



KILLDEER (*CHARADRIUS VOCIFEROUS*)

BY LINDELL TOWNSELL, MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER

A shorebird you can see without going to the beach, killdeer are graceful plovers common to lawns, golf courses, athletic fields, and parking lots. Killdeer have several identifying features, including short bills, brown and white bodies, and two especially noticeable black bands around the neck.



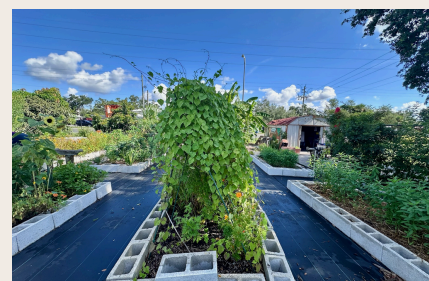
Killdeer

They get their name from the shrill, wailing “kill-deer” call they give so often. These tawny birds run across the ground in spurts, stopping with a jolt every so often to check their progress, or to see if they’ve startled up any insect prey.

Killdeer nests are simple scrapes often placed on slight rises in their open habitats. Pairs of killdeer tend to stay together for one to a few years. Their clutch size is usually four to six eggs and chicks hatch with a full coat of buffy down feathers and a single black breast band. They can walk out of the nest as soon as their feathers dry. Killdeer are some of the best-known practitioners of the broken-wing display, an attempt to lure predators away from a nest by feigning injury.

Killdeer are one of the most successful of all shorebirds because of its fondness for humans, modified habitats and its willingness to nest close to people. Because they live so close to people, however, killdeer are vulnerable to pesticide poisoning and collisions with cars and buildings.

For more information, visit:
<http://bit.ly/3JgYzfV>
<http://bit.ly/4llydXl>



Manatee Square Community Garden

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Master Gardener Volunteers are here to answers your questions!

Email us at: 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

HELLSTRIP (AKA: SIDEWALK STRIP, MERIDIAN, PARKWAY STRIP)

BY LINDELL TOWNSELL, MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER

Hellstrips are the skinny, oddly-shaped areas between the sidewalk and the street.

Hellstrips are usually unpaved, frequently covered in lawn, and often planted with street trees. Some of the challenges with landscaping a hellstrip are soil compaction, dogs, people, cars, trash, pollutants, and enormous trees planted in these strips.



Hellstrip

Additionally, this area is surrounded by the hottest, heat-reflecting surfaces in the landscape – asphalt from the street and concrete from the sidewalk. The city usually owns these strips of land even though the homeowner is expected to maintain them.

Here are some considerations about creating a hellstrip garden. Check your local regulations. Cities, HOAs, and other agencies often have rules about what you can and cannot do with these strips. Underground utilities often run through these strips. Before you dig, call 811 for free utility flagging. Use the “Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Guide to Plant Selection and Landscape Design”. This guide is an excellent source for selecting the right plant in the right place.



A Hellstrip Transformed

For more information, visit:

<http://bit.ly/415agwr>

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

The book, “Hellstrip Gardening” by Evelyn J. Harden.

References:

Hellstrip Landscaping Ideas, Plants, and Designs, <https://yardzen.com>.

Hadden E, (2014), “Hellstrip Gardening”, Timber Press Inc.

PASSION VINE – POPS OF PURPLE

BY SALLY HERB, MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER

If you're in the market for a vine with visual interest, this one's for you! Passion vine (*Passiflora incarnata*), also known as maypop, has beautiful iconic purple and white flowers and lovely tear-drop leaves. It was used extensively by indigenous people for various health issues and food. While the spring to fall flowers are enough to draw you in, it's also a host plant for the Gulf fritillary and zebra longwing butterflies. Passion vine is drought tolerant and resistant to pests. Remember, raggedy-looking leaves are a good sign that you've attracted butterflies!



Passion Vine

Happiest in full to part sun in Zones 8A-10B, once established, this vine really takes off. It spreads with rhizomes just below the soil surface with plants popping up in places you don't expect, then climbing whatever is nearby. With patience and pruning, the maypop can be trained to a trellis or fence. While it can be unruly, the butterflies it attracts are well worth the effort to contain it!

For more information, visit:

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

<http://bit.ly/4owTSib>

MOLE MADNESS

BY JENNIFER TONGE-MARTIN, MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER

The fifth element of Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ sounds simple enough: “Attract Wildlife”. A yard with birds chirping and pretty butterflies flitting from flower to flower is a wonderful image that almost every gardener dreams about. But we never want the “critters” that damage our plants, and are often in a struggle to remove them from the scene.

The Eastern Mole (*Scalopus aquaticus*) appear in that pristine expanse of lawn we have worked so hard to achieve, leaving ugly mounds that tear up the carpet of green. They are clearly some of the critters we do not want to attract. There are hundreds of products to get rid of moles. Which ones work, and which ones are a waste of money?

First, know your enemy! Moles are insectivores. They eat lots of grubs, larvae, crickets, beetles and slugs that eat the roots of grass and plants. Moles are built for a life underground and have incredibly strong, paddle-like forefeet with claws that are perfect for tunneling. They can cross an entire suburban lawn in one night. However, they do not spend much time in those tunnels. Their homes are dug much deeper underground, entered via molehills far away from their foraging tunnels.

Moles love wet lawns on soft, sandy soils. Not only is it easier to dig, but they often have great infestations of what moles love to eat.



Eastern Mole (*Scalopus aquaticus*)

As they forage for food, they inadvertently tear up the roots of the grass, already damaged by the bugs they eat and excessive water. Unless “tromped” back down, the grass over a foraging tunnel will quickly die. This leaves unsightly lumps and bumps in the lawn, a clear challenge to us gardeners. As we stomp and tromp over the grass, we think “is there another way?”

Traps kill, sometimes gruesomely. They have to be placed properly, and then the mole has to re-use the old tunnel. You may get a mole or two with traps, but the rest will just avoid them and dig new foraging tunnels.

Poisons kill but can be dangerous to anyone handling the products. Professionals who use poisons must be properly trained and licensed. Poison bait must be ingested by the mole but kept away from everything else.

Again, one or two moles may be fooled by the poisonous fake earthworm, but the rest will quickly learn to avoid it.

Repellents drive moles away with noxious tastes, sounds, smells, lights, motions or combinations thereof. In spite of incredible marketing, no one product has been proven to work very well or for very long. What does IFAS recommend? Stop over-watering your lawn. Determine if you have an infestation of “mole food” and take steps to control it. Decrease the amount of lawn in your landscape, as a mix of plants promotes a healthier yard and fewer unwanted pests. Tromp down the tunnels in the grass as soon as you notice them. And yet, appreciate the benefits of moles: they eat pests, aerate the lawn, and mix nutrients into the soil. Learn to love your moles. They won’t love you back, but at least you will live in peaceful harmony!

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

TOMATOES AREN'T ITALIAN, COFFEE ISN'T COLOMBIAN, AND POTATOES AREN'T IRISH

BY AMY STRIPE, MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER

There are some surprising origins of some common culinary plants. The Solanaceae family (also called nightshade) includes tomatoes (*Solanum lycopersicum*), potatoes (*S. tuberosum*) and peppers (*Capsicum spp.*). These three vegetables (technically, tomatoes are berries) are native to the Americas. Other far-ranging crops of today, like corn (*Zea mays*), tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum*) and pineapple (*Ananas comosus*) are also native Americans. ("Americans" does not refer to the U.S.A., but rather the North and South American continents.)



Tomatoes (*Solanum lycopersicum*)

Interestingly, in medieval times in Europe, any fodder crop such as barley, oats or rye was referred to as "corn." For several centuries following Columbus tomatoes were considered poisonous by Europeans (well, the leaves are!) and were grown only as ornamentals. The potato, too, was considered poisonous (and still is, actually, all the green parts.)



Agave (*Agave sp.*)

Vanilla (*Vanilla planifolia*), perhaps the most expensive spice in the world after saffron, is harvested from a native American orchid. Agave (*Agave spp.*), the most notorious use of which is for tequila, is native to Mexico whereas *Aloe vera* a very similar-looking plant originated in Africa.

Sunflowers (*Helianthus annuus*), romantically associated with Europeans like Vincent Van Gogh are, you guessed it: Americans. And lastly, everyone's favorite, cacao (*Theobroma cacao*) is also a native to the Americas. Who doesn't like chocolate?

For crops found in our Florida yards and homes, sweet orange (*Citrus sinensis*) is, as the scientific name suggests, native of China and southeast Asia. Coconut palms (*Cocos nucifera*) turn out to be from the south Pacific, after years of being chased around the world by botanists seeking its true origin. The seed – the coconut – can float around the ocean for years and germinate on infertile sandy beaches, of which there are plenty, including here in Florida! Coffee (*Coffea arabica*) is native of Ethiopia and was perfected in Yemen.

Olives (*Olea europaea*) are a new crop in Florida. Both eating and oil olives are being commercially raised in central Florida. This is a challenge as olives are native to the Mediterranean, a drier climate.



Brazilian peppertree (*Schinus terebenthifolia*)

Lastly, consider the Brazilian peppertree (*Schinus terebenthifolia*) which is a prohibited species in Florida. And yet, it is the source of the pink peppercorns you buy in the grocery store.

For more information, contact our Extension office at: ManateeMG@ifas.ufl.edu

MONARCHS, MILKWEED, AND OE**TEXT & PHOTO BY NORMA KISIDA, MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER**

As word of a decreasing population of monarch (*Danaus plexippus*) butterflies - our most popular and celebrated butterfly - became widely known, many of us rushed to plant more milkweed. Unfortunately, the most widely available and easy to grow milkweed, tropical milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*), may be contributing to the spread of a parasite that causes death and deformity in monarchs. This parasite, *Ophryocystis elektroscirrha* (OE), is a protozoan parasite that evolved with milkweed butterflies such as monarch and queen butterflies. Although not new to Florida, the levels have increased dramatically in the last few years, resulting in an important threat to the health of predominantly monarchs but also queens. This is controversial, even among experts, in how best to manage this increasingly common threat.

Tropical milkweed is a species of milkweed native to Mexico that is widely grown here in Florida. It is popular as a landscape plant and in butterfly gardens, and is spreading aggressively in Central and South Florida. It blooms throughout the year and does not die back in the winter as most native milkweeds; it is a favorite of monarchs to lay their eggs on and their caterpillars to eat. The OE parasite lives on the infected monarchs and is spread to the milkweed as they nectar and lay eggs. The caterpillars ingest the plant and become infected themselves, causing them to not develop normally. If they make it through the chrysalis stage they may emerge with deformed wings. With lower levels of infection, they may look normal but still have the carry the parasite and can still spread it to milkweed.

In our part of Florida we have resident, migrating, and breeding populations of monarchs. Tropical milkweed doesn't die back in the colder months like the native milkweeds. Because this non-native milkweed is still available for breeding, the migratory monarchs may end up staying instead of migrating.

There is still much research needed. Dr. Andy Davis at the University of Georgia who has been studying monarchs and their migration for over twenty-five years has proposed stopping planting milkweed at all, even the native species. Dr. Jaret Daniels at the University of Florida argues that this would concentrate monarchs more where milkweed still existed, causing more butterflies to be exposed to OE. He advises avoiding planting tropical milkweed and using native milkweeds. Here in our area, there are several species of native milkweeds available at native plant nurseries. If tropical is used, cut it back to the ground in late October before the northern monarchs arrive. Another way to mitigate OE is not to rear large numbers of monarchs in cages where they can easily spread the infection.

For more information, visit:
<http://bit.ly/4maZX25>



Monarch Butterfly on Tropical Milkweed

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 63rd Ave. W., Bradenton

UF/IFAS EXTENSION MANATEE COUNTY

Weekdays (except Wednesdays)
9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.
1303 17th 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, I found this crawling on the side of my house. What is it?



Photo Courtesy of Resident

DEAR RESIDENT, The presence of this crustacean on your house indicates that your home is close to a mangrove forest. This is *Aratus pisonia*, a mangrove tree crab. Found primarily in red mangrove trees, they range away from the shore to black and white mangrove trees, and occasionally to the side of your house. Adapted to living in the trees, these tiny crustaceans

venture down to the ground at low tide to feed on bits of algae and smaller invertebrates. They're small in stature, only about an inch across their carapace (shell), but they play a big part in a healthy mangrove ecosystems by breaking down organic matter and recycling nutrients.

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)



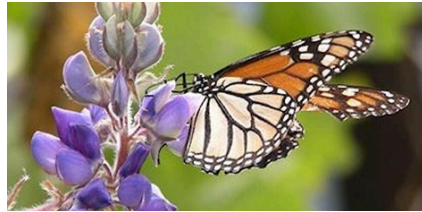
ELWOOD COMMUNITY GARDEN OPEN HOUSE

September 9, 2025

9:00 A.M. to 11:00 A.M.

Learn more here:

<https://ElwoodOpenHouse.eventbrite.com>



BASICS OF BUTTERFLY GARDENING

September 18, 2025

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

Learn more here:

<https://ButterflyGardening.eventbrite.com>



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>



MANATEE SQUARE COMMUNITY GARDEN OPEN HOUSE

September 16, 2025

9:00 A.M. to 11:00 A.M.

Learn more here:

<https://ManateeOpenHouse.eventbrite.com>



THE ART OF THE PRESSED BOTANICAL WORKSHOP

September 23, 2025

9:30 A.M. to 11:30 A.M.

Learn more here:

<https://PressedBotanical.eventbrite.com>



RYE PRESERVE TOURS

Third Saturday of the month
(October - April)

9:00 A.M.

Learn more here:

<https://RyePreserveTours.eventbrite.com>



GREEN INDUSTRIES - BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES (GI-BMP) -COMMERCIAL

September 16, 2025

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

Learn more here:

https://GI-BMP_9-16-2025.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>

CONSERVE IRRIGATION WATER AND IMPROVE LANDSCAPE HEALTH BY THE MOBILE IRRIGATION LAB

The UF/IFAS Manatee County Extension Mobile Irrigation Lab will come to your home or business to conduct a free on-site evaluation of your irrigation system.

In compliance with Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ principles, our team of professionals will provide a detailed analysis in order to reduce water waste and how it

applies to landscape appearance. Possible rebates for reduced potable water use are available. Call 941-722-4534 ext. 1828 to schedule!

A MESSAGE FROM THE RESIDENTIAL HORTICULTURE TEAM

BY NATALIE MCELYEA AND BRITTANY ATKINSON, COMMUNITY GARDENS PROGRAM SPECIALISTS

Did you know Manatee County is home to two vibrant community gardens? Membership is open to the public. Our gardens offer members a raised bed, soil, garden amenities, and access to expert knowledge on Florida-friendly gardening. Whether you're a seasoned grower or just starting out, you'll benefit from learning opportunities, and have access to communal growing spaces.

Membership opens in September, and we invite you to explore the gardens during two upcoming open garden events:

Elwood Community Garden
Monday, September 9, 2025
4008 39th Street East Bradenton

Manatee Square Garden
Monday, September 16, 2025
410 6th Avenue East Bradenton

(Reserve your spot using the links on page 7).

Despite last fall's hurricanes, it's been a productive year! At Manatee Square Garden, we've harvested papayas, bananas, okra, and tomatoes. We're also thrilled to expand our public food forest just outside the garden, where we're building up soil and planting more fruit trees for anyone to enjoy.



Gardening at Elwood Community Garden

At Elwood Community Garden, we're enhancing the landscape with native grasses that help reduce erosion, absorb rainwater, and improve soil health. These grasses will eventually serve as a living mulch system, providing natural materials we can harvest and reuse in the garden.



Bananas at Manatee Square Garden

Both gardens are shifting toward resilient, Florida-adapted crops such as Seminole pumpkins, pigeon peas, and sweet potatoes. With a focus on sustainability and community-building, our goal is to grow not just food, but strong roots in the neighborhood.

Come see for yourself, join us at an open garden day and get inspired to grow with us!

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