

# The Master Gardening Bench



The Manatee County Master Gardener Newsletter

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All articles are researched utilizing UF/IFAS Extension and/or other educational sources unless otherwise noted.

## Using Native Plants in Your Landscape

By Amy L. Stripe, Master Gardener 2008



Paurotis Palm



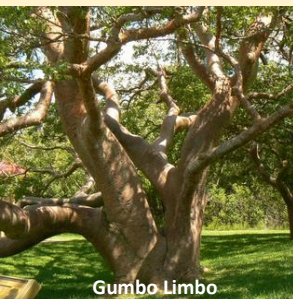
Dahoon Holly



Florida Azalea



Wild Coffee



Gumbo Limbo



Royal Palm

Homeowners are opting for all-native or at least some native landscaping in their yards. It's a great idea, especially if you wish to attract native wildlife (such as pollinators) as both native plants and wildlife have evolved together over the years. Your chances of glimpsing native bees, birds, and butterflies are greatly enhanced with the use of native plants in your landscape. A properly planted native landscape can also cut down on chemical and water input.

Careful selection is important: just because it's "native" doesn't mean it will fit the bill for just any landscape situation, or that it is necessarily more tolerant of stress or pests than other non-native plants.

A wide range of ecosystems exists in Florida, from coastal wetlands to pine uplands, and many native plants are very site specific. They have sensitivities to shade and sun, soil type, drainage and pH, moisture and temperature. As with any plant, consider "right plant, right place" before you buy or install.

Examples: the paurotis palm (*Acoelorrhapha wrightii*) is a native of the rich, moist soils of the Everglades. In the alkaline soils and cooler climate of east Manatee County it cannot be expected to thrive or even survive. Dahoon holly (*Ilex cassine*) is widely used in landscapes throughout Florida but it is a native to wetlands; the top will thin out if it is not watered during dry spells. Florida azaleas (*Rhododendron* spp.) will not do well in alkaline soils as they are natives of acidic Panhandle woodlands. Wild coffee (*Psychotria nervosa*) prefers the shady conditions of its native hammock understory habitat. In Manatee County, we can see the devastating effects of cold temperatures on the likes of gumbo limbos (*Bursera simaruba*) and tropical palms, such as royal palms (*Roystonea regia*).

Even choosing natives that you see growing in nature around you is not necessarily an indicator of success in your own yard. Soils in urban developments have typically undergone dramatic changes: alteration of the natural soil habitat by stripping topsoil and adding fill material, compaction, and addition of building debris.

Some guidelines:

**Know your soil:** Get your pH tested (Extension will do it for a small fee) and test for soluble salts if you are on well or reclaimed water for irrigation, or near or on the beaches.)

**Know your plants:** Find out the cold hardiness zone, light, soil and water conditions in the native habitats of the plants you are considering.

**Know the provenance of your nursery selections:** "Natives" can be as specific as from your county or as general as from your state or region of the U.S. You want "Central Florida" natives. For example, a flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*) that has been propagated at a Virginia nursery may not do well here.

**Be patient:** Even if natives don't thrive right away, they may just be acclimatizing themselves to your landscape, especially if recently transplanted. If you've chosen wisely, you will be rewarded for your patience with pest resistant plants that do not need supplemental irrigation once established.

For more information: <http://www.edis.ifas.ufl.edu/uw384>,  
<http://www.edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep297>,  
<http://www.gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/ornamentals/native-plants.html>.





## What's This? The "Hole" Truth Gopher Tortoise, Armadillo, and Mole Holes

By Gretchen Lindelof Master Gardener Intern 2017



Gopher tortoise burrow



Armadillo burrow



Mole hole

Photos from ifas.ufl.edu

Finding - or tripping over - holes in the yard? Here's an easy guide to identifying the culprits.

**Gopher tortoise** (*Gopherus polyphemus*) burrows are rounded on the top, flat on the bottom and large; 6 to 12 inches in diameter and deep. They are listed as threatened in Florida and are considered a keystone species because they share their burrows with over 350 other species. The burrow and tortoise are protected under state law.

**Armadillo** (*Dasypus novemcinctus*) burrows are typically 7 to 8 inches in diameter and round. They can be fifteen feet long and armadillo often have several burrows. Although armadillos consume many insects, they are an invasive species in Florida.

**Mole** (*Saclopus aquaticus*) holes are usually less than three inches across. They have extensive tunnel systems that can vary in depth from 3 to 30 inches. They create mounds of dirt by excavating their tunnels that can run up to fifty or sixty yards. Shallow tunnels will appear as ridges on the surface. Moles are considered beneficial because of their appetite for mole crickets, beetle larvae, ants, moth larvae, and slugs.



Thank  
you!

UF/IFAS Extension Manatee County was the recipient of new soil testing equipment through the generosity of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA). The equipment measures pH and soluble salts to aid growers, landscapers, and gardeners in assessing the condition of their soils.

Pictured left to right, Dan Haubein, President Florida Suncoast Chapter of GCSAA; Michelle Atkinson, UF/IFAS Extension Manatee; Marguerite Beckford, UF/IFAS Extension Sarasota; Nick Kearns, Chapter Vice-President Florida Suncoast Chapter of GCSAA.





# Orchids for the Senses

By John Dawson, Master Gardener 2007

Orchids comprise the largest of all flower plant families. Their beauty and scent have coaxed people to collect and grow them for thousands of years. Your first orchid may have been the one you gave or received on prom night or it may have been one that adorned your dinner plate at a fancy restaurant (all orchid flowers are edible.)

Orchids seem to have a special relationship with our senses, more than any other flower with the possible exception of roses. A large number of orchids are easy to grow and are comfortable in the same temperature ranges as people, which is why they do well indoors. Here in Florida, they also do especially well outdoors.

The trick to growing orchids is to match their native environment with one you can provide. This means you need to do some homework to learn what your specific orchid needs (all orchids are not created equal.)

As a first time orchid grower, you will do well to stick with the simpler ones you will find in most box stores. The moth orchids (*Phalaenopsis*) account for 75% of all orchids sold in the U.S. These are the ones you see

with big green thick leaves and flowers on a long stem supported by a stick. The next most popular are the *Cattleyas* (the *Cattleyas* (the prom orchid.) If you manage to keep either of them alive, you may want to venture into growing some of the other 25,000 to 30,000 orchid varieties.

People are attracted to the appearance: color, size, shape; but many prefer the allure of fragrance. Not all orchids have a scent, while others may only give off fragrance in early morning or late evening, depending on what type of pollinator they are trying to attract.

Some orchids are only pollinated by a specific insect and will stay open for long periods of time waiting for them to arrive. Thus, unless the insects happen to be in your home or in your neighborhood, you can expect your orchid flowers to bloom much longer than any other flower you may have. Once pollinated, or if they can wait no longer, the flower will disappear.

Here are some of the most common or popular scented orchids, of which I have grown a few:

*continued on page 4*



*Angranthus grandiflora*  
Smells like jasmine



*Cattleya walkeriana*  
Smells a bit like cinnamon buns



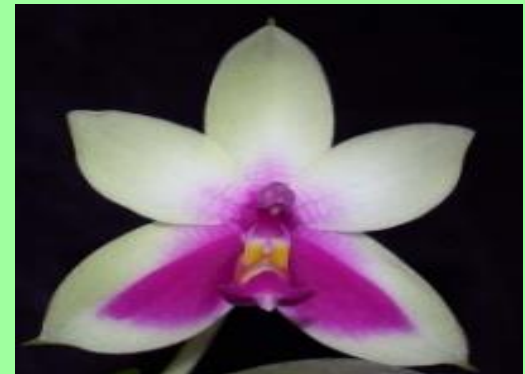
*Miltoniopsis santanaei*  
Smells a bit like roses



*Zygopetalums*  
Although I could not detect a scent on mine, they are supposed to smell like hyacinths



*Brassavola nodosa*  
A white flower that gives off a scent in the evenings something like the lily-of-the-valley I grew up North



*Phalaenopsis bellina*  
Has a lemony scent



*Maxillaria tenuifolia*  
Smells like coconut



*Rhynchostylis gigantea*  
I haven't grown this either, but it is supposed to have a strong citrus scent.



*Oncidium 'Sharry Baby'*  
Has a slight chocolate smell

If you would like more information on orchid care, sign up for our workshop Orchid Care and Repotting on July 14, 2018 by calling (941) 722-4524.



# Plants for Wet Areas

By Mack Lessig, Master Gardener 2015



As summer is upon us, you may notice a marked increase in the amount of rainfall. Summer is the beginning of our rainy season in Central Florida. In some years, up to 60 inches of rain can come down on the state! This usually results in large areas of prolonged, standing water in landscapes and yards. For some people this is disaster, but for others this is an opportune time to make note of those wet areas. These wet, mucky areas can be effectively and aesthetically incorporated into a beautiful, functional landscape. If you decide to tackle these swampy areas, consider using Florida native plants adapted to these conditions. For those of you not familiar with natives for wet areas, I will break them down into two categories: butterfly gardens and rain gardens.



Planting a butterfly garden in your private swamp might not sound ideal, but allow me to convince you. Monarchs, white peacocks, viceroys, red admirals, and black swallowtails are but a few of the most common butterflies that frequent wet areas. These areas provide habitat for their host plants which, in turn, provide habitat for them. Monarchs are one of the most common and popular butterflies in most gardens. They are attracted to species in the genus, *Asclepias*, or milkweeds. Swamp milkweed (*A. incarnata*), aquatic milkweed (*A. perennis*), and few-flower milkweed (*A. lanceolata*) are three native milkweeds adapted to wet/moist conditions. White peacocks can be attracted by planting ground covers known as water hyssop (*Bacopa monnieri*) and lemon bacopa (*B. caroliniana*).



If you have a larger wet space, consider adding some native willows (*Salix* species) to attract the viceroy butterfly. Viceroy butterflies are very convincing mimics of monarchs so you'll have to pay attention. Red admiral butterflies utilize nettle plants which are found naturally in wetland areas. If you have ever had caterpillars on your dill or fennel, you are familiar with black swallowtails. Did you know that most of their native host plants occur in wetlands? Planting mock bishop's weed (*Ptilimnium capillaceum*) and water dropwort (*Oxypolis filiformis*) will encourage huge populations of these beautiful insects. All of these plants can be incorporated into those undesirable wet areas, creating a wonderful habitat for butterflies.

If you're not swayed by butterflies, maybe I can convince you to plant those mucky areas with impressive colors instead. Planting a rain garden can provide a dazzling rainbow of hues and textures not available to most gardeners. Depending on the size of the area, you have quite the selection of natives to fit the bill.



You may be interested in our native hibiscus species, such as the stunning scarlet hibiscus (*Hibiscus coccineus*), or one of the largest flowers in North America, the swamp mallow (*H. grandiflorus*). Your rain garden may also be home to a number of *Coreopsis* species including the Florida coreopsis (*Coreopsis floridana*), which is endemic to the state. For even more impact, add blue-flag iris (*Iris virginiana*), swamp canna lily (*Canna flaccida*), and Elliot's aster (*Symphyotrichum elliottii*) for a splash of blue, yellow, and purple.

In larger rain gardens add the unusual, but beautiful buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*) for a mid-summer ballet of white, spherical flowers. In the largest rain gardens, one could add pond cypress (*Taxodium ascendens*) or bald cypress (*T. distichum*) for an imposing, majestic feel.

When the rains come this year, take some time to consider your next landscape move. If you end up having puddles of standing water for a couple of weeks or months, think about turning that wet, mucky eyesore into a beautiful, functional part of your landscape! For more information, visit:

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/uw057> (Butterfly gardening) or  
<http://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/design/types-of-gardens/rain-gardens.html>.

# HURRICANE CAMPING

**By Bob Nicholson, Master Gardener 2008**

With the arrival of hurricane season, I realized I need to update my disaster plan. I contacted Sherilyn Burris, Manatee County's Emergency Operations Center Chief for some ideas. She encourages residents to have a well thought out personal hurricane readiness plan and to take responsibility for their own safety and comfort. The county's shelters should be considered a last resort. Shelters are somewhat austere, crowded, and provide only basic meals. A better choice is to shelter with a friend or family member who is in a safe area. If you are not told to evacuate and live in a sturdy house, shelter in place. Here is a site to help you formulate your personal plan:

<http://www.mymanatee.org/home/government/departments/public-safety/hurricane-readiness-center.html>.

When I set out to develop my personal plan, I realized that many of my camping skills are transferable to hurricane recovery. Here are some hints that may help you:

Power: Remember to have plenty of batteries on hand for flashlights, lanterns, and radios. Crank-charged lights and radios are also available through outdoor suppliers. You can recharge cell phones in your car plus you can hook up an inverter to power small AC appliances. Just remember to never run an auto in your garage because of carbon monoxide emissions. Portable gas generators are handy, but don't overestimate their usefulness in a storm. It's best to consider them an intermittent and supplemental power source.

Cooking: one-burner propane stove is the best thing I've found for routine cooking. Mine is a 10,000 BTU burner that screws on to a 16.4 oz. propane cylinder. One cylinder will last for over 2 hours on high flame, 9 hours on low, and will boil a quart of water in 4 minutes. They are relatively inexpensive and are available at many sporting goods or big box stores.

Water: Most experts recommend that you have 1.5 to 2 gallons of water per person per day. Detailed information regarding water purification and storage can be found at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ss439>.

**Food:** The menu ideas presented here may not be appropriate for people with special dietary needs, food allergies, diabetes, or heart disease. I pursued this with Nelly Nelson, Family Consumer Science Agent at the Manatee County Extension. She suggested that those with special requirements contact their personal healthcare provider to discuss emergency menus. Ms. Nelson is happy to help with individual questions and can be reached at

941-722-4524, ext. 1854 or at [nelly.nelson@ufl.edu](mailto:nelly.nelson@ufl.edu). She also suggested the following links for helpful meal planning information:

- 1) [http://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/archive/families\\_and\\_consumers/housing/disaster\\_prep\\_and\\_recovery.html](http://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/archive/families_and_consumers/housing/disaster_prep_and_recovery.html)
- 2) <https://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/emergency/index.html>
- 3) <https://www.usda.gov/topics/disaster>
- 4) <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/food-safety>

One option for your hurricane plan is freeze-dried portion packed meals. They are commonly used by campers and hikers because of the ease of preparation, light weight, and very long shelf-life (up to 30 years). They are available through most camping suppliers and often the big box stores. They are a good choice if you are sheltering one or two people.



Another option is to buy non-perishable foods from the grocery store. This requires more planning. Just remember, your objective is easy preparation with no leftovers to refrigerate.

Breakfast ideas: 1) Boxed cereal and shelf-stable or powdered milk. 2) Instant hot cereals, such as oatmeal. Fruit juice, instant coffee, or tea are good breakfast beverages.

Lunch ideas: 1) Peanut or almond butter sandwich with honey on whole wheat bread. 2) Tuna or salmon salad made with a vinaigrette (mayo must be refrigerated), served with crackers. 3) Hot, hearty canned soup. (Don't forget the non-electric can opener.)

Dinner ideas: 1) Angel hair pasta with canned sauce and Parmesan cheese. 2) Various rice dishes such as red beans and rice with canned ham; black beans and rice with ham; or yellow rice with chicken, peas, and mushrooms. Fresh salads like shredded carrots with raisins or “pickled” cucumber with onions can brighten these meals. Follow this with some cookies or fresh fruit for dessert. Have some snacks like dried fruit, nuts, jerky, or energy bars on hand for between meals.

Comfort and hygiene ideas: Have a supply of disposable wipes, hand sanitizer, paper plates and cups, and trash bags. You probably won't have hot water and may have backed up sewers, so look at sun showers and potty buckets at your sporting goods store.

Here's the good news. If, when the season is over, you haven't needed your hurricane supplies, Manatee county is abundant with excellent camping opportunities. Go camping and count it as training for next year's hurricane season.



# SUMMER'S BITING INSECTS

By Joy Derksen, Master Gardener 2004

Hot weather is here again, and with it comes the insects that like to bite us. Some are bothersome to us and some are dangerous because their bites cause discomfort, allergic reactions, and disease. Take note: to quote Rudyard Kipling, "the female of the species is more deadly than the male."

No-see-ums (*Culicoides fuhren*) are midges that are half the size of the letter "D" on a dime. All we can see without a magnifying glass is a black dot where we feel a sudden pain. They hang out in some of the same areas that we like. Coastal marshes, streams and ponds, wet manures, and even some bromeliads provide homes for these bothersome, tiny animals. Like many biting insects, the female no-see-um needs a blood meal to mature her eggs. The males feed on nectar.

Midges do not spread diseases in people, but some of us have allergic reactions to the bites. They feed in the early morning and early evening and on cloudy days. About the only protection is DEET-based repellents and clothing that keeps you covered. They are small enough to get through pool and window screens but are poor flyers: a high-speed ceiling or window fan will keep them off you. For more information: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/in626>.

Mosquitoes are the bane of our existence in Florida. Once again, the females are the ones who need blood for reproduction. We have a variety of mosquitoes that live in all our climate zones and bite throughout the day. All females bite, but only some species spread disease.

Mosquitoes carry several deadly diseases in Florida including encephalitis, yellow fever, dengue fever,

and the zika virus. Lately, a new disease called keystone virus has also been found in Florida. Good protection from recognized repellents and proper clothing can keep you safe. Window screening keeps them out and high-speed fans keep them off you. The repellents that University of Florida tested for successfully repelling mosquitos are listed in this publication: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/in419> It has an easy-to-read chart that lets you know what brand of repellent works well and for how long.

Ticks can also be a problem in Florida. Deer ticks and lone star ticks both carry disease. Females need blood for healthy eggs. If you ever get a round "bull's eye" circle around a bite, it is time to visit a doctor. Blood tests will show if you have been infected, and the diseases can be treated.

Once again, wear repellents and long sleeved shirts and long pants, and stay out of heavy brush where ticks hang out. Check yourself, children, and pets for ticks after an outing. If your pets become infested check with your vet about which products to use to kill eggs in your home and lawn.

Fire ants are a year-round problem in Florida, but they do not carry any diseases. Again, it's the females that are going to bite you because all the ants working in the colony are female! Unfortunately, many people are allergic to the ant's venom. Lawns can be treated for the problem and University of Florida has a publication that discusses how to properly treat for these pests: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/lh059>.

Stay aware of your surroundings whilst gardening. Good luck and stay safe out there in wild Florida!

# July/August

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Photo: Patty Pennington, <https://npsot.org>

Date	Time	Event
1 <sup>st</sup> Saturday	10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.	<b>Ask a Master Gardener</b> – Island Library – 5701 Marina Drive, Holmes Beach. Visit the Extension Master Gardener information table and get answers to your gardening questions.
2 <sup>nd</sup> & 4 <sup>th</sup> Saturday	10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.	<b>Ask a Master Gardener</b> – Rocky Bluff Library – 6750 US Highway 301 N., Ellenton. Visit the Extension Master Gardener information table and get answers to your gardening questions.
2 <sup>nd</sup> Saturday	10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.	<b>Ask a Master Gardener</b> – South Manatee Library – 6081 26 <sup>th</sup> Street West, Bradenton. Visit the Extension Master Gardener information table and get answers to your gardening questions.
Saturday July 14	10:00-11:30 a.m.	<b>Orchid Care and Repotting</b> - Bring your orchid and pruners for a hands-on exercise of dividing your orchid. Learn how to care for and propagate several varieties of orchids. Advanced payment of \$15 for materials (cash or check only and payable to Friends of Extension) due before workshop. Register on-line at <a href="https://orchid_care_repotting_july14.eventbrite.com">https://orchid_care_repotting_july14.eventbrite.com</a> or call the Extension Master Gardeners (941) 722-4524.
Saturday July 28	10:00-11:00 a.m.	<b>Rain Barrels for the Rainy Days of Summer</b> - Conserve water and prevent stormwater runoff using rain barrels. \$5 administration fee. After the workshop, you will have an opportunity to purchase a rain barrel at \$30 (cash or check only) for a non-drilled, DIY barrel with basic parts included. Register on-line at <a href="https://rain-barrels-july28.eventbrite.com">https://rain-barrels-july28.eventbrite.com</a> or call the Extension Master Gardeners. (941) 722-4524.
August 9,15,23	9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. Each Date	<b>Integrated Pest Management/Scouting Training</b> - A three-day workshop for anyone interested in strategies for pest control. \$100 program fee includes lunch and materials. Subjects include scouting strategies, insects, diseases, nematodes, and weeds. Register on-line at: <a href="https://imp-scouting-2018.eventbrite.com">https://imp-scouting-2018.eventbrite.com</a> or call Martha (941) 722-4524, ext. 1814.
Saturday August 18	9:00-10:30 a.m.	<b>Tillandsia “Make and Take”</b> - Learn about these lovely epiphytes that only require air and water to live. This is a “make and take” workshop where you will create a palm boot planter using Tillandsia plants. Bring wire cutters and pliers. \$35 due for materials by August 13 (cash or check only payable to Friends of Extension). Register on-line at <a href="https://tillandsia-august-18.eventbrite.com">https://tillandsia-august-18.eventbrite.com</a> or call the Extension Master Gardeners (941) 722-4524.
Saturday September 22	9:00-11:00 a.m.	<b>Sharpen Your Garden Tools</b> - Learn how to maintain and sharpen your garden tools. Students may bring their tools for possible demonstration. Time does not permit us to sharpen everyone’s tools that are brought to class. Learn the “how to” so that you can sharpen and maintain your tools at home. Presented by John Dawson, Master Gardener. \$5 administration fee. Register on-line at <a href="https://sharpen_your_garden_tools.eventbrite.com">https://sharpen_your_garden_tools.eventbrite.com</a> or call the Extension Master Gardeners (941) 722-4524.
Saturday September 22	9:30-11:00 a.m.	<b>Florida-Friendly Landscaping – The Nine Principles</b> - Learn how to help preserve our fragile natural resources by making changes in your landscape and irrigation practices to conserve water, reduce pollution, protect and provide a habitat for wildlife. \$5 administration fee. Register on-line at <a href="https://ffl_the_9_principles.eventbrite.com">https://ffl_the_9_principles.eventbrite.com</a> or call the Extension Master Gardeners (941) 722-4524.



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# TEST YOUR SOIL BEFORE PLANTING

## SOIL AND WATER pH AND SOLUBLE SALT TESTS

The Manatee County Agriculture and Extension Service performs pH and soluble salt tests for soil and well water (used for irrigation) on Mondays for a small fee per sample. These analyses provide information to assist you in the plant and lawn selections best suited for your site. Samples are tested once a week with results over the phone or email. For more information, contact the Extension Master Gardeners 941-722-4524.