



## BEGGAR-TICKS, SPANISH NEEDLES (*BIDENS ALBA*)

BY LINDELL TOWNSELL, MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER

*Bidens alba* is an often unappreciated native Florida weed or wildflower. It has a reputation for its aggressive growth in home gardens and landscapes. Spanish needle occurs in many different habitats, ranging from moist, fertile soil to dry and infertile soil. They are most often found in moderately dry, full-sun areas that have been disturbed by human or animal activity.



Spanish Needle Flower (*Bidens alba*)

One plant can produce between 3,000 to 6,000 highly viable seeds with no dormancy requirement. Its abundant flowers bloom year-round and attract an incredible variety of pollinators including bees and butterflies

even though its flowers are self-pollinating. In Florida, Spanish needles are the third most common source of nectar for honey production.



Spanish Needle Seeds (*Bidens alba*)

Additionally, Spanish needle is a larval host plant for the dainty sulphur butterfly (*Nathalis iole*). Spanish needles belong to a group of weeds nicknamed "hitchhiker weeds" for their ability to stick to clothing and fur. Their barbed adaptations ensure that the seeds will travel far and wide via animal or people locomotion.

For more information, visit:  
<http://bit.ly/41R84ZU>  
<http://bit.ly/4n0TuqZ>  
<http://bit.ly/4glJMgi>



Manatee Square Community Garden

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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



## THIELAVIOPSIS TRUNK ROT

BY JOY DERKSEN, MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER

Lately, I have been noticing tall palms in my neighborhood whose crowns are falling off or whose heads are bent down looking like the crooked top of a cane. What's happening here?

It seems these palms have been infected with a fungus that is native to our local Florida soils. It enters the palm tree in a wound which can be caused by improper trimming of green fronds (only cut off brown fronds!) with an unsanitary cutting instrument, by woodpecker or sap sucker holes, or by other damage to the tree. The fungus can be blown in the wind from a nearby infected tree, soils that have the fungus present, or carried from an infected tree by cutting tools, or birds or other animals.

The fungus, *Thielaviopsis paradox*, enters and begins to multiply causing a wet soft rot through the trunk on the side of entry. It is not particular to any one palm species. Symptoms of the disease might be oozing from the initial wound site and wilting of the fronds. Other times there is no warning and



Trunk Collapse on a Palm

the crown, half rotted on the wound side simply collapses in that crook shape. If the rot makes it all the way across the palm trunk, the entire crown may simply fall off. One day appearing healthy, the next day headless! To give you an even better idea of how it looks, University of California calls it “crook neck.”

There is no chemical treatment for thielaviopsis at this time. Once infected the palm cannot

be saved. Prevention is to avoid pulling or cutting off live fronds and to sterilize cutting tools between trees. An infected tree should be removed and incinerated to avoid the chance of spreading to other palms. UF recommends that you do not plant another palm in the same place unless you can protect it from trunk wounds.

For more information, visit:  
<http://bit.ly/3K2gXcZ>

## PALMETTO BRANCH LIBRARY

HELP US GROW OUR NATIVE PLANT GARDEN!

Join the Palmetto Library Garden Club and learn practical cultural growing skills from UF/IFAS Extension Manatee County experts. Our garden showcases native Florida plants that you can grow in your own landscape. We meet once a month (next date is October 8 beginning at 8:30 A.M.) to maintain our plantings alongside Extension staff.

Kids (with adult supervision) are welcome. Hats, sunscreen and long-sleeves are recommended for sun protection.



Palmetto Library Garden Club

In addition to our gardening days, our “Grow Your Garden” series of presentations include: Pests and Beneficial Insects on November 3 and Pollinator Landscape on November 17.

To reserve your spot go to [MyManatee.org/library-system](http://MyManatee.org/library-system) and see Event Calendar

## MANURE MANAGEMENT: HERE'S THE POOP

BY JENNIFER TONGE-MARTIN, MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER

Gardeners are weird. Get a bunch of them together, and soon you will hear a lively discussion about... manure! Is cow or horse better? Earthworm or chicken? Bat or goat? It can get quite heated as we argue the merits of our favorite source of excrement. What's the stink about?

Even as ancient hunter-gatherers, humans have picked up poop for many uses. From fuel to building material, dung has been an important part of civilization. When we became farmers and herders, manure management became an obvious necessity. No one knows for sure how we discovered that spreading it on fields and pastures improved plant growth, but it did, and the fertilizer industry was born. Now science has identified the specific nutrients that plants need to grow, but there are other, almost magical things in manure that we are just discovering.



Chicken Manure

Manufactured fertilizer is made of the macronutrients nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium (NPK) plus micronutrients and enough inert ingredients to improve spreadability and adjust utilization rates. Manure is surprisingly low in these nutrients, and most are



Cow Manure

classified as "soil amendments" rather than fertilizer. Now, amendments do so much more than mere fertilizer. They improve both water retention and drainage, help with soil pH and nutrient uptake by plants. They help plants resist or recover from diseases and bugs. They even help plants communicate with each other!

Manure has one big drawback: what goes in is what comes out. The germs and parasites, chemicals and heavy metals in fresh manure must be managed. Manure that is allowed to age at least 90 to 100 days is considered safe enough by the USDA National Organic Program standards, but active composting methods result in the best outcomes. The heat generated will kill most germs and diminish, if not eradicate, odor and loose nutrients that contaminate groundwater. Composting won't kill parasites like roundworms, so poop from pigs, dogs, cats and humans are not recommended to use.

Fecal matter that comes from barns and stables are great because they are already mixed with hay, straw or sawdust. IFAS has lots of resources on managing a good muck system for everyone from the family with one horse or goat to large farms and ranches. Gardeners

always like to cultivate friends whose children are in the 4-H club! IFAS has a Livestock Waste Testing Lab that will determine nutrient and contaminant levels in "home-grown" manure sources.

Commercial bagged manure has many pluses. It is well-composted and has been tested to determine how much NPK is in it. This helps with adjusting the use of commercial fertilizer down, though it may not remove the need for fertilizer completely.

To safely apply composted manure, mix it well into the top 6-8 inches of soil before planting. It can also be used as a "side dressing", keeping it away from the base of your plants but close enough for the outer roots to reach it. Composted manure from horse or cow sources can also be used as compost or "top dressing". Read the label for the use of manures with higher NPK contents like guano or chicken litter. Treat them like the organic fertilizer they are. Sometimes it takes a little experimentation to get the right mix of manure in your garden. Got Zoo Doo, anyone?

For more information, visit:  
<http://bit.ly/3K76hJZ>



**“THE POWER OF 7”****BY JIM HAUPT, MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER**

Recently, while sitting in the lanai, a continuous stream of European starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) sat quietly atop a power line as far as I could see. Suddenly the entire flock flew from their perch forming a dense, shape-shifting, massive black cloud which curved and twisted easterly like iron filings drawn to an invisible magnet. This jaw-dropping ballet, called *murmuration*, generally occurs at dusk. While other bird species, like Canadian geese, American white pelicans, and ibises, form v-shape patterns, starlings are known for their unique aerial murmurations. But *why* do they perform these tightly-knit, eye-catching patterns and shapes? *How is it possible* for any one individual, surrounded by thousands, even millions, possibly know which direction to go without ramming into one another and creating mass confusion?

European starlings are considered an invasive species in North America. They roost in trees, hedges, and manmade structures. They pack themselves tightly together for warmth and protection. While in flight, when one of the birds



An Aerial Murmuration

spots a predator, their noisy harsh trills and chatter, and incessant flapping and swirling, will confuse any raptor who threatens them.

Researchers at Princeton University along with a team of Italian physicists discovered that starling formations occur when each bird, wherever they are in the flock, responds immediately to social cues from seven of its closest neighbors. Called the “*power of 7*”, each bird must sense and react quickly to the neighbors around it. Any bird in the flock can be a leader if it spots a threat first. When it does, its group will react. This group will cause their own seven neighbors to respond initiating an instant chain reaction that quickly ripples throughout the

entire flock. The “*power of 7*” enables the flock to function as one unit enabling the entire flock to react immediately.

We can learn something from starlings. Research tells us that working in small groups as opposed to large groups, gives each individual more opportunities to participate, build friendships and trust, produce better outcomes, reduces confusion, and promotes quicker decision-making due to fewer distractions. In other words, The “*power of 7*” is not necessarily “all for the birds!”

For more information, visit:  
<http://bit.ly/46EJ6zw>  
<http://bit.ly/3VgBxIX>



An Aerial Murmuration



## MYRSINE – NEAT AND TIDY

TEXT & PHOTOS BY SALLY HERB, MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER

Many of us are looking for a shrub that doesn't need a lot of time and effort to maintain. Myrsine (*Myrsine cubana*) is an under-utilized option.

Native to hammocks and pinelands in Zones 9A-11, myrsine averages 8-15 feet tall by 3-8 feet wide, although most seem to stay in the lower range size-wise. In the spring, myrsine has tiny white-green flowers that grow along the branches. These mature into small black fruit loved by birds, especially blue jays and cardinals.

The leaves cluster in small whorls giving it a lot of visual interest. It is dioecious (separate male and female flowers on different plants) so it's best to plant a male and a female to get the benefit of berries.

Myrsine is somewhat drought tolerant once established and not soil picky as long it is well drained. We've noticed at UF/IFAS Extension Manatee County that it is a slow grower, only a few inches a year, and needs little to no pruning to keep it tidy. Oddly, one of it's common names is colicwood even though there appears to be no research supporting historic use as colic remedy



Northern Cardinal in a *Myrsine cubana*



This *Myrsine cubana* has never been pruned and remains neat and tidy.

Myrsine makes a lovely, easy to care for hedge/screen or specimen planting.

For more information, visit:

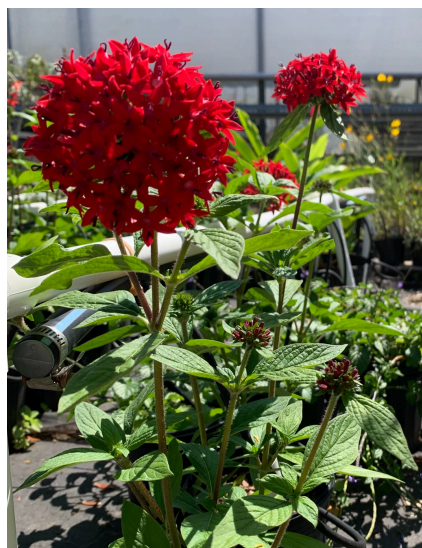
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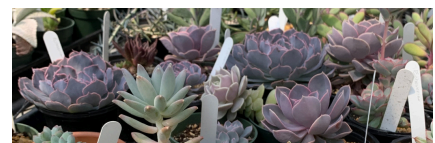
## MASTER GARDENER PLANT SALE IS SATURDAY, OCTOBER 4TH! WE ARE PRICED TO SELL!

Native trees, shrubs and wildflowers; succulents and bromeliads; and vegetables ready for the upcoming cool season will be on sale, all raised by Manatee County Master Gardener volunteers.

Bring your own garden wagon and load up! All proceeds from the sale go towards the operation and maintenance of our educational gardens and greenhouse, and to support our education and outreach programs.



Pentas



Succulents

For best selection, buy an Early Bird ticket for \$10 (or for a family of 2 or more, \$15) which gives you priority entry at 8:00 A.M.

Beginning at 9:00 A.M., all entry is free, but do sign up in either case on Eventbrite here: <https://2025fallplantsale.eventbrite.com>



## 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,** *This 2" long, hornet-like bug was floating in our community hot tub. The stinger is ridiculously long.*

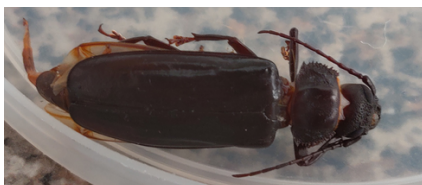


Photo Courtesy of Resident

**DEAR RESIDENT,** This insect is *Mallodon dasystemus*, commonly known as the hardwood stump borer. The projection isn't a stinger but an ovipositor used by females to deposit her eggs. This is a huge beetle known for its long, segmented antennae.

Due to the numerous trees damaged by the 2024 fall hurricanes, the beetle has likely laid eggs at the base of a damaged or dying hardwood tree, such as oak or maple.

I'm including links to information about the beetle for you to refer to.

<http://bit.ly/3K4XkRt>

<http://bit.ly/3JWWt5p>

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)



### 2025 MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER FALL PLANT SALE

October 4, 2025

8:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M.

Learn more here:

<https://2025fallplantsale.eventbrite.com>



### SMALL FARM STARTUP SCHOOL

October 7 - November 25, 2025

Tuesdays. 6:30 P.M. to 8:30 P.M.

Learn more here:

<https://FarmSchool.eventbrite.com>



### IRRIGATION WITH WATER CONSERVATION IN MIND

October 13, 2025

10:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M.

Learn more here:

<https://WaterConservation.eventbrite.com>



### ENVIRONMENTAL LANDS MANAGEMENT

October 15, 2025

9:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M

Learn more here:

<https://environmental-lands.eventbrite.com>



### RYE PRESERVE TOURS

Third Saturday of the month

(October - April)

9:00 A.M.

Learn more here:

<https://RyePreserveTours.eventbrite.com>



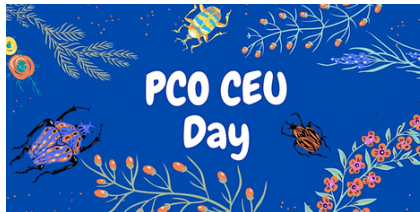
### RANCHING FOUNDATIONS

October, 23, 2025

10:00 A.M. to 2:30 P.M.

Learn more here:

<https://25ranchingfoundations.eventbrite.com>



### FALL 2025 PCO CEU DAY

October 30, 2025

8:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M.

Learn more here:

<https://2025PCO.eventbrite.com>



### PERICO PRESERVE TOUR

Fourth Saturday of the month

(September - April)

9:00 A.M.

Learn more here:

<https://PericoPreserveTours.eventbrite.com>



### SSSNAKES OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

October, 30, 2025

11:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M.

Learn more here:

<https://SSSnakesofFl.eventbrite.com>

## INTERESTED IN FARMING? SIGN UP FOR EXTENSION'S INCUBATOR FARM INITIATIVE

*THE GARDEN BENCH INTERVIEWS IDA VANDAMME, SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS EXTENSION AGENT*

Manatee, Lee, Hillsborough, and Polk County have joined in a multi-county partnership. UF/IFAS Extension is inviting beginning farmers to sign up for Small Farm Startup School in which Extension will provide instruction in farm business

planning, crop and livestock production, marketing, and more. This 8-week course is the first big step to learning how to farm. A fee is involved. Coursework begins October 7. Upon completion, there is a potential to participate in a

hand-on learning experience with an incubator farm where participants can try farming in a low-risk, low-cost environment under the guidance of Extension. Register here: <https://FarmSchool.eventbrite.com>



## A MESSAGE FROM THE RESIDENTIAL HORTICULTURE TEAM

BY MACK LESSIG, RESIDENTIAL HORTICULTURE AGENT

Founded in 2015, the Manatee County Community Gardens Program was created in response to a survey that identified approximately thirty food deserts in the Manatee and Sarasota area. Recognizing that these communities lacked access to nutritious food and traditional grocery stores, Manatee County, UF/IFAS, and the Department of Health collaborated to build the program's first garden, Manatee Square Garden. To ensure its success, the county also created a dedicated Community Gardens Program Assistant position.

Thanks to years of dedicated community engagement and strong support from the county, UF/IFAS, and our partners, our program has truly flourished. What began as a single initiative has expanded to include a second public garden at Elwood Park, with our team helping to create four church gardens and two municipal gardens.



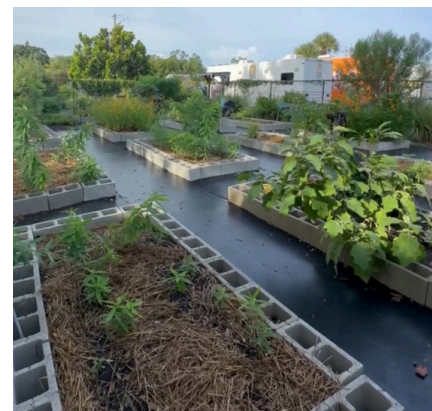
Manatee Square Garden in 2015

We also provide ongoing support to countless backyard gardeners and have previously assisted dozens of school gardens county-wide.

Our impact is clear: we've produced over 2,100 pounds of produce, logged more than 2,500 hours of community volunteerism, and educated nearly 2,000 gardeners and residents, all while cultivating a more connected and resilient community.

As Manatee County continues to grow, the program remains committed to meeting the

unique needs of its newest communities. We will continue to build strong partnerships and provide research-based content to support community and backyard gardeners.



Manatee Square Garden in 2025

## 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 S. and Joy D. 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)