

THE GARDEN BENCH



THE MANATEE COUNTY MASTER GARDENER E-NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2025 - VOLUME 24 - ISSUE 1

CONSERVE FLORIDA'S NATURAL WORLD

By Dr. Marty Main, Professor,
Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation, UF

The chirp of a boastful osprey flying overhead; the magnificent gumbo limbo tree in a county preserve; the silvery glimpse of a mullet in your canal; the whoosh of a manatee expelling a breath. These are some of the rewarding sights and sounds of nature in Florida, which is why I created the [Florida Master Naturalist Program](https://masternaturalist.ifas.ufl.edu/) (FMNP). FMNP is an adult conservation and environmental education program that is taught statewide by UF/IFAS Extension, Sea Grant agents, and other partner organizations.

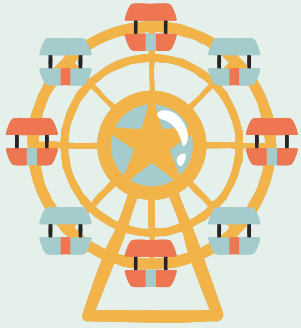
The goal of the FMNP is to promote awareness, understanding, and respect of Florida's natural world and to prepare and empower FMNP graduates to share their knowledge and enthusiasm for nature with others ([90-second youtube video](#)). The FMNP has awarded roughly 25,000 graduation certificates and inspired a grassroots movement of FMNP alumni who are promoting environmental awareness and a stronger conservation ethic among Florida's citizens and visitors. We anticipate approximately 1,400 graduates in 2024 and already have a dozen [FMNP courses](#) scheduled for 2025. If you are a nature lover, join us!

We could use financial support also. Consider contributing to our [pre-endowment \(operational\) funds](#) and/or to the [FMNP endowment fund](#). These differ in that operational funds can be used immediately for program expenses whereas the FMNP endowment is designed for establishing long-term financial security for the FMNP. There are many ways to give (see links below). Or contact UF Advancement and view [UF/IFAS Planned Giving webinar](#) that details various options for supporting programs you value. To speak to a philanthropy expert, please contact Ms. Haley Felton (haleyfelton@ufl.edu) or one of us in the FMNP program office.

Marty Main at mmain@ufl.edu
Ms. Caitlin Robison, FMNP Program Coordinator, at fmnpcoordinator@gmail.com

Roseate spoonbills Photo:
<https://masternaturalist.ifas.ufl.edu/>

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MANATEE COUNTY FAIR IS COMING JANUARY 16-26

With the theme of “Keeping Agriculture Alive in 2025,” the county fair promises entertainment, pageantry, great food, fun rides, arts and crafts, and livestock shows. Manatee County Master Gardener Volunteers will be hosting tours of our educational gardens and will be available to answer your lawn and gardening questions. The gardens will be open from noon to 6:00 P.M. on weekends, Martin Luther King Day (January 20th), and Seniors Day (January 22nd). Head to the Manatee County fairgrounds in Palmetto to enjoy all the sights and sounds of fair time.

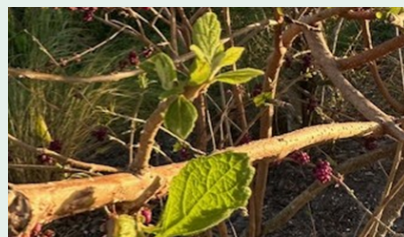
HOPE AFTER THE HURRICANE

By Sally Herb, Master Gardener Volunteer

On October 9, Milton came ashore in Manatee County as a Category 3 hurricane. As I walked around my yard – on October 10 and in the few days thereafter - what I felt most was hope. There were so many small signs of recovery.



*This black racer snake was sunning on the badly beaten native yellow top (*Flaveria linearis*). A hummingbird flew by as I was taking the snake picture (much too fast for a photo op!).*



*Defoliated beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana* - R) and button sage (*Lantana involucrata* - L) had already started to put out new leaves.*

Photos courtesy of Sally Herb



Ask a Master Gardener Volunteer



Master Gardener Volunteer Karen Holleran answers your email questions at ManateeMG@gmail.com. Or call our diagnostic plant clinic at 941-722-4524 weekdays (except Wednesdays) from 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. In-person visits are welcome at the Manatee County Extension Office at 1303 17th St. W., Palmetto or at our mobile plant clinics (see schedule).

Dear MG, What is this? We have seen a few in our house, and they fly.



Resident Submission

Dear Resident, This insect is an *Evania appendigaster*, the cockroach egg parasitoid wasp. These beneficial insects deposit an egg in the roach casing, and their larvae devour all the eggs. This insect is common outdoors and probably found its way inside by accident. Being inside isn't an indication of an indoor problem. They are short-lived insects; adults survive only a few weeks. Harmless to humans but deadly to roaches, this wasp should be shooed outside to do its work.

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/in319>

Master Gardener Volunteer Amy Stripe & Joy Dersken, Co-Editors. Contents reviewed & edited by Extension staff. The University of Florida is committed to providing universal access to all our events. For accessibility accommodations such as alternate formats of written material, please contact Katie Granberg at katiebg@ufl.edu.

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.

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 manateemg@gmail.com	1303 17th St. W., Palmetto	Every weekday except Wednesdays	9AM – 4PM



GOLD WEATHER AND PALMS



By Amy Stripe, Master Gardener Volunteer

Photos: T.K. Broschat

https://idtools.org/palm_symptoms/index.cfm?packageID=1111&entityID=3313

Manatee County is NOT in the tropics. Despite the USDA's shift in cold-hardiness zones at the end of 2023, we are still in the 9 to 10 range, not 11. Minimum average temperatures are shown below by zone. By selecting plants based on zone, you support their survival at low temperatures persisting for four hours or more.

Zone 9b (25°-30° F): Parrish and Myakka City

Zone 10a (30°-35° F): Bradenton, Ellenton, Palmetto, Sarasota, and Terra Ceia

Zone 10b (35°-40° F): Anna Maria Island, Cortez, Holmes Beach, Long Boat Key

We tend to push the cold hardiness envelope in our county by installing cold-sensitive palms in our landscapes. Commonly planted palms such as Christmas (*Adonidia merrillii*), coconut (*Cocos nucifera*), and areca (*Dypsis lutescens*) palms are 10b, therefore not suited for 10a or 9b zones. Likewise, favorites like royal (*Roystonea regia*), foxtail (*Wodyetia bifurcata*), Bismarck (*Bismarckia nobilis*), and fishtail (*Caryota mitis*) palms are 10a and not appropriate for 9b. And keep in mind that zone temperatures are averages, and temperatures could go lower!

Of course, temperature is just one factor influencing the effects of cold on palms. Fertilizing with proper palm fertilizer, maintaining enough soil moisture, and refraining from over pruning contribute to palm cold hardiness. Micro-climates within the landscape and wind exposure also play a part.

Chilling injury can occur at temperatures well above freezing on cold-sensitive palms, especially if the temperature drop is sudden and significant. Dead leaflet tips on the older part of the canopy are the usual symptom of this kind of cold damage. Frosts happen on clear, calm nights when heat loss through the canopy causes random damage to fronds. A hard freeze causes yet another type of injury which may result in the eventual death of the palm as fungi and bacteria set up in the degrading portions of young, unopened leaves killed by the cold. An immediate drench of copper fungicide is recommended (NOT water-soluble copper sulfate, as this is toxic to palms). It might take months for hard freeze damage to manifest itself, so patience is key.

Search your cold hardiness zone by zip code: <https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/>

Learn about cold damage on palms: <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/MG318>



Chilling injury on coconut palms. Note dead tips on oldest leaves.



Hard freeze damage: dead spear leaf easily removed.



Save the Oaks!



By Sally Herb, Master Gardener Volunteer



Mature live oak

Photo: UF/IFAS

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/ST564>



Fallen oak after hurricane

Photo: UF/IFAS

<https://branding.ifas.ufl.edu/photos-and-videos/>

“Dendrophobia” is the fear of trees. There is no word to describe fear of trees being removed, although there is a term coined by psychologist Marvin Hurvich called “annihilation anxiety”. This is the feeling I get every time I hear a chainsaw in the aftermath of Hurricane Milton. A cursory look around the county is sad evidence that oaks - in particular, native live oaks (*Quercus virginiana*) - are disappearing from landscapes at an alarming rate.

As I wrote in my March 2024 article for this newsletter, [https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/media/sfylifasufledu/manatee/docs/pdfs/master-gardners/newsletters/The-Garden-Bench--March-2024-\(4\).pdf](https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/media/sfylifasufledu/manatee/docs/pdfs/master-gardners/newsletters/The-Garden-Bench--March-2024-(4).pdf) oaks are a keystone species. They support abundant biodiversity – from beneficial bacteria to wildlife – the “glue” that holds an entire ecosystem together. As a bonus, oaks absorb copious amounts of carbon dioxide, better than any other species of tree.

Granted, some oaks were felled by wind and excessive rain. If they had been maintained properly with periodic pruning by a licensed tree service, the root systems probably would have provided structural strength. But a substantial number are being removed by homeowners and HOAs for the wrong reasons.

Manatee County’s tree ordinance stipulates specific protections for street trees (private back and side yard trees are exempt). After a hurricane, only “immediate danger” or “destroyed beyond salvage” trees are allowed to be removed without authorization. Otherwise, homeowners must have a street tree assessed and documented as posing a danger to people or property by a certified professional before it can be removed. Tree removal in HOA common and conservation areas needs the same documentation as well as a Request for Removal accompanied by \$144 for any trees that were on the builder’s original approved plat.

Leaves in the pool, fear of root creep (on the off chance that decades from now roots may be a problem for hardscapes or structures), and messy acorns are poorly reasoned and unacceptable reasons for removing a street tree.

A properly planted (consider mature size/root development) and periodically maintained oak is an invaluable asset to a landscape. While it is tempting to replace these native stalwarts with palms, please consider that palms are under a myriad of disease and nutrition pressures. Oaks provide a lovely shade canopy and a wonderful biodiverse ecosystem that cannot be matched by a palm.

https://www.myanatee.org/departments/building_development_services/environmental_review/tree_removal_authorization_permits/residential_tree_removal

http://manateecounty.elaws.us/code/lcd_ch7_pti_sec700



FLORIDA ARBOR DAY IS JANUARY 18TH: PLANT A TREE!

By Amy Stripe, Master Gardener Volunteer

If you lost trees during last year's hurricanes, consider replacing them with trees that are both wind resistant and tolerant of saltwater inundation and salt spray.

Some good native tree choices are the orange geiger (*Cordia sebestena*), buttonwood (*Conocarpus erectus*), gumbo limbo (*Bursera simaruba*) and seagrape (*Coccoloba uvifera*). A couple of non-native trees that weathered the storms well include screw pine (*Pandanus utilis*) and black olive 'Shady Lady' (*Terminalia buceras*). All the above species vary from moderately to highly salt tolerant, so if you are in an area prone to flooding, do some research first. Also, local nursery stock may be depleted due to high demand, however, your favorite nursery may be able to order plant material for you.

Use UF's tree recommendation tool to find trees appropriate for your landscape:
<https://lyra.ifas.ufl.edu/FloridaTrees/>

Tree care tips:
https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/media/sfylifasufledu/baker/docs/pdf/horticulture/ArborDay_TreeCare_FactSheet.pdf



Orange geiger

Photo: UF/IFAS

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/ST182>



Buttonwood

Photo: UF/IFAS

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/ST179>



Gumbo limbo

Photo: UF/IFAS

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/ST104>



Screw pine

Photo: UF/IFAS

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/ST430>



Black olive 'Shady Lady'

Photo: UF/IFAS

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/ST102>



Seagrape

Photo: UF/IFAS

<https://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/trees-and-shrubs/trees/seagrape/>

Secrets of the Sphinx (Moth)

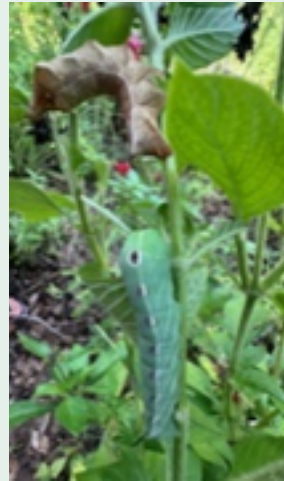
By Catherine Rueth, Master Gardener Volunteer

Butterflies seem to get all the attention! But there are more species of moths than there are butterflies. Moths do not get the accolades and applause butterflies get, perhaps because they are active mostly at night and not as colorful as butterflies. They are, however, equally important in their jobs as pollinators and food sources for predators. They are beautiful too.

Some of the largest moths belong to the sphingid family. You may have seen one hovering over a flowering plant and thought it was a hummingbird. Their thick hairy bodies, long forewings, and talented hovering ability give off a hummingbird vibe. These moths are sometimes called hawkmoths or sphinx moths. The sphinx moth is so-called because of its sphinx-like positioning when feeding on a host.

A specific type of sphinx moth is the tersa sphinx moth (*Xylophanes tersa*). Like all moths, tersa sphinx moths undergo a complete metamorphosis during their life cycles. While they are beneficial pollinators and good news in some ways, the larval stage caterpillar is sometimes unwelcome news for our plants. They are voracious and can decimate a plant in no time. The caterpillar is often called a hornworm because of the horn-shaped appendage on its hind end. They sport big fake eyespots that make them look menacing to predators, and they can be a bit shocking if encountered when gardening due to their 3-inch size.

Adults feed at night using a long proboscis, which is an elongated sucking mouthpart shaped like a bendable straw. They extract nectar from deep-throated flowers like honeysuckle, pentas, and moonflower vine, a night bloomer. Caterpillars eat leaves on woody plants such as catalpa, firebush, strongbark, and wild coffee, as well as buttonweed, Joe-pye weed, and pentas.



*Tersa Sphinx Moth
Caterpillar*

Photo courtesy of Sally Herb



Tersa Sphinx Moth
Photo: Canva



Moonflower Vine

Photo courtesy of Sally Herb

A sure sign of caterpillar damage is not only holes in leaves but the enormous amount of droppings both on leaves and on the ground around the plant. If caterpillars occur in large numbers and are eating a significant number of leaves, you can remove them to a bucket of soapy water. Or apply a biorational insecticide targeting caterpillars, worms, and maggots called “*Bt*”. *Bt* is an abbreviation for the bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis*; it causes the caterpillar to stop feeding and die. The strain of *Bt* indicated for these caterpillars is *kurstaki* (brands include Monterey, Thuricide, and Dipel).

If you come across some tersa sphinx moth caterpillars, keep in mind that once they turn into moths, their secrets are out; they are acrobatic fliers that can hover, hum, and dart like hummingbirds, and they can travel long distances and increase genetic diversity through pollination services. What is not to like about those qualities?

<https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/design/gardening-with-wildlife/sphingidae-moths/#:~:text=Sphingid%20moths%20have%20long%20narrow,and%20back%20of%20the%20body.>

<https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/care/pests-and-diseases/pests/hornworm-caterpillars/>



Tropical Spinach

By John Dawson, Master Gardener Volunteer
Photos: [shutterstock.com](https://www.shutterstock.com)

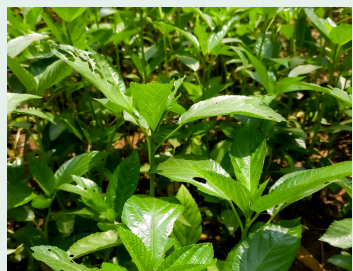


Spinach (*Spinacia oleracea*), made famous by the Popeye cartoons, is a leafy green, cool season vegetable grown October through February in our area. It hates the heat and starts to wilt and bolt to seed as the temperatures approach 75°F and dies off above 85° F. It is a very nutritious vegetable with health benefits which are greater when ingested raw versus cooked. Of the many varieties, 'Fan Tail' is the most heat tolerant. To grow fresh spinach alternatives during the other times of the year, you will want to plant tropical spinach.

“Summer Spinaches Take the Heat” is a UF/IFAS 2019 blog that provides useful information on such tropicals as Okinawa spinach (*Gynura crepioides*), longevity spinach (*G. procumbens*), Malabar spinach (*Basella* spp.) and Surinam spinach (*Talinum triangulare*). Tropical spinaches are not true spinach, but they provide many of the same nutritious properties as true spinach. Some may be gelatinous when cooked and some grow as vines, so do your research before planting. Here are more tropicals to consider:



Chaya



Egyptian Spinach



Brazilian Spinach



Chinese Spinach

Chaya (*Cnidoscolus aconitifolius*), the “spinach tree” is a large, fast-growing, and leafy perennial shrub or small tree from Mexico. Chaya *must be cooked* before it is consumed because raw chaya contains hydrocyanic acid which is poisonous to humans. Boil the leaves for twenty minutes before eating. It is richer in iron than true spinach and a powerful source of potassium and calcium. It is a prolific grower which refoliates quickly. Butterflies love the flowers.

Egyptian spinach (*Corchorus olitorius*) is a bushy, nutritious, “super-green” annual plant that can grow to be four feet tall, with small yellow flowers and edible leaves and stems. Egyptian spinach loves the heat. It has a slightly nutty flavor when eaten raw, less noticeable when cooked. Like many tropicals, it may have a slightly slimy texture when boiled. It has been a staple food source since the pharaohs; its Egyptian name, molokheiya, means “vegetable for the king”.

Brazilian spinach or “sissoo” (*Alternanthera sissoo*) is a small perennial less than a foot tall which forms a dense ground cover tolerant of shade. The leaves can be eaten raw with caution as it contains oxalic acid which is neutralized through cooking. It does not have a gelatinous texture. The leaves have three times more vitamin C than true spinach, and over one and a half times more vitamin A than kale.

Chinese spinach or “red spinach” (*Amaranthus dubius*) is a leafy vegetable native to Mexico and South America (not China!). It is tasty and can be used like regular spinach. There are two varieties, one with plain green leaves and the other with green leaves having pink to purple highlights along the veins. It is a fast grower and can reach three feet within thirty days. As a bonus, the seeds can be milled to produce gluten-free flour.



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