



## Post-Hurricane Care for Trees and Shrubs

By Amy Stripe, Master Gardener 2008



The best advice we can provide comes via University of Florida's Dr. Ed Gilman et al in a series of publications available at this link:

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/FR/FR17200.pdf>.

There are a few key things you should know even before you reference this detailed publication:

- Safety first: closely monitor trees that appear unstable; those with dead or broken limbs should be pruned.
- Depending on size and maturity, leaning or uprooted trees might be saved with proper cultural practices.
- Defoliated canopies of trees or shrubs do not necessarily indicate they are dead. Hold off pruning dead stuff.

So patience is the key. In fact, the University of

Florida/IFAS suggests you leave damaged (but not broken) limbs on trees and shrubs. No matter how ugly the foliage looks, let it be. Pruning creates added stress to the plant or tree.

I am keeping a diary of my plants post-Irma; I had a few "leaner" trees (of widely varied species) and some aerosol salt damage in my largely native landscape. Salt water was carried from Tampa Bay (about 2 miles from my home) into my yard by Irma and it will be interesting to see short and long term effects on landscape plants.

If you have an educational story to share about effects in your yard and garden, please send it to [ManateeMG@gmail.com](mailto:ManateeMG@gmail.com).

Please call the Manatee County Agriculture and Extension Service (941) 722-4524 or email Master Gardeners at [ManateeMG@gmail.com](mailto:ManateeMG@gmail.com) with any questions concerning care of your landscape post-Irma.



**Q:** I apologize for the terrible photo. I found this dead and discarded live oak leaf in my yard today and am curious to know what these quite lovely pea-shaped structures are on the underside. My neighbor said they might be galls. I don't know what galls really are. Should I be concerned?

Thank you! NKA, Palmetto



**A:** Dear NKA:

The picture of the oak leaf, although a little blurry, clearly shows oak leaf galls. The many different kinds of galls and can be described as blister, bud, bullet, oak apple, roly-poly, rosette, or stem galls. Galls are a plant's response to an organism (insect) or chemical/mechanical stimulation.

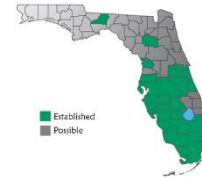
This particular gall is the result of an insect, a tiny wasp, which has laid an egg in the plant tissue. Just as human skin reacts to a splinter or an insect bite by swelling around it, so a leaf grows tissue or a gall around the growing insect egg to protect the plant. The growing insect feeds on the internal gall tissue until mature when a tiny hole is made in the gall and the mature wasp emerges. Although these galls look alarming and can be abundant, they rarely affect the health of the tree.

Most gall-making insects on oaks are native in our landscape and do not require management. I've included a link to information about galls for you to read:

[http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/Hort/GardenPubsAZ/facts\\_about\\_galls.pdf](http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/Hort/GardenPubsAZ/facts_about_galls.pdf).

## Brahminy Blind Snake ("Flower Pot Snake")

By Norma Kisida, Master Gardener 2012



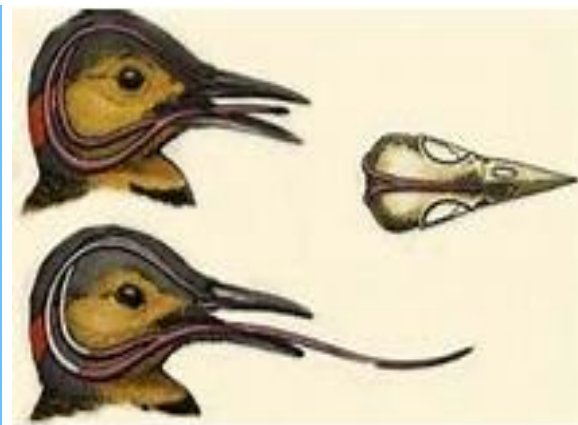
The Brahminy blind snake (*Ramphotyphlops braminus*) is a small non-venomous snake most often found under rotting leaves and in garden beds. It is considered the most widespread snake species in the world, likely due to its propensity to live and travel in the soil of potted plants (thus the name "flower pot snake"). This non-native snake from southeastern Asia was first reported in Florida in 1983 and has now been found throughout peninsular Florida.

This snake is typically less than six inches long with a brown, dark gray, or black back and lighter underside. It is frequently mistaken for an earthworm, but it is not segmented, does not stretch or contract like an earthworm, and has scales like a snake. The blunt rounded tail resembles the head and the tiny eyes are nearly invisible dots covered with translucent scales, rendering these snakes almost blind. All these snakes are asexual females and lay eggs without sperm from a male. They are thought to occasionally give live birth. Their diet consists of ants and termites including the eggs and larvae.

Although populations of these snakes are well established and spreading in Florida, they are currently not considered a threat to native species. For more information:

<http://ufwildlife.ifas.ufl.edu/snakes/brahminyblindsnake.shtml>  
or  
<http://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/nonnatives/reptiles/brahminy-blind-snake/>.





## Rat-a-tat-tat, or Why is that Woodpecker Pecking on My Drainpipe?

By Nancy Porter, Master Gardener 2014

Have you ever been awakened in the morning by a staccato tapping-rapping?

Most likely it's a woodpecker letting other birds know that your location is HIS and he is looking for "the one." In the meantime, he's probably driving you crazy!

There is a definite difference between the noise woodpeckers make when searching for food versus trying to attract a mate. To get a mate, they make a rapid, continuous noise that may go on for many days.

Woodpeckers search for food in trees, and because they drill holes with their beaks, this definitely makes noise. But when the male is trying to attract a mate, the louder the noise, the more attention he gets; hence his pecking on metal objects: gutters, soffits, a nearby power pole. This "drumming" most often occurs in the spring but can continue throughout the summer.

How can a woodpecker peck continuously without damaging its head and brain? Well, it incessantly moves its beak around, thus minimizing brain damage in specific areas. It also has a skull that is flexible due to plate-like bones. These bones act like a seat belt for the bird's skull, as well as its eyes. A thick membrane beneath the lower lid of its eyes protects it from flying debris resulting from its pecking.

Another interesting tidbit of information is the red-bellied woodpecker's (*Melanerpes carolinus*) tongue wraps around its brain, then down through its nostrils and out of its mouth. The red-bellied woodpecker (curiously named since its most prominent feature is a red head!) also has stiff tail feathers that act like a supporting tripod as the bird clings to vertical surfaces.

The bird's beak is also a big help. An orthodontist would be

delighted to get a woodpecker in his/her chair, as they have a bit of an overbite. The bird's upper beak is longer than its lower beak which is made of strong bone that helps to absorb impact.

Our most common woodpeckers are the red-bellied, the pileated (very large), red-headed, downy, and hairy.

Some interesting facts about woodpeckers:

- A woodpecker's beak acts as a chisel and crowbar to help remove bark to find insects.
- Some woodpeckers have tongues that are up to four inches in length.
- Woodpecker toes are different from most other birds. Two toes point forward and two backward in order help grasp the sides of the trees as they hammer away.
- The average woodpecker taps an estimated 8,000-12,000 times per day.

If you do not want woodpeckers around, you can discourage them with various methods:

- Place plastic sheets over siding.
- Hang nylon/mesh netting over the siding, placing it at least 3" off the siding.
- Use silhouettes of owls or hawks.
- Use noise-making devices of owls or hawks.

If you would like to encourage them to homestead, provide them a snag in which to nest. A snag refers to a standing, dead, or dying tree often missing a top or most of the smaller branches. For more information go to:

<https://extension.psu.edu/woodpeckers>,  
[http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2002&context=extension\\_histall](http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2002&context=extension_histall),  
<https://askabiologist.asu.edu/plosable/woodpeckers>.

# SELECTING TURFGRASS FOR YOUR MANATEE COUNTY YARD

By Amy L. Stripe, Master Gardener 2008

Having a green yard year round is one of the aesthetic advantages of living in Florida. And grass does have its uses in the landscape; for example, erosion control and slowing storm water runoff. Turfgrass, properly selected and maintained, can be Florida-Friendly! But remember: *There is no "perfect" turfgrass!*

Consider the following factors when choosing your turfgrass:

- **Site conditions**

What is the pH of the soil? How much sun does the area receive? What kind of irrigation is available? How much foot traffic will there be? These are key questions. For example, centipedegrass (*Eremochloa ophiuroides*) is not suited to the hot weather conditions of our county. Northern grasses like fescue (*Fescua* spp.) or bluegrass (*Poa* spp.) will also not withstand our hot summers.

Consider using zoysiagrass (*Zoysia* spp.) if you anticipate a high degree of recreational use of your lawn. And while most of Florida's warm-season grasses require a good deal of sun, there are some cultivars of turfgrass species that tolerate shade.

- **Level of maintenance**

All turfgrasses require *some* degree of maintenance. Ask yourself how much time you are willing to devote to your lawn. In general, bermudagrass (*Cynodon* spp.) and seashore paspalum (*Paspalum vaginatum*) are not recommended for homeowners who look after their own lawns because of the high level of maintenance required to keep it looking good. Among other disadvantages, bermudagrass requires lots of fertilizer, and it can be very

aggressive, spreading well beyond where you want it to go. Seashore paspalum requires frequent mowing and can be damaged by many common herbicides. Thatching is also an issue with seashore paspalum.

In addition to factors such as mowing frequency, consider pest and disease issues. We all know about St. Augustinegrass' (*Stenotaphrum secundatum*) vulnerability to chinch bugs, but it is also prone to gray leaf spot disease. Zoysiagrass may be susceptible to nematodes, depending on the cultivar.

- **Budget**

Cost factors go hand-in-hand with maintenance issues. Are you paying for your irrigation water or is it reclaimed or well water? Can you start your chosen turfgrass from seeds (least expensive) or must you use sod (most expensive)? Does the turfgrass require de-thatching from time to time? St. Augustinegrass does and this usually takes special equipment and/or a professional lawn specialist.

Speaking of special, some grasses, like zoysiagrass, get their best cuts with a reel type mower, while you may own only a rotary mower.

Consult the turfgrass selector table on the following page for optimal choices for your county but also the many resources available from UF/IFAS Extension on individual turfgrass varieties and cultivars at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/> or through the Extension office, (941) 722-4524

An excellent book on the subject is "The Florida Lawn Handbook" by Laurie E. Trenholm and J. Bryan Unruh, available at the University of Florida/IFAS bookstore <http://ifasbooks.ifas.ufl.edu/default.aspx>.

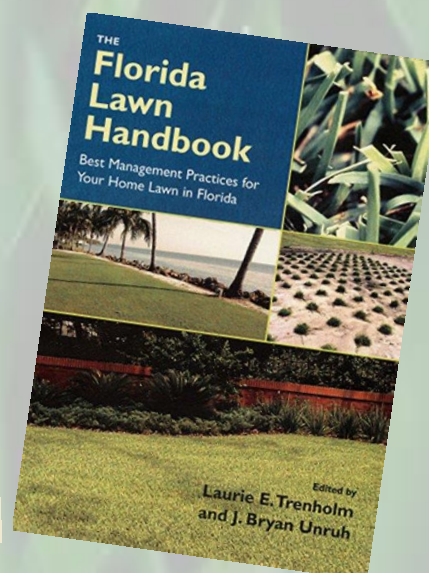
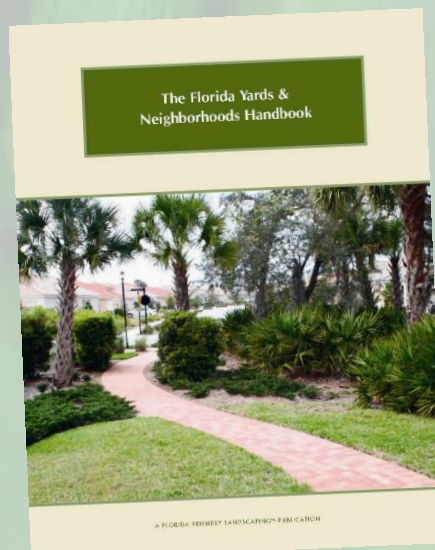
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# TURFGRASS SELECTOR

Species	<b>BAHIAGRASS</b> ( <i>Paspalum notatum</i> )	<b>ST. AUGUSTINEGRASS</b> ( <i>Stenotaphrum secundatum</i> )	<b>ZOYSIAGRASS</b> ( <i>Zoysia</i> spp.)
<b>Mowing height</b>	3 - 4 inches	3.5 – 4 inches (2 – 2.5 for dwarf cultivars)	1.5 – 2.5 inches
<b>Soil</b>	Acid, sandy	Wide range	Wide range
<b>Leaf texture</b>	Coarse to medium	Coarse to medium	Fine to medium
<b>Drought tolerance</b>	Excellent	Fair	Medium
<b>Salt tolerance</b>	Poor	Good	Good
<b>Shade tolerance</b>	Poor	Good (cultivar-dependent)	Good (cultivar-dependent)
<b>Wear tolerance</b>	Poor	Poor	Good to excellent
<b>Nematode tolerance</b>	Very good	Good	Depends on cultivar
<b>Maintenance level</b>	Low	Medium	Medium
<b>Establishment method</b>	Seed, sod	Sod, plugs, sprigs	Sod, plugs, sprigs
<b>Establishment rate</b>	Slow	Medium	Very slow
<b>Major Diseases/Pests</b>	Few diseases / mole crickets	Brown patch & gray leaf spot/chinch bugs	Dollar spot, brown patch & rust/ hunting billbugs
<b>Thatch control</b>	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Weed control</b>	Problematic	Controllable	Controllable

(Adapted from “The Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Handbook” and “The Florida Lawn Handbook.”)





# Bugs or NERVES?

By Joy Derksen, Master Gardener 2004



"Can you help me? Bugs are biting me!" This is not a strange request for assistance in the Master Gardener Plant Clinic at Manatee County's Extension Service. We have numerous insects in Florida. Mites, lice, bed bugs, and fleas are home-dwelling insects that can leave itchy rashes or bumps. Outside, there are no-see-ums and mosquitoes that use humans for a blood meal and can also cause itching. And then there are the insects that object when we disrupt their well-ordered insect lives (think fire ants and wasps and spiders).

While Master Gardener volunteers and Extension agents are pretty good at distinguishing which insect is eating your plants, we are not trained to look at humans and decide what is biting them. If you bring us an insect in a plastic container, we can look at it and tell you what insect we see. (No squished bugs, though...we can't see its parts!)

If we can't identify an insect, we get the advice of an Extension agent or send it to the experts at the University of Florida.

What we cannot do is look at human flesh or scabs or hair and say what has happened to you. This will take a medical professional trained in human bumps and rashes. You need to see a dermatologist, your family doctor, or the Manatee County Health Department to help you with your quandary.

Sometimes when insects cannot be found, you haven't really been attacked by an insect. You may feel an insect, but it turns out that your nerve endings are fooling you!

As we age and lose our fat layer between skin and nerves, sometimes the nerves think they are feeling an insect and send that message to the brain. Other medical causes for nerves misfiring are diabetes, thyroid problems, B12 deficiency, cancer, chemotherapy, and other drugs.

This misfiring of nerves causing you to feel bugs on your skin is common enough that it has its own name: "Delusional parasitosis" (a rough translation would be imaginary parasites). In these cases, medical help is available, just not at the Master Gardener Plant Diagnostic Clinic!

[http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/hot\\_topics/environment/biting\\_insects.shtml](http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/hot_topics/environment/biting_insects.shtml)





# Alternatives to Invasive Plants in Florida, Part I: Replacing Mexican Petunia

By Nancy Hammer, Master Gardener 2014



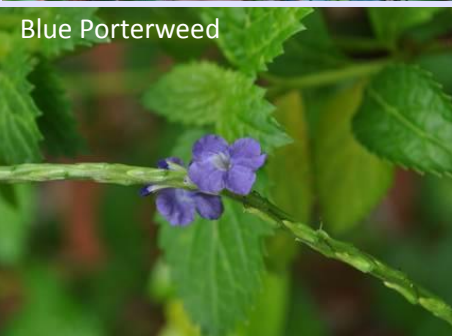
Purple Showers



Purple Showers



Blue Porterweed



Stokes' aster



Mona Lavender



Marc Frank, a University of Florida/IFAS botanist, states that invasive plants are: "non-natives that tolerate a variety of habitats and growing conditions; grow and reproduce rapidly; compete aggressively for nutrients, water, light and space; and lack natural enemies to keep them under control." He continues: "They displace native species, reduce native wildlife habitat, reduce forest health and productivity, alter ecosystem processes, reduce agricultural productivity, and degrade recreational areas".

The University of Florida has identified a number of Florida-Friendly alternatives to these bad actors. In a series of articles, we will identify some of the most commonly found invasive plants in Florida gardens and suggest several native and non-native substitutes.

**THE BADDIE:** Mexican petunia (*Ruellia simplex*) is a garden favorite in our area. It was introduced in the U.S. in the 1940's and has been listed by the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council (FLEPPC) as a Category I invasive since 2001. This means it can easily escape our garden bed and crowd out native species in natural areas. The mother plant produces seeds that germinate immediately or survive in the soil for years. Plants also spread by above- and below-ground stems and are extremely difficult to eradicate. Unfortunately, this troublemaker may still be found at some garden centers.

**THE GOODIES:** A sterile (non-reproductive) cultivar called 'Purple Showers' is readily available in nurseries. Also, the University of Florida has more recently developed several cultivars that also do not set seed ('Mayan Purple,' 'Mayan White,' and 'Mayan Pink'). Be aware that these sterile cultivars can still spread by plant stem sections.

Perhaps the best alternative plant is the beautiful low-growing **wild petunia** (*Ruellia caroliniensis*) which can be found at native plant nurseries. This shorter annual wildflower has a very long flowering period and attracts several butterflies.

Another suitable native plant is **blue porterweed** (*Stachytarpheta jamaicensis*), a small perennial shrub. Continuous blue or pink flowers at the end of long stems attract butterflies. They are often planted in mass along a foundation or used as a hedge. Be aware that there is a non-native species, *S. cayennensis*, which is listed as a Category II invasive (not recommended).

Yet another native with blue/lilac flowers is **Stokes' aster** (*Stokesia laevis*). This low maintenance perennial grows up to 2 feet tall with cornflower-like flowers up to 4 inches across which attract butterflies.

**Plectranthus 'Mona Lavender'** is a non-native, non-invasive evergreen perennial with 6-inch long lavender blossoms, suitable for filtered shade to shady moist areas. It was a Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association (FNGLA) 2004 Plant of the Year, and it is readily available at local nurseries.

For more information on alternatives to the invasive Mexican petunia, visit <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/EP/EP46800.pdf> "Alternatives to Invasive Plants Found in Central Florida Landscapes."

Stay tuned to "The Bench" for more articles on invasive plant substitutes for your yard.



# October

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### 2017 Master Gardener Plant Fair

**Saturday October 7, 2017 ~ 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. - Save on Florida-Friendly Plants!**  
**Located at Manatee County Extension Service - 1303 17<sup>th</sup> St. W. in Palmetto at the Fairgrounds**  
**Come Early for Best Selections!**



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 October 14	9:00-11:00 a.m.	<b>Extension Master Gardener Plant ID Tour - Riverview Pointe Preserve</b> – 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 Extension Master Gardeners at (941) 722-4524.
Sunday October 15	9:00-11:00 a.m.	<b>Extension Master Gardener Plant ID Tour - Robinson Preserve</b> – 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 <sup>th</sup> Street Northwest, Bradenton. To register call the Extension Master Gardeners at (941) 722-4524.
Tuesday October 17	10:00 a.m.	<b>Monthly Guided Tours of the Master Gardener Educational Gardens</b> - 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 Extension Master Gardener Plant Diagnostic Clinic (941) 722-4524.
Saturday October 14	9:00-10:00 a.m.	<b>Problems in the Bee Hive - What is the Importance of Beekeeping?</b> This workshop will give a quick overview of basic beekeeping then jump into the issues honeybees combat in their hives. Take home a free pollinator plant — limited supply. Register on-line at <a href="http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu">http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu</a> or call the Extension Master Gardeners (941) 722-4524.
Saturday October 14	10:00-11:30 a.m.	<b>Water Gardening Wonders</b> - The Queen & the Killer: Two <i>Guinness World Record</i> Plant Curiosities. Travel with Paula Biles to the Amazon and a Florida bog. You'll learn about the world's largest water lily and the fastest carnivorous plant. Passports not required! Register online at <a href="http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu">http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu</a> or call the Extension Master Gardeners (941) 722-4524.
Saturday October 14	1:00-2:00 p.m.	<b>The Longleaf Pine Trees</b> - Eric Strickland, ISA Certified Arborist and Senior Forester for the Florida Forest Service, will discuss the history of the longleaf pines in Florida, why it is declining, and what are the recovery efforts being done for the special pine tree. Register on-line at <a href="http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu">http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu</a> or call the Extension Master Gardeners (941) 722-4524.
Saturday October 21	10:00-11:00 a.m.	<b>SSSnakes!</b> - Learn more about how to differentiate between venomous and non-venomous snakes and the benefits of native, non-venomous snakes. Register on-line at <a href="http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu">http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu</a> or call the Extension Master Gardeners (941) 722-4524.
Saturday October 21	9:00-11:00 a.m.	<b>Extension Master Gardener Plant ID Tour - Rye Preserve</b> - 805 Rye Wilderness Trail, Parrish 34219. Meet at Rye Preserve on the east side of Rye Road and North of Manatee River. Drinking water and hiking sticks are recommended. There are places to enjoy a picnic lunch, if desired. Register by calling the Extension Master Gardener Plant Diagnostic Clinic (941) 722-4524.
Saturday October 21	Noon-1:30 p.m.	<b>Orchid Care and Repotting</b> - Learn the proper way to care for and propagate several varieties of orchids. Bring your orchid and pruners for a hands-on exercise of dividing the orchid. Advance payment for materials due by October 13 and guarantees your spot in class. Register on-line at <a href="http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu">http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu</a> or call the Extension Master Gardeners (941) 722-4524.
Saturday October 28	10:00 a.m.-Noon	<b>Wild about Wildflowers - Feed the Butterflies and Bees!</b> This workshop will focus on specific native wildflowers that grow in our area, basic information on starting a wildflower garden in your backyard, instructions on cultural needs for the plants, and the wildlife value. Register on-line at <a href="http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu">http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu</a> or call the Extension Master Gardeners (941) 722-4524.



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