10 to 30% acetic acid (labeled as herbicide) might work. Although higher concentrations may produce better results, they are usually short-term so multiple applications may still be necessary to do the job, and high concentrations are corrosive and dangerous, causing eye damage and injuring plants you want to keep. When faced with tough weeds in a large area, a combination of methods consisting of hand-pulling, solarization, and using an appropriate synthetic pre-or post-emergent herbicide may work best. For safe use of herbicides by homeowners, visit:

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/EP575>

For more information on household product combinations, visit:

<https://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/highlandsco/2020/07/24/home-garden-remedies-helpful-or-harmful/>

## APRIL CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Date	Time	Event
4/1 & 4/15	3:30pm	April 1, 2025 Certificación sobre las Mejores Prácticas de Manejo para el profesional April 15, 2025 Certificación sobre las Mejores Prácticas de Manejo para el profesional Esta certificación es requerida por Manatee County, ordenanza para profesionales del Paisajismo.
4/4	10am-11am	Native Garden Tour - UF/IFAS Extension Manatee County Office Are you interested in learning more about Florida native plants, and how you can incorporate more native plants into your existing landscape? Join us for an informative, one hour walking tour of our mostly native plant landscape at UF/IFAS Extension Manatee County where you can see a wide variety of native plants and learn about caring for them from the folks who maintain them. You will have the opportunity to ask questions as we go. We'll be walking about the grounds, so please bring sun protection.
4/10 & 4/24	3:30pm	April 10, 2025 Landscape Best Management Practices April 24, 2025 Landscape Best Management Practices This Certification is required for the MC fertilizer ordinance for landscape professionals.
4/24	11am-12:30pm	Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Edible Landscaping Palma Sola Botanical Park Learn how to add interesting edibles to your landscape without it looking like a farm, the Florida-Friendly way!

*Master Gardener Volunteer Amy Stripe & Joy Dersken, Co-Editors. Contents reviewed & edited by Extension staff.*

*Note change in Manatee County USDA Hardiness Zones! Majority of county is now 10A (annual extreme minimum temperature 30 – 35 degrees F) and 10B (35 – 40 degrees F.) Plants suited to only cooler zones (e.g., 9) may not thrive.*

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*The University of Florida is committed to providing universal access to all of our events. For disability accommodations such as sign language interpreters and listening devices, please contact our office at (941) 722-4524 at least 1 week in advance. Advance notice is necessary to arrange for some accessibility needs.*

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