

### CREEPING BEGGARWEED (*DESMODIUM INCANUM*) BY LINDELL TOWNSELL, MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER

Creeping beggarweed also called Spanish clover, hitch hikers, sticky weed is native to Central and South America however it has found a home in Florida as well as other Southern states. This legume is a member of the pea family and is often found growing in yards, fields of crop, and road margins. It often grows along the ground especially when found in turf, but can also have an upright or erect growth, appearance.

Beggarweed spreads itself freely through the use of incredibly sticky seeds. Any person or animal that has brushed by beggarweed has found themselves covered with seed pods that stick to hair and clothing. This broadleaf perennial weed grows throughout the summer in Central and North Florida but may grow throughout the year in the South.

Although considered a lawn nuisance, beggarweed is a food source for deer, livestock, game

birds and butterflies, of particular note the dorantes longtail butterfly (*Urbanus dorantes*).



*Seeds Stick Like Velcro!*  
Photo Credit: Carrie Stevens, UF/IFAS Extension

Managing beggarweed involves maintaining a healthy, thick lawn to outcompete it, physical removal of its taproot, or applying a post-emergent herbicide when weeds are young and before they form buds. For more information see IFAS-UF publication #ENH1327, Biology and Management of Creeping Beggarweed. <http://bit.ly/3WhcGoR>

For more information, visit:  
<http://bit.ly/4nWOQuD>



*Monarch Butterfly Caterpillar*

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Master Gardener Volunteers are here to answers your questions!

Email us at: [ManateeMG@gmail.com](mailto:ManateeMG@gmail.com)

Call our Master Gardener Volunteer Plant Diagnostic Clinic at:  
Phone: 941-722-4524  
Open weekdays (except Wednesdays) from 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.

In-person visits are welcome at:  
The UF/IFAS Extension Manatee County Office  
1303 17th St. W., Palmetto, FL 34221



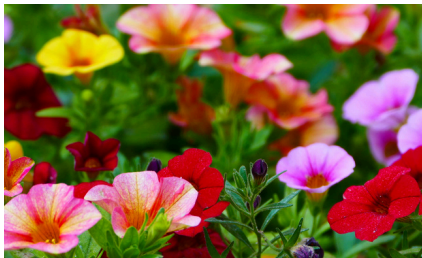
## COLORFUL WINTER ANNUALS TO PLANT IN SOUTH FLORIDA

BY JOY DERKSEN, MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER

This is a good time to plant cool season annuals that do not thrive in our hot and humid summers. If you gardened in Northern climates, you can grow familiar plants that would be stressed by summer weather. I love petunias, pansies, and sweet alyssum and this is about the only time of year that they do well in Florida. In Manatee County alyssum can turn into a ground cover until hot weather returns. Lobelia, with its bright blue flowers, and pansies and violas in purple and white make a good contrast with brightly colored petunias or snap dragons.



*Pansies*



*Petunias*

Geraniums and dianthus like winter weather, too. The geraniums do well as potted plants in winter sun and can be moved to a shady area for the summer. They need to be dead-headed to continue blooming. Salvia and pentas provide height. They can start in the winter and will continue blooming through the summer as long as they are fertilized.



*Pentas*

Impatiens and begonias can start now and will continue to flower year round as long as you fertilize them and cut them back for the summer season. You can also start some winter herbs. Dill, fennel, parsley, and cilantro like winter and don't look out of place among the flowers. Their bright green color and lacy leaves provide an interesting contrast.

I look for winter annuals at local nurseries that cater to Florida gardeners. The big nationwide stores seem to order their flowers and vegetables for the rest of the U.S. and not necessarily for Floridians. But if you know your Florida flowers you can purchase Christmas amaryllis on sale, let them bloom inside and then plant them in your garden for reblooms next year. Inexpensive small pointsettias also make colorful bedding plants for the winter season.

You can continue to grow them, but it takes attention to how much light they need to convince them to rebloom next Christmas. I usually replace mine with summer annuals.

The usual gardening rules apply: prepare your beds with organic material tilled into the top 2-3 inches of soil, sprinkle the bed with a controlled release fertilizer (e.g., Osmocote or Dynamite or similar ) following the label directions. You can use a pre-emergent herbicide if you don't want to weed by hand. (READ THE LABEL! to make sure it won't kill your new plants.) Water before and after planting. Hand water daily in the morning to avoid fungus until you see new growth. Then water as needed. Enjoy the color!

For more information, visit:  
<http://bit.ly/49eD621>  
<http://bit.ly/47xyfrs>

## A RECIPE WITH HERBS: FLORIDA'S 'LONG ISLAND MAMMOTH' DILL (*ANETHUM GRAVEOLENS*)

BY CYNTHIA OLCOTT, MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER

Dill is most successfully planted from seed, September through December (although it can be planted in early spring as well).

This wonderful host plant attracts pollinators and beneficial insects including the beautiful black swallowtail butterfly; but equally important, it is also used by hungry humans for pickling, sauces, dips and in fish dishes.

Dill should be at the top of most gardeners' potted herb list. It needs water only once a week; any all-purpose vegetable garden soil will sustain it; and this annual will re-seed itself for next year if allowed to flower. All the above ground parts are edible – flowers, seeds, and leaves. Harvesting is best when plants are beginning to flower.

Think only Julia Childs can make a souffle?



Salmon Souffle

If you can buy a can of salmon and whip an egg (the trick is not to let the egg whites get wet with water or oil.) This meal can be used for breakfast, lunch or dinner and is awesomely dill-ish:

### Salmon Souffle

- 3 T butter
- 1/3 t dry mustard
- 1/3 t salt
- 1 C milk
- 5 egg yolks
- 3 T flour
- ¼ t Worchester
- 1 T fresh chopped dill
- 1 14.75 oz can salmon
- 5 egg whites

Grease bottom and sides of a high sided casserole dish and preheat oven to 375°.

Melt butter in pan and stir in flour. Slowly add milk while stirring and simmer 1 minute to thicken. Turn off heat, add seasonings and cool. Add egg yolks 1 at a time. Add flaked salmon. (Okay to use canned.)

In another clean dry bowl, beat egg whites to stiff peaks. Gently (imperfectly) combine the whipped whites with the fish mix. Pour into casserole and bake 30 – 40 minutes until top is puffed and light brown. Serve immediately.

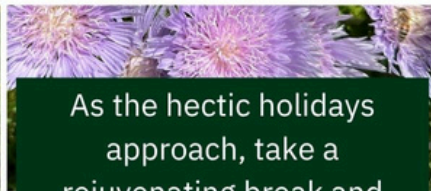
## ENJOY OUR FLORIDA NATIVE PLANTS

BY SALLY HERB, MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER

Starry Rosinweed, *Silphium asteriscus*



Stokes Aster, *Stokesia laevis*



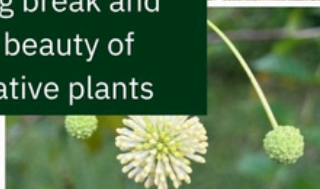
Muhly Grass, *Muhlenbergia capillaris*



Firebush, *Hamelia patens*



Walter's Viburnum, *Viburnum obovatum*



Buttonbush, *Cephalanthus occidentalis*



American Beautyberry, *Callicarpa americana*

As the hectic holidays approach, take a rejuvenating break and enjoy the beauty of Florida's native plants



## WINTER READS: BOOK REVIEW FOR GARDENERS AND NATURALISTS

BY AMY L. STRIPE, MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER

Nature at Night: Discover the Hidden World that Comes Alive After Dark by Charles Hood (Timber Press, 2025)

Naturalist and photographer Charles Hood's 240 photos documenting the behavior of nocturnal plants and animals – some seen for the first time – accompany his fascinating text on the abundance of life after dark. From bats to wild cats, fireflies to dragonflies, dolphins to daturas, Hood packs in facts on nighttime nature around the world, including deserts, oceans, jungles, and your own back yard. He includes tips on nighttime nature walks to maximize productivity (sightings and photography) as well as safety! The format is essay-style, making reading accessible and leisurely. Excellent!

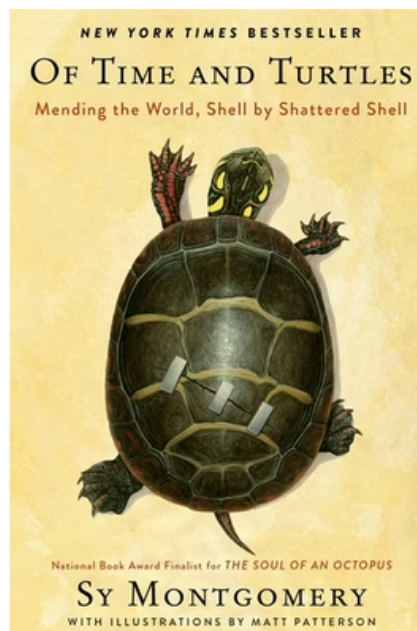
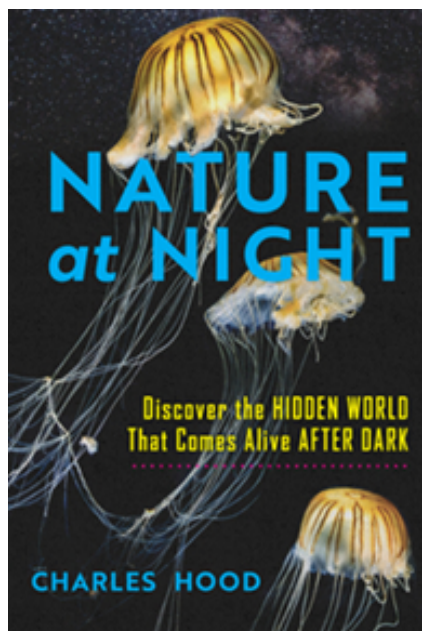
Of Time and Turtles: Mending the World, Shell by Shattered Shell by Sy Montgomery (Mariner Books, 2023.)

Wildlife illustrator Matt Patterson joined author Sy Montgomery to document the Turtle Rescue League's (based in Massachusetts) efforts in rehabilitating sick, injured and abandoned turtles of all kinds; they both ended up pitching in to help. This was largely during COVID shut downs in that state, when people were seeking outlets to isolation. Turtles in distress (injured by cars, dog attacks, or inept care) all came within the selfless aid of a pair of courageous women.

Protecting nests and rescuing sea turtles are also part of their work. I found the book tedious towards the end. Consider how long the average turtle lives (60 to 100-plus years) and you get the idea!)

The Woman in the Garden: A Novel by Jill Johnson (Poisoned Pen Press, 2024.)

Whilst I rarely review fiction for "Bench" readers, this one caught my eye because it's about poisonous plants and the author uses SCIENTIFIC NAMES! (So... educational?) Professor of Botanical Toxicology Eustacia Rose is terminated from her tenured university post due to an alleged misuse of laboratory substances. At home, she cultivates a lush garden of her own poisonous plants. One night, she hears a neighbor scream and quickly becomes embroiled in accusations of poison. A quick, light read; author Johnson says this is the first of a series of Eustacia Rose mysteries. Hope so. What fun.





**THE ESSENTIAL 4-POINT GUIDE TO GROWING TOMATOES IN MANATEE COUNTY****BY MACK LESSIG, RESIDENTIAL HORTICULTURE AGENT**

The major planting season is underway in our region. Fall is one of the best times to plant a variety of vegetables, and for most U.S. gardeners, the tomato is the absolute favorite. While cherished and relatively easy to grow, a successful harvest in Manatee County requires attention to four key areas.

First, you must be familiar with our growing seasons. For successful tomato cultivation in our area, we have two primary seasons. The fall season starts in August and typically ends around December; this is often the most productive and forgiving season. The spring season begins in mid-February to avoid most danger of frost and lasts until early summer.

Second, pay attention to varieties. Florida's heat and humidity are tough on plants, making variety selection the most crucial step. There are thousands of tomato varieties, but not all perform well here, so don't grab just any seeds. To ensure an abundant harvest, you must choose varieties that are pest and disease resistant. Always look for documented resistance on seed packets or transplant labels. For example, a variety with the VFN designation indicates resistance to two common diseases (verticillium and fusarium wilt) and nematodes. Look for proven performers like 'Celebrity,' 'Better Boy,' 'Florida 91,' or 'Homestead.' Choosing a resistant variety is the best defense against a poor harvest.

*Tomatoes*

Third, provide irrigation and fertility. Tomatoes are heavy feeders and require consistency to produce beautiful fruit. For irrigation, the soil should be moist but never soaking wet. Maintaining even moisture is critical for reducing fruit cracking and preventing the common issue of blossom end rot. Using mulch is highly recommended to help maintain soil moisture, prevent diseases, and keep roots cool. In terms of nutrition, tomatoes need fertile soil and a steady supply of nutrients, specifically good amounts of calcium (Ca) and magnesium (Mg), especially from the first fruit set onward. Calcium is essential for preventing blossom end rot.

*Tomatoes*

Lastly, you must be proactive with pest management. First, watch out for whiteflies. These tiny, serious plant-suckers are notorious for transmitting tomato yellow leaf curl virus (TYLCV) which stunts growth, ruins production, and may kill young plants. Inspect the underside of leaves weekly and treat early infestations with insecticidal soap or neem oil, ensuring you coat the leaf undersides completely. Second, the tomato hornworm is a large, green caterpillar that can devastate a whole plant overnight. Look for their distinct dark droppings first, then hand-pick them off the plants and dispose of them in soapy water.

Have a question about your garden? We invite you to bring or email samples to one of our many Plant Diagnostic Clinics throughout the county. We also offer special classes, including our popular Tomatomania workshop, focused just on tomatoes. (See "Upcoming Events" page 7).

## FOR YOUR CONVENIENCE: MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER MOBILE PLANT CLINICS DAYS, TIMES, AND LOCATIONS

In addition to our regular Diagnostic Plant Clinic at the Extension office in Palmetto, Master Gardener Volunteers are deployed at additional locations throughout the county at our Mobile Plant Clinics.

Highly trained Master Gardener Volunteers staff each location and are qualified to address your lawn and garden questions, including plant and weed identification, insect identification, management of pest issues, and know how to refer you to science-based University of Florida information, all under the umbrella of Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ principles.

Our goal is to assist Extension agents in their aim to conserve water use and preserve water quality, responsibly manage pests, and assist residents in having a healthy and beautiful landscape.

### BOB GARDNER PARK

Third Sundays  
9:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M.  
2710 White Eagle Blvd.,  
Lakewood Ranch

### CROWDER BROS. ACE HARDWARE

Third Saturdays  
9:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M.  
5409 Manatee Ave. W.,  
Bradenton

### CENTRAL LIBRARY

Third Saturdays  
11:30 A.M. to 2:30 P.M.  
1301 Barcarrota Ave.,  
Bradenton

### ISLAND BRANCH LIBRARY

First Saturdays  
10:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M.  
5701 Marina Dr., Holmes Beach

### LAKEWOOD RANCH LIBRARY

First Saturdays  
9:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M.  
16410 Rangeland Pkwy,  
Bradenton



Amy Boohaker, Tanya Larsen & Teri Conk at Crowder Bros. Ace Hardware

### ROCKY BLUFF LIBRARY

Second & Fourth Saturdays  
10:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M.  
6750 US-301, Ellenton

### SOUTH MANATEE BRANCH LIBRARY

Second Saturdays  
10:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M.  
6081 26th St W., Bradenton

### ST. GEORGE'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

First and Third Thursdays  
8:30 A.M. to 11:30 A.M.  
912 63<sup>rd</sup> Ave. W., Bradenton

### UF/IFAS EXTENSION MANATEE COUNTY

Weekdays (except Wednesdays)  
9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.  
1303 17<sup>th</sup> St. W., Palmetto  
Phone: 941-722-4524  
Email: ManateeMG@Gmail.com

## ASK A MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER

**YOUR QUESTIONS ARE ANSWERED BY KAREN HOLLERAN, MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER**

**DEAR MASTER GARDENER,** *Is it safe to cut off the two growths on the trunk of the palm tree?*



Photo Courtesy of Resident

**DEAR RESIDENT,** These are the sheafs of the flower/seed stalk emerging. Yes, you can cut them off. Care should be taken to ensure the main trunk isn't damaged.

I suggest that the pruning equipment be sanitized before the cut, since disease can be introduced on pruning equipment, and a fresh cut can allow the disease to enter the tree.

The following link is to a publication on disinfecting pruning equipment for your reference.

<http://bit.ly/46w6YUW>

Email your questions to:  
ManateeMG@gmail.com



## UPCOMING EVENTS

TO VIEW MORE EVENTS, VISIT : [HTTPS://SFYL.IFAS.UFL.EDU/EVENTS/?LOCATION=MANATEE](https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/events/?location=manatee)



### RYE PRESERVE TOURS

Third Saturday of the month  
(October - April)  
9:00 A.M.  
Learn more here:  
<https://RyePreserveTours.eventbrite.com>



### PERICO PRESERVE TOUR

Fourth Saturday of the month  
(September - April)  
9:00 A.M.  
Learn more here:  
<https://PericoPreserveTours.eventbrite.com>



### EMERSON POINT PRESERVE TOUR

First Saturday of the month  
(November - April)  
9:00 A.M.  
Learn more here:  
<https://EmersonPointPreserveTour.eventbrite.com>



### GROW YOUR GARDEN: PESTS AND BENEFICIAL INSECTS

November 3, 2025  
1:30 P.M. to 2:30 P.M.  
Learn more here:  
<https://manateelibrary.libcal.com/event/14989820>



### 2025 FARM CITY WEEK AGRICULTURAL TOUR

November 14, 2024  
8:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.  
Learn more here:  
<https://2025FarmTour.eventbrite.com>



### GROW YOUR GARDEN: POLINATOR LANDSCAPE

November 17, 2025  
1:30 P.M. to 2:30 P.M.  
Learn more here:  
<https://manateelibrary.libcal.com/event/14989842>



## GET READY FOR TOMATOMANIA!

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2025 FROM 10:00 A.M. TO 12:00 P.M.

Dreaming of juicy, homegrown tomatoes? Join us for a fun and informative workshop all about growing your best tomato crop yet!

Learn how to:

- Improve your soil
- Choose the right varieties
- Maximize your harvest with expert techniques

Great for beginners and garden pros!

Tickets: \$10 — Includes TWO tomato seedlings + expert-led instruction on tomato cultivation!

Get tickets here:

<https://tomatomania.eventbrite.com>

## GREAT HOLIDAY GIFTS FOR GARDENERS

BY JOHN DAWSON, MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER

Holidays are just around the corner and if you are looking for a great gift to give that special gardener in your life, here are some helpful hints. If your gardener is just starting out, gardening books, seed kits and plants may be just the thing. If your gardener is a seasoned pro, those items may not be as welcoming, something like receiving aftershave and perfume every year.

Look for ergonomic gardening items to make jobs easier. In the October 2024 Issue of "The Garden Bench", page 6, I wrote about "Cool Tools"; these are still great gift ideas. Here is a list of ten great gardening gifts available on-line I think any gardener (myself included) would like to receive and which are all available by Christmas.

1. Elbow length gardening gloves for working with thorny plants.



Gifts for Gardeners

2. Outdoor propane weed torch for those stubborn pavement crack weeds.
3. Raised bed cement corners to easily build beds without tools; just lay in lumber.
4. A good quality gardening /grafting knife.
5. Crack and crevice weeding tool (without the flame thrower).
6. Soil test kit for measuring (pH, N, P, K) comes in either analog or digital.
7. Hori hori knife (multi-purpose gardening tool) or any good quality Japanese garden tool.

8. Mason jar hydroponics kit.
9. Pollinator watering station for bees and butterflies.
10. Giant 'teddy bear' sunflower seeds for folks who want to wow and brag.

(These items are shown, left to right, above.)

Receiving any of these gifts should make your gardener's gardening experience more rewarding and enjoyable; but be aware, some of these gifts may not fit in a Christmas stocking!

## A PUBLICATION OF

### THE MANATEE COUNTY RESIDENTIAL HORTICULTURE MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEERS

The Garden Bench Newsletter is a publication of the University of Florida/IFAS Extension Manatee County Master Gardener Volunteer Program, with Amy Stripe and Joy Derksen serving as Co-Editors. All content is reviewed and edited by Extension staff to ensure accuracy.

The Master Gardener Volunteer Program, an integral part of the Residential Horticulture Program, helps Extension

Agents deliver research-based horticulture education to Florida residents. They also lead preserve and garden tours, organize children's programs, host public workshops, and operate the Plant Diagnostic Clinic.

Also under the Residential Horticulture Program, the Community Gardens Program, established in 2015, focuses on horticultural education.

It provides hands-on workshops and information on planting, variety selection, and proper fertilizer and pesticide application.

For more information on becoming a Master Gardener Volunteer, joining a Community Garden, or subscribing to the newsletter, please email Mack Lessig, Residential Horticulture Agent at: [mlessig@ufl.edu](mailto:mlessig@ufl.edu)