



THE

GARDEN BENCH

The Manatee County Master Gardener Newsletter

September 2020 – Volume 19 – Issue 8



Florida Botanical Gardens, Largo



Kew Gardens, England

U.S. Botanical Garden, Washington D.C.



Fairchild Gardens, Miami

Botanical Garden Virtual Tours

By John Dawson, Master Gardener Volunteer

To me, nothing is more pleasant, beautiful, and serene as walking through a botanical garden. For those of you who live near one, I urge you to go visit. There are many famous gardens throughout the world and here in the U.S.

If you are physically unable, or lack the time or funds to travel, computer virtual tours are an alternative. Do a search on botanical garden virtual tours and you will find many to choose from. Besides beautiful pictures, some sites offer educational information on the various plants growing in the gardens. Many tours are produced by the gardens themselves; while a different perspective can be found through visitor videographers.

Below are links for virtual tours I have visited. Enjoy!

Worldwide

Kew Gardens – England <https://www.kew.org/about-us/virtual-kew-wakehurst>

Monet's Garden – France <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjWx2WNXFF4>

Royal Horticultural Society Gardens – England

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X2WealAPZHU>

Keukenhof Gardens -Holland <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7Mzpj005AO>

Trouttiansdorff Gardens – Italy

<https://www.trouttiansdorff.it/fileadmin/templates/r360/en/#/fruehling/>

U.S.A.

**US Botanical Garden – Washington D.C. www.usbg.gov/take-virtual-tour

Hawaii Tropical Garden - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDP3KDoQvZY>

**Atlanta Botanical Gardens - <https://atlantabg.org/lifebloomson/>

Florida

**Selby Gardens – Sarasota - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrM2_JzKZkU

Florida Botanical Garden – Largo

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TU3i4JgPxOg>

**Nature Coast Gardens – Spring Hill

<https://www.naturecoastgardens.com/virtual-garden-tour.html>

**Fairchild Gardens – Miami <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Et4Kok5MYTQ>

**Gardens I have personally visited and enjoyed.



Q. Dear Master Gardener Volunteer:

I found this on our driveway...way bigger than normal! Do you know what it is?

B.D., Bradenton



A. Dear B.D.:

Don't worry, this is not the "Murder Hornet" but Florida's very own *Sphecius speciosus*, giant ground hornet or Cicada killer wasp, a gentle giant. This wasp is harmless to humans but not so to cicadas.

The female of this species hunts and captures cicadas, injecting paralyzing venom that allows her to carry the cicadas to her underground egg chamber. There she lays an egg on one of the cicadas and leaves. Once her egg hatches, the larva feeds on the cicadas left by the mother wasp. The developing larva finishes out its development underground, exiting the chamber as an adult and starting the life cycle all over again.

The female wasp has a stinger but isn't aggressive and is unlikely to sting unless you handle her. The male has no stinger but is territorial and will dive at and bump anyone or anything that trespasses into its territory.

The following is a link to information about the cicada killer for your reference:

<http://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/entnemdept/2016/08/26/giant-wasp/>

Master Gardener Volunteer Karen Holleran
answers your email questions.

Send questions and/or photos for identification or for
diagnosis of residential gardening problems to
ManateeMG@gmail.com.

Or call us during office hours 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. at
941-722-4524 and ask for a Master Gardener Volunteer.

The

MONSTERS

That Attack South Florida

By Rob Hinz,
Master Gardener Volunteer

Shortwinged Mole Cricket
mouth parts, foretibiae, and dactyls

Science-fiction screen writers who create B monster movies could have a field day with the remarkable image of the mole cricket (*Neocurtila hexadactyla*). When this insect is magnified, it may scare children and cause adults to laugh.

Adult mole crickets have peculiar enlarged forelegs that are used for digging in the soil. The forelegs have large blade-like claws whose number and arrangement are used to distinguish between species. The *pronotum* (head shield) is brown and mottled with darker spots that also differentiate species. The abdomen of adults is mostly whitish or tan in color. These crickets measure 22 to 29 mm (1 ½ inches) in length. This tank-like soldier is a marvelous creation, from a certain point of view, but may cause concern to gardeners, ranchers and turf tenders.

Three mole cricket species in Florida are aggressive and damage turf and other plants. They include the southern mole cricket (*Neoscapteriscus borelli*), the tawny mole cricket (*N. vicinus*) and the shortwinged mole cricket (*N. abbreviates*).

These three pests were inadvertently introduced to the southern United States about 1900. By 1919 they had spread from southern Georgia and northern Florida to other southern states and as far west as California. Colder temperatures have contained their spread. The most abundant is the shortwinged mole cricket (*Neoscapteriscus abbreviates*) which is

somewhat restricted to the coastal areas. This cricket is incapable of flight. Both the tawny (*Neoscapteriscus vicinus*) and the southern (*Neoscapteriscus borellii*) mole crickets fly but not great distances.

They spend most of their lives tunneling underground causing deep cavities and galleries. They breed in April. During spring, mole crickets can be seen flying, with some being attracted to incandescent and florescent light. The bright floodlights of a tennis court, streetlights, or a ball field also attract them. Heavy rain collapses their tunnels and brings them to the surface.

Although all three invasive crickets are omnivorous, the Southern mole cricket is mainly carnivorous, only occasionally feeding on plant roots, stems, and leaves. This cricket is also cited as eating fire ants. The tawny and shortwinged mole crickets have voracious appetites and feast on turf, pasture grasses, forage crops, vegetable seedlings, and some insects. Common grasses targeted include bahiagrass, bermudagrass, centipedegrass, seashore paspalum, St. Augustinegrass, and zoysiagrass.

Signs of mole cricket activity include small mounds of soil that bulge upward and patches of brown grass that is dying or decaying and being replaced with weeds. The soil or affected areas of grass can be

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tested by mixing 1.5-2 tablespoons of dish detergent in one gallon of water and applying the solution to the affected area in the early morning or late evening to bring the mole crickets to the surface. Once discovered and identified, other means will be necessary to eradicate them.

Management of mole crickets is accomplished using cultural controls, insecticides, and biological controls. Cultural practices include planting plants that are less desirable to crickets, lighting practices, and altering the moisture in the soil.

Biological controls that include mole cricket nematodes (*Steinernema scapterisci*), Larra wasps (*Larra bicolor*), and the Brazilian red-eye flies (*Ormia depleta*). This type of management is considered to be the best option. They are effective but not a hundred percent foolproof. The parasitoids are not available commercially but are currently found in most counties and are expanding their range across Florida. Depending on the severity of the infestation, “The Mole Cricket IPM Guide for Florida” recommends biological agents and chemicals to control infestations.

References:

Mole Cricket IPM Guide for Florida:

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/files/IN/IN102100.pdf>,

<http://entnemdept.ufl.edu/molecrickets/mcri0038.htm>

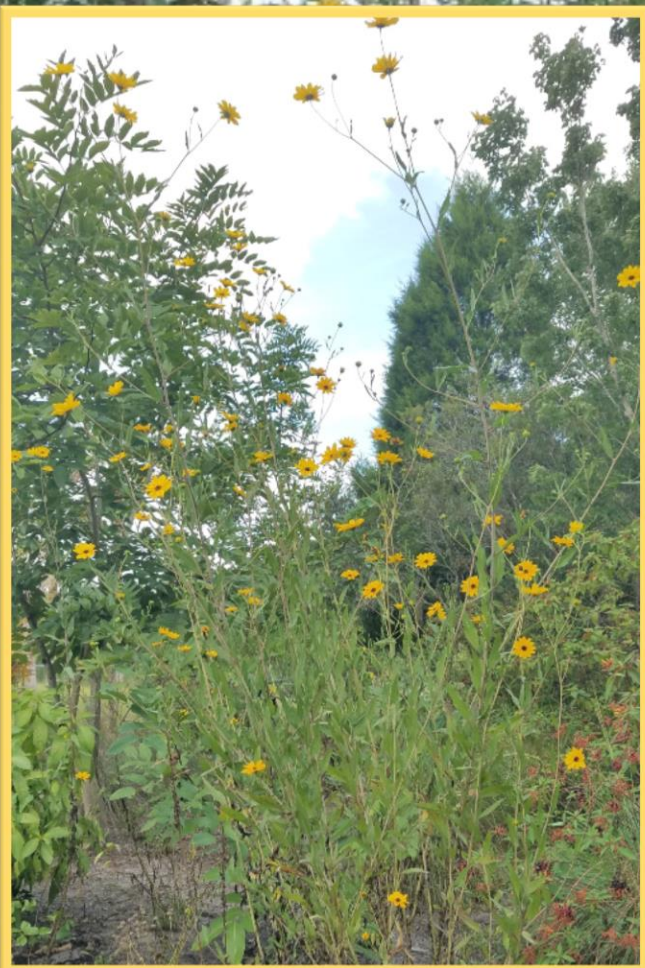
<http://entnemdept.ufl.edu/creatures/beneficial/larra-wasps.htm>

<http://entnemdept.ufl.edu/molecrickets/mcri0008.htm>



Close-up of mottled pronotum and short wings of the Shortwinged Mole Cricket





What's This? A Native Fall Winner! Swamp Sunflower

Text and Photos by
Norma Kisida, Master Gardener Volunteer

As summer flowers fade, we still have many later blooming native plants to bring us color and provide food for wildlife. One that may not be as common in the home landscape - unless you are a native plant enthusiast - is the swamp or narrow leaf sunflower (*Helianthus angustifolius*).

Swamp sunflower is a tallish open-structured perennial with narrow, rough textured leaves and numerous large 2-3-inch yellow flowers in the late summer and fall. It pairs well with other fall blooming native plants such as purple blooming blazing star (*Liatris spicata*).

Although it is generally found in wet areas it will also do well in residential or public gardens with well-drained soil if irrigated during drought. It is root hardy in our area and spreads by underground rhizomes; it does best in full sun and acidic soil.

It generally grows to about 2 feet tall but can reach up to 6 feet in ideal conditions and may need staking. However, it can be cut back in early June to keep it lower and fuller, and dead stalks can be cut low after flowering.

A benefit of this plant is that it is a great pollinator plant, attracting bees, butterflies, and other insects when as it is available in the fall versus other plants with spring and summer blossoms. There are no common pest problems reported with this plant.

Swamp sunflower can be propagated from seeds or by plants available at native plant nurseries. The rhizomes can also be divided once they become large enough.

For more information:

Swamp Sunflower- *Helianthus angustifolius*:

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/media/sfylifasufledu/baker/docs/pdf/horticulture/demonstration-gardens/Swamp-Sunflower.pdf>.

Food for Thought

By Rob Hinz,
Master Gardener Volunteer

Florida is home to many edible plants. This article will discuss one common edible plant: American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*). Future articles on other edible plants will follow. While these plants can be eaten and have some medicinal uses, it is important to consult your physician before using or consuming them.

Think of a native Florida plant with light green, fuzzy leaves, and clusters of magenta berries glistening in the morning dew. This is the eye-catching beautyberry plant, a deciduous shrub. The Greek genus *Callicarpa* comes from “callos” (beauty) and “carpos” (fruit). Other common names are French mulberry, sour bush, bunchberry, or purple beautyberry.

Beautyberry is a fast-growing perennial which some say is fire tolerant. This sprawling plant can reach a height of 3 to 8 feet and a width of 4 to 8 feet in conditions varying from moist and shady to open and dry. After flowering in spring and summer, branches bend toward the ground with purple fruit strung in clusters.

The small fruits, or drupes, contain numerous seeds. They are attractive to about 40 species of animals including mammals, birds, butterflies, and other insects. One author stated, “it’s a squirrel’s version of takeout.”



Beautyberry

Photo: Jan Hinz



Photo: Mary Derrick

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UF

continued from page 6

Although the berries are edible the raw berry taste can be unpalatable. Dr. Julia Milton from the University of Miami said, “The rank odor of the plants makes nibbling of the berry bunches on its stems unpleasant.” Use caution when eating the raw berries. They are not poisonous but could be a problem for some.

Beautyberry has a long history among Native Americans for eating and medicinal use. It can be made into jelly and wine. Depending on the amount of sugar used, the jelly can be either tangy or sweet.

The crushed leaves have been known to be an insect repellent. Florida “crackers” used to put beautyberry leaves under horse harnesses to repel mosquitoes. However, for people, it is recommended that the leaves be rubbed on clothing

rather than bare skin since chemical absorption into the skin is unknown. Tea can be made from the roots and berries and is said to treat dysentery, stomach problems, and colic.

There are various jelly, tea, and insect repellent recipes available online.

For more information, visit:

<http://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/bakerco/2019/02/15/wild-weeds-american-beautyberry/>,

<http://sfrc.ufl.edu/extension/4h/plants/Beautyberry/index.html>,

<https://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/trees-and-shrubs/shrubs/beautyberry.html>.

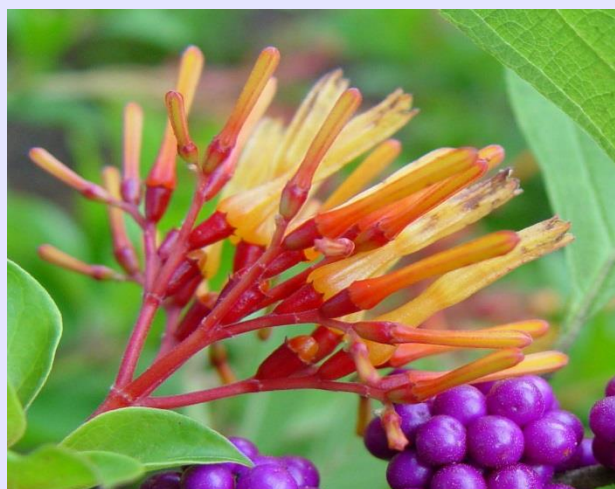


Photo: P. Dessaint



Beautyberry

Photo: Jan Hinz

Beating the Heat!

By Jim Haupt, Master Gardener Volunteer

From the bluish-green waters of the Gulf of Mexico and the vast Atlantic, moist tropical breezes flow across the Florida peninsula to create a hot, humid environment. Florida's 54-inch average yearly rainfall drives humidity levels even higher. Before mechanized heating and cooling, early settlers of the Sunshine State built cracker homes with wrap around porches, breezeways, elevated floors, and they took advantage of shade provided by native trees and other plants to cool their homes and redirect air flow.

Throughout Florida today, homeowners continue to search for cost effective ways to lower energy bills. Research at the University of Florida (UF) shows that large windows and sliding doors allow the most heat entry into a home, accounting for 30 to 60 percent of a building's total heat gain in the summer. Walls and windows on the east and west side of a house receive about 50 percent more sun than sides that face north and south.

We cannot control Mother Nature, but we can make modifications to "lower utility rates as much as 30 percent," based on UF research. Enviroscaping is the practice of modifying the landscape to make our homes environmentally friendly by conserving energy. Native plants, often overlooked, have adapted over time to Florida's soils, climate, heat and humidity, and wet and dry conditions. Indigenous trees, shrubs, vines, and groundcovers, naturally suited to these conditions, not only add curbside appeal, but can provide extra humidity control without obstructing air flow.

According to UF/IFAS researchers, groups of trees have a greater cooling effect than the same number of individual trees around the landscape. Fast-growing deciduous trees with broad canopies, like the American elm (*Ulmus americana*), planted on the east, west, and south side of a house will provide shade in summer while allowing warm air to filter through to provide warmer conditions in the winter. Evergreens like Dahoon holly (*Ilex cassine*), East Palaka holly (*Ilex x attenuata*), and other members of the holly family make great shade trees in the Florida landscape. The Department of Energy estimates that three strategically placed trees can save the average household between \$100

to \$250 annually in energy costs. Trees should be planted the appropriate distance from septic systems and roofs to avoid damage.

Shrubs, which grow much faster, provide extra shade and control humidity in just a few years. Vines like Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), Southern magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*), and twining vines like confederate jasmine (*Trachelospermum jasminoides*), trained on a trellis, create a microclimates that can block significant amounts of sunlight and prevent heat build-up on targeted sides of a home. Evergreen vines, according to the University of Florida, are a good choice for providing shade along the east and west sides of a house. Shrubs planted around outdoor air conditioning compressors/condensers help to block direct sunlight and reduce energy costs. Because they draw in air, care must be taken to avoid restricting air flow.

UF research has also shown that strategically placed grasses and groundcovers can keep surface and ground temperatures lower in summer by reducing glare as much as 9 degrees, and temperatures on paved surfaces as much as 25 degrees. Native sword ferns (*Nephrolepis exaltata*), Southern shield fern (*Thelypteris kunthii*), and beach sunflower (*Helianthus debilis*) are just a few suggested groundcovers that help reduce heat intensity around a home, pool, and sidewalk.

Similar to sweating, plants have the remarkable ability to reduce temperatures through a process called transpiration. During the summer months when temperatures rise, plants release excess water into the air from their leaves. By releasing evaporated water, plants cool themselves, creating a zone of cool air. The U.S. Geological Survey reports that a live oak (*Quercus virginiana*), for example, can release up to 40,000 gallons of water vapor in a single year.

Energy Efficient Homes: Landscaping
edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/FY/FY105000.pdf, or
"Evapotranspiration and the Water Cycle", U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, usgs.gov.
sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/archive/hot_topics/lawn_and_garden/enviroscaping.shtml#intro.

September

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Crab Spider on Coneflower

Photo: Norma Kisida MGv

Date	Time	Event
Wednesday September 9	1:00-3:00 p.m.	Preparing Your Fall Vegetable Garden Zoom Webinar Success in the fall vegetable garden starts with planning and preparation. Learn the best sites and environmental conditions for your garden, soil preparation, seasonal veggie selections, and using seeds and transplants to begin growing. To register, click here .
Wednesday September 16	1:00-3:00 p.m.	Fall Vegetable Garden Planting and Care Zoom Webinar You have planned your fall garden, now it is time to start planting and growing. This webinar covers timing, spacing, and placement of vegetable plants in the garden as well as fertilizing, mulching, watering, and other maintenance tasks. To register, click here .
Friday September 18	12:00-1:45PM	Mangrove Considerations Zoom Webinar Mangroves are unique and wonderful trees and as such have rules governing how they are trimmed. This short webinar course will cover their ecological importance, ID of the three common species, and basic trimming guidelines. To register, click here .
Wednesday September 23	1:00-3:00 p.m.	Scouting Vegetables for Pests and Diseases Zoom Webinar Be a scout! Regular inspection of plants and identification of insects and diseases in the vegetable garden will help you make decisions about management. Learn how to prevent problems and tackle pests using a variety of environmentally friendly methods. To register, click here .
Wednesday September 30	10:30-11:30 a.m.	Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ - Rain Gardens Zoom Webinar Rain gardens are an important part of the Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ concept and serve multiple functions. Information provided will help you decide if a rain garden is right for you and what you need to do to design, install, and maintain your rain garden, including native plant ideas. To register, click here .

Master Gardener Volunteer Plant Fair Postponed

SAVE THE DATE: March 20, 2021

By Amy Stripe, Master Gardener Volunteer

Spring
**plant
SALE**

In an abundance of caution, the Manatee County Master Gardener Volunteers (MGVs) have postponed their traditional 1st Saturday of October plant sale until March 20, 2021.

Plant Fair chairperson Linda Lestock says, "We considered ways in which to conduct a plant sale, including on-line ordering or even holding a sale with social distancing while keeping our customers and volunteers safe. At the end of the day, UF recommended we not hold it this year."

Head of plant propagation Sharon Krueger adds "Those of us MGVs raising plants and our customers wanting plants now share common goals: survival of gorgeous plants through the hottest and coldest months and our ability to offer you prime specimens in March next year."

Many Master Gardener Volunteers are committed to this aim. There may be fewer quantities of plants than before, but they will be top notch. Manatee County MGVs are looking forward to seeing you in March.



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