



Spectacular Songbird: The Painted Bunting

By Kathy Oliver, Urban Horticulture Program Assistant



Photo by Dan Pancamo

An eagerly awaited arrival in the fall is the return of the painted bunting (*Passerina ciris*), one of North America's most beautiful songbirds. Fondly known as 'nonpareil' for its incomparable plumage, the male bird seems to have hopped straight from an artist's palette. Add in a sweet song and a propensity for visiting feeders and you come up with a finch that is a local favorite. Although not as colorful, the female bunting ('greenie') shines with yellow and green feathers somewhat brighter than other songbirds.

Painted buntings of the eastern population migrate to south Florida and the northern Caribbean islands in winter. Manatee County is at the northern edge of their winter range. One of the best places to observe the birds is at Felts Preserve, a 27-acre parcel in Palmetto managed by the Manatee County Audubon Society. A cozy blind and numerous feeders make for easy viewing. Although some birds may arrive as early as September, your best sighting bets are November through April.

Buntings feed on seeds most of the year, especially from grasses, wildflowers and weeds. You may attract these beauties by leaving sections of your yard a bit untamed. Since they often feed low to the ground, it is a good idea to keep prowling cats indoors. For feeders, use a finch mix of mainly millet seeds in a caged tube that excludes larger, more aggressive birds. A shallow birdbath placed in a shady, open area is also attractive to the buntings and other birds.

Helpful weblinks:

<https://sites.google.com/site/manateecountyaudubon/home/felts-preserve>,

<http://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/painted-bunting>,

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Painted_Bunting/id.



What's This?

By Amy L. Stripe, Master Gardener 2008

It grows like crazy, spreading several inches a week over your Florida lawn and garden via runners that freely take root. Flowers are usually purple and are a popular nectar source for pollinating insects, including bees and butterflies.

This is called "frog fruit" in Florida, a native that has many other common names. The scientific name is *Lippia nodiflora*.

It is so abundant in my garden that I pull it up with impunity (as in "weed.") Yet it persists, much to the delight of common buckeye and white peacock butterflies, modest low-level fliers that are otherwise taken for granted.

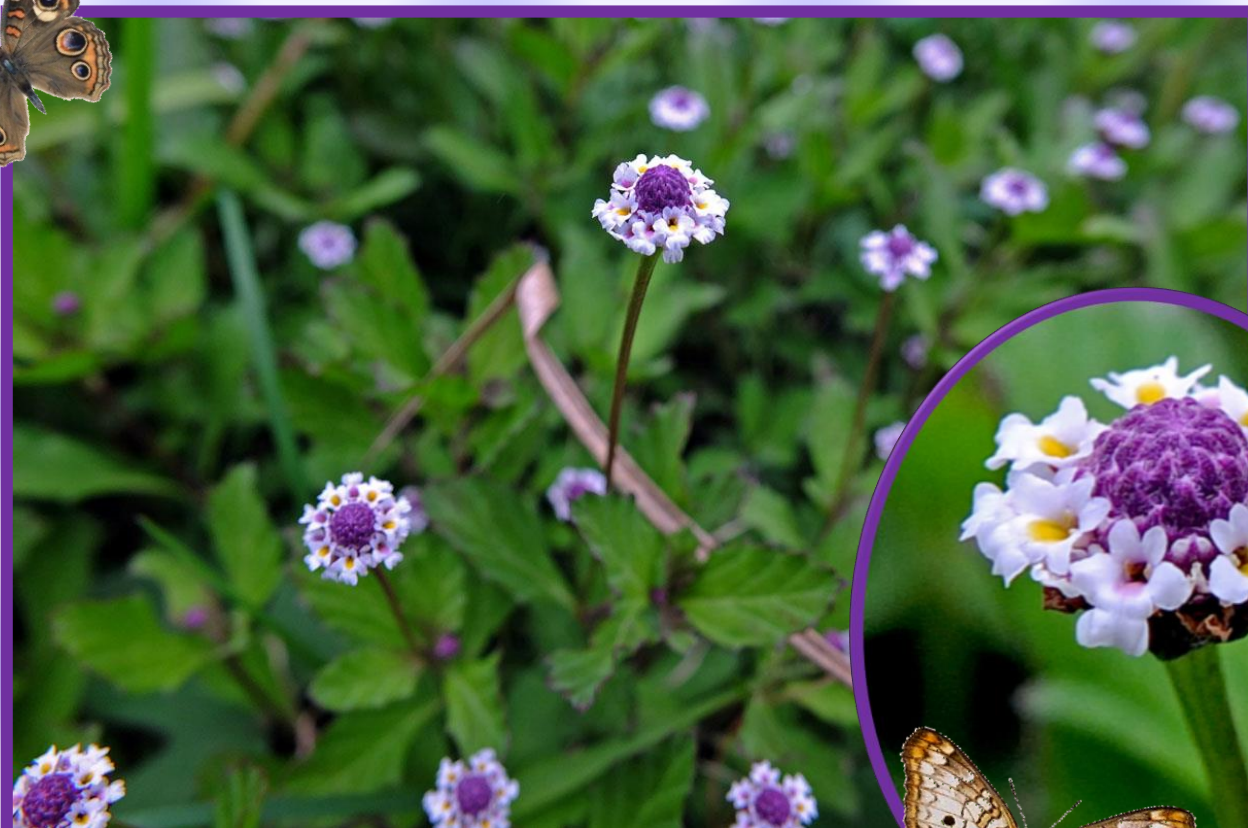


Photo credit: Costea, M., I Garcia Ruiz, available from: <http://www.phytoimages.siu.edu>



The Gecko that does NOT Sell Insurance, but does eat Insects!

Or, How to Insure You Have Fewer Insects in Your Home

By Nancy O. Porter, Master Gardener 2014

Growing up in Manatee County one becomes familiar with all kinds of creepy crawly things. However, something new to me is the Mediterranean house gecko, *Hemidactylus turcicus*. They differ in looks from the usual anoles (lizards) we've all seen scurrying about, and in my opinion, are cuter than cute.

Mediterranean house geckos are somewhat transparent, a bit bumpy, with suction cups on their feet. They sport rounded snouts and vertical pupils in bulging eyes with no eyelids. Being nocturnal, there are usually seen in the evening, hanging around windows or near outdoor lights.

Their food of choice is insects, in particular, roaches. (That makes them champions in my book!) Fertile eggs are laid by the females, often times without the help of a male. In some species, there ARE no males!

Geckos are different from other lizards in that they communicate with vocal chirps. They are the only lizards able to vocalize. Clicking and squeaking sounds are made when socializing. Their common name happens to be an imitation of the sound they produce.

Some people keep geckos as house pets in order to provide pest control, but they are not universally welcome. Their droppings are elongated and brownish, and frequently tipped with white. These droppings can stain fabrics, carpets, and curtains.

To keep them out, be sure to have cracks and crevices tightly sealed, especially around doors and windows. If they do happen to get into the house, you can relocate them easily by catching them in a jar or margarine tub.

For more information visit:

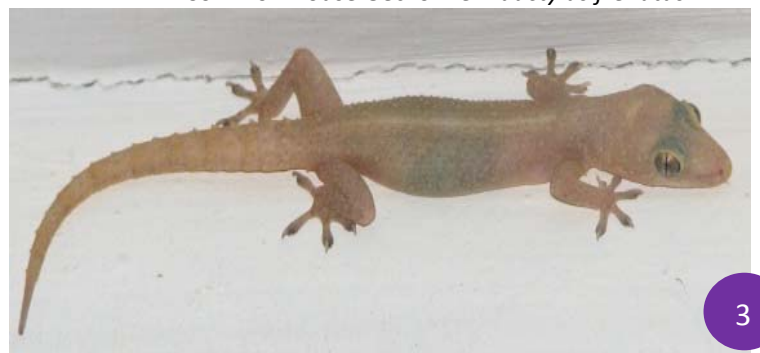
[http://okeechobee.ifas.ufl.edu/News%20columns/Lea
pin'%20Lizards.htm](http://okeechobee.ifas.ufl.edu/News%20columns/Lea%20pin'%20Lizards.htm).



Mediterranean House Gecko, *Hemidactylus turcicus*



Common House Gecko *Hemidactylus frenatus*





Q: I have two three-trunked palms in front of my house in a bed with red mulch. Recently the "bark"--if palms can be said to have bark--has been pulling away from the ground, and there is now a 4" space between the bottom of the trunk and the mulch, showing the many tube-like roots going into the ground.

What is happening? This doesn't seem to be normal. What can I do to remedy this? D.H., Sarasota

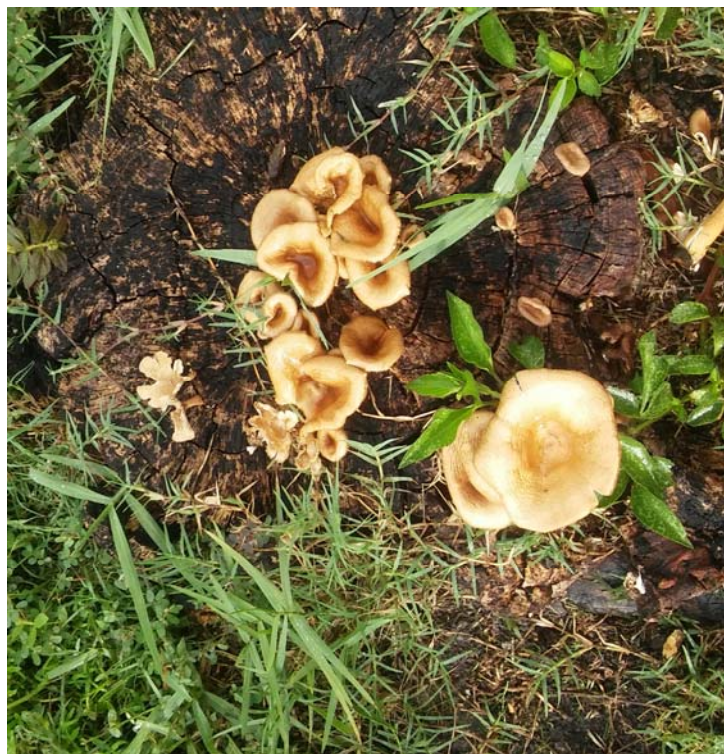
A: What your palms are doing is normal. You are seeing the "root initiation zone" that all palms have and from which palm roots emerge from the base of the trunk. This area starts in the center of the bottom of the stem in palm seedlings.

As the palm develops, it expands outward and upward, eventually working its way upward along the base of the trunk. Where these root initials are in contact with the soil or other moist environments, they will continue their development, growing outward and downward into the soil as typical functioning roots.

As the root initiation zone on older palms expands up above the soil line, these new root initials, which arise from tissue under the "bark" (cortex) of the palm trunk, eventually force the "bark" outward in a flared fashion. This is a normal part of development as a palm matures. I have included a link to a publication about this and other 'odd' habits that palms have.

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/EP/EP34400.pdf>

Q: : Do you know this species? - Is it (edible)?
J.T., Bradenton



A: As delicious as these beauties look, I wouldn't eat them unless I were absolutely positive they were edible and you have to be an expert to determine that. They're of the genus *Armillaria* spp., a wood rotting fungus. The most common in Florida is *A. tabascens*. From your photograph it looks like they're growing on an old tree stump and is the likely reason the tree died. I've included a link to a publication about this mushroom species for you to look at.

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/EP/EP47800.pdf>

"Ask a Master Gardener" questions were sent to ManateeMG@gmail.com and answered by Master Gardener Karen Holleran.

If you have a lawn-and-garden question, email us, phone us at 941-722-4524, or visit us at the Extension Service, 1303 17th St., W., Palmetto. Samples and photos are immensely useful.

GET A
GOOD
THING
GROWING!

Free Workshop on Termite Detection

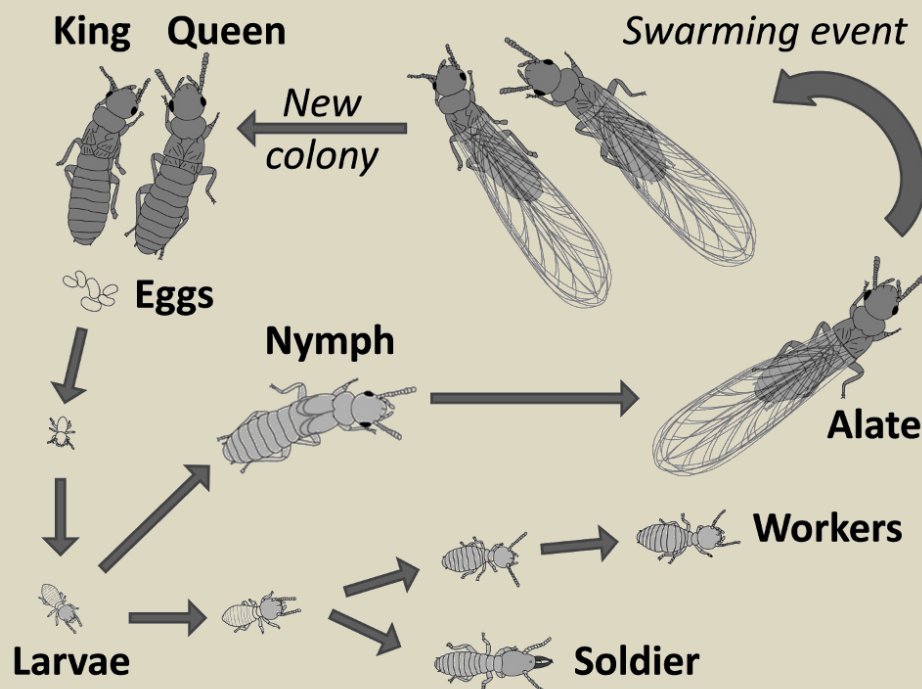
By Amy L. Stripe, Master Gardener 2008

Termites come in over 4,000 varieties, about 400 of which cause “economically significant” destruction to structures. In Florida, these detritus feeders (detritivores) are classified as drywood, dampwood, or subterranean the latter categorization being the most terrifying. All three kinds feed on wood.

These insects require four conditions for optimal vigor: a food source (wood), appropriate moisture, shelter, and comfortable temperature. While many people think mulch harbors termites, in most instances this is not true. Unless mulch is applied super-thickly and a colony is already established inside, it is not likely that termites will be present.

If you suspect you have any kind of termite, the first step is identification. Control methods vary from species to species, as does the cost of treatment. Because the worker caste of most termites is virtually identical in appearance, you may need to capture a queen, king or future royal (a winged termite, called an alate), or soldier. You may bring your specimen to the Extension Service for identification or call in a professional. Many professional pest control operators will come out, identify the pest, and provide a free estimate.

To learn how to distinguish termites from other flying insects (in particular bees and ants), their prominent swarming seasons, and telltale signs of termite feeding, attend "Termite Discovery 101," a free workshop offered at the Manatee County Agriculture and Extension Office on Saturday, October 22nd from 10:00 A.M. - noon. To register for this workshop call (941) 722-4524 and ask for the Master Gardeners or go <http://termitedetection.eventbrite.com>.



Alternatives to Citrus

By John Dawson, Master Gardener 2004



Carambola



Lychee



Avocado

It's sad when we Master Gardeners inform homeowners their tree is suffering from citrus greening (huanglongbing virus, HLB, a fatal disease.) There is no cure as yet and the University of Florida and the citrus industry are working feverishly to find a solution.

Homeowners often ask if it's okay to replace their tree with another citrus tree; however, since HLB and its carrier (the Asian citrus psyllid) are obviously in the neighborhood it would be very risky. The next question is, "So, what kind of fruit tree can we plant?"

There are more than 250 different non-citrus fruit tree species that will grow and fruit in our area. Most folks originally from up north want to plant fruit trees they grew up with, but most of those trees will not do well here (it's too hot!) Trees from up north require a cold rest period known as chilling hours (temperature hours below 45° F.)

Apples require from 400-1000 chill hours per year; peaches and pears 600-800 hours per year; whereas our area averages only 240 hours per year (considered "low chill.") Since the 1950's, the UF low chill fruit program has been developing low chill fruit varieties. As a result, many good low chill apple, peach, and pear varieties now exist, but they still do not compare and cannot compete with the northern standards. It's now time to try something new.

Check out the UF web site FruitScapes <http://trec.ifas.ufl.edu/fruitscapes/> where you can find valuable information on growing over 59 species of fruits that will grow well in our area. It is a treasure trove of everything you need to know on growing and maintaining fruit trees in your landscape. The fact sheets on each species cover how to plant, when to fertilize (what type and how much), along with information on watering, disease and pest control, and pruning on a month-to-month schedule. The site also has several videos on the more common species.

Another good website is Growables <http://growables.org/>, put together by two Master

from Sarasota County. This site has information on 70 fruit species that will grow here, many not available in local stores.

Another great source of information can be found at <http://www.mrfc.org/>. The Manatee Rare Fruit Council (MRFC) is a non-profit local organization dedicated to introduce, propagate, and distribute the many rare tropical and sub-tropical fruits grown throughout the world; to educate its members and the public as to the merits of these plants and to encourage and extend their cultivation.

The club maintains a rare fruit exhibit (54 species with several varieties) at the Palma Sola Botanical Park. This exhibit provides homeowners the opportunity to see what the mature fruit trees look like. The club also donated an exhibit in the Educational Gardens at our Extension Office. Each year in May (after Mother's Day) the MRFC sponsors the state's largest fruit tree sale at the Bradenton Area Convention Center (a good place to find the tree you want).

Whatever tree you decide upon, my mantra has always been "Try before you buy!" If you enjoy store bought mangos and want to plant a Mango, please don't go out and buy a tree where the plant tag just says 'Mango.' Which mango of over 240 varieties is it?

How do you know you will like the fruit? Each species of fruit may have hundreds of different varieties to choose from. Make sure the one you grow is the one you like! DO NOT try to grow fruit from seed of a fruit you enjoyed. Some fruits will come true to seed, but may take more than twelve years before they fruit. Others, especially hybrids, will never come true to seed and any fruit that forms may be totally different from its parent. Only grafted trees are true clones and will usually fruit within three years.

For more detailed information, sign up for our free class "Alternatives to Citrus" scheduled for November 19, 2016 at the Manatee County Agriculture and Extension Office located at 1303 17th Street West in Palmetto. To register call the Extension Master Gardeners (941) 722-4524 or online at <http://alternativestocitrus.eventbrite.com>.





October

CALENDAR OF EVENTS



Date	Time	Event
3 rd Tuesday of each Month	10:00 a.m.	Monthly Guided Tours of the Master Gardener Educational Gardens - Join us for a guided tour lasting about one hour. The gardens illustrate a variety of garden styles and techniques, demonstrate Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ principles, educate residents about plants that perform well in Florida landscapes, and inspire garden visitors to follow recommended gardening practices at home. Register by calling the Master Gardener Plant Diagnostic Clinic (941) 722-4524.
2 nd & 4 th Saturday	10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.	Ask a Master Gardener – Rocky Bluff Library – 6750 US Highway 301 N., Ellenton. Visit the Extension Master Gardener information table and get answers to your gardening questions.
Saturday October 8	9:00-11:00 a.m.	Extension Master Gardener Plant ID Tour - Riverview Pointe Preserve – DeSoto National Memorial – Stroll through Riverview Pointe Preserve to learn more about Florida's native plants and inhabitants of a coastal habitat. Suitable for all ages. The hike begins in the parking area of the DeSoto National Memorial Park and enters into the Riverview Preserve at 8250 DeSoto Memorial Highway, Bradenton. To register call the Master Gardeners at (941) 722-4524.
Saturday October 15	10:00-11:30 a.m.	Roses for Your Florida Yard - Stop and smell the roses at our workshop devoted to growing roses in your Florida yard! For a nominal fee of \$5, participants will learn how to select and care for rose varieties that will flourish in their yard. Attendees will also take home a rose to propagate! Register online at http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu or call the Extension Master Gardeners (941) 722-4524. Class size limited!
Sunday October 16	9:00-11:00 a.m.	Extension Master Gardener Plant ID Tour - Robinson Preserve – Stroll through the Robinson Preserve's salt marshes to learn more about Florida's native plants and inhabitants of a coastal habitat. Suitable for all ages. Tour begins in parking area by main entrance at 1704 99 th Street Northwest, Bradenton. To register call the Master Gardeners at (941) 722-4524.
Thursday October 20	10:00-11:30 a.m.	Worm Composting "Vermicomposting" - Find out how to use worms to turn food scraps and other waste into compost. Worm bins available for purchase at \$50, cash or check only. Register online at http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu or call the Extension Master Gardeners (941) 722-4524.
Saturday October 22	10:00 a.m.-Noon	Termite Discovery 101 - Learn how to identify termites from other flying insects, particularly bees and ants, and when are the prominent swarm seasons. Learn the telltale signs of termite feeding, and how to determine if you may need to call an exterminator. Register online at http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu or call the Extension Master Gardeners (941) 722-4524.
Saturday October 22	1:00-3:00 p.m.	Upcycle Your Recycle Bins! - Wondering what to do with your recycle bins as Manatee County switches to single stream collection? Upcycle your old bins by turning them into useful items such as garden planters, tool bins, totes, and more. Master Gardener John Dawson will demonstrate the steps to turn your trash bins into treasured items. Register online at http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu or call the Extension Master Gardeners (941) 722-4524.
Monday October 24	9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.	Creating Schoolyard Habitats - This workshop is designed to provide hands-on activities for formal and non-formal educators working with youth ages K-8 th grade. Creating Schoolyard Wildlife Habitats specializes in converting empty areas into wildlife habitats (the area does not need to be a schoolyard). Pre-registration is required in order to receive workshop books and materials. Cash or check only, checks made payable to Friends of Extension. Register online http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu or call the Extension Master Gardeners (941) 722-4524.
Tuesday October 25	1:30-3:30 p.m.	Irrigation with Water Conservation in Mind - This class satisfies the irrigation educational requirement for the Manatee County Outdoor Water Conservation Rebate Program. Topics will focus on how to adjust your in-ground sprinkler system to conserve water, how you can repair parts, and the benefits of installing smart irrigation devices. Register online at http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu or call Joann (941) 722-4524.
Thursday October 27	1:30-3:30 p.m.	Landscape Tips for Water Conservation - This class satisfies the landscape educational requirement for the Manatee County Outdoor Water Conservation Rebate Program. Topics will focus on Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ tips such as right plant vs right place, watering efficiently, and the benefits of mulch. Register online at http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu or call Joann (941) 722-4524.
Saturday October 29	10:00-11:30 a.m.	Introduction to Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ - The 9 Principles - Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ means using low-maintenance plants and environmentally sustainable practices. Learn how you can have a beautiful landscape that could save you time, energy, and money while protecting our future. Register online at http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu or call the Extension Master Gardeners (941) 722-4524.



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