Holiday Book Gifts for Gardeners and Naturalists

By Kristine Del Vecchio and Amy Stripe, Master Gardener Volunteers

A Garden to Dye For: How to Use Plants from the Garden to Create Natural Colors for Fabrics and Fibers (by Chris McLaughlin, 2014, St. Lynn’s Press)
This is not a new book, but ties in nicely with our new Rainbow Dye garden here at Extension. The book is written for those new to the craft and who want to start by learning basic terminology and processes. It features over 40 plants that the gardener/crafter can grow and takes the unique approach of organizing plant selections by plant categories (fruits, vegetables, herbs, flowers, etc.) It covers both the gardening side, including plant selection for a personalized color palette, and the dying process. The book also has an excellent resource section for locating supplies and materials.

Ten Tomatoes that Changed the World: A History (by William Alexander, 2022, Grand Press Publishing)
Who knew the tomato is native to the Americas? They are not Italian?! Neither Italians nor any European began eating tomatoes until the 19th century; up until then they were considered poisonous. And who knew that the world’s leading condiment is ketchup and pizza the most universal food? Fascinating in its depth of research, the author has little praise for Florida’s tomato industry, nor for that matter, the heirloom tomato boom. Fun reading. One of this author’s previous books is entitled: The $64 Tomato.”

The truly mind-boggling anatomy (eyes, arms, neurological system) of octopuses, as well as their social behavior, feature heavily in this interesting account of this cephalopod (pronounced “sefələˈpəd”). Their secretive habitats, chameleon-like camouflage, and eating habits are truly a marvel of nature. My only criticism is the lack of anatomical diagrams: the many mysterious (to me) octopus parts were not clear.

![Image of octopus](https://fairchildgarden.org/interpretation/mdd/many-things-under-a-rock/)


We read this in one sitting. From the Black Plague to typhoid to cholera, Kennedy narrates how disease outbreaks have shaped the history of nations, including malaria’s impact on non-resistant European colonizers of Africa and the impact of pharmaceutical plants. A big takeaway from this book is that whilst we cannot win against pathogens, neither are we helpless. The book traces historical trends dating back to Neanderthals. By the way, COVID is not one of the eight plagues!

![Image of book cover](https://fairchildgarden.org/interpretation/mdd/pathogenisis-a-history-of-the-world-in-eight-plagues/)

**Native Plant: Not the Croton the Builder Installed**

**Pineland Croton (Croton linearis)**

By Sally Herb, Master Gardener Volunteers

When you mention crotons, most people think of the colorful plants that are native to India/Malaysia and found in nearly every neighborhood in Central Florida! If you are looking for a native shrub that typically stays under 3 feet, this year-round bloomer may fit the bill. Native to South Florida pine rocklands, scrublands, and thickets, the pineland croton has narrow, leathery leaves that are green on top and silvery below. Whilst not showy, the small white flower clusters are striking against the leaves, and the trunk and stems are an interesting rust tone. It thrives with full sun in poor, sandy soils and is both heat and drought tolerant. The natural range is Zone 10A and 10B, but the one we have at the Manatee County Extension office in Palmetto has flourished over the last two years. If planted East of 75, you might consider putting it in a protected spot close to the house or covering it if there is a freeze warning. This is the sole larval host for the Bartram’s hairstreak butterfly. It is a low-maintenance addition to any landscape!

https://fairchildgarden.org/interpretation/mdd/croton-linearis/
There is a new garden called The Rainbow Dye Garden in our Barbara Davis Educational Gardens here at Manatee County Extension Service. It was created by the Master Gardener intern team of Dana Preston, Kimberly Jacobs, and Sam Bickner.

In addition to installing plants for dyes, the team created a brochure that explains dyeing using colors extracted from roots, wood, bark, berries, lichens, leaves, flowers, nuts, and seeds. Dyeing is an ancient practice, dating back to the Neolithic period. Early dyeing produced subtle colors, but with the discovery of substances called mordants, colors could be fixed and were brighter. Mordants include alum, iron, tannin, and others.

The University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) points out that in addition to using natural dyes for fabric, some can also be used as hair rinses – such as chamomile to brighten blonde hair; and sage, black walnut hulls, and black tea on brunette hair. Pigments from plants such as alkanet root, beets, walnuts, purple cabbage, coffee, tea, indigo, and madder root can be used to create wood stains. Inks can be made from black walnut and pokeberry.

Following are the plants found in The Rainbow Dye Garden -

Prickly pear (*Opuntia lasiacantha*) juice can be used to make red pigments. It is also a host plant for a scale insect harvested to make red cochineal dye. Zones 7-10

Common madder (*Rubia tinctorum*) produces a red dye from its roots. It was used to dye the redcoats of British uniforms. Zones 5-9

Coreopsis (*Coreopsis tinctora*), Florida’s state wildflower, creates dyes ranging from red, orange to yellow. Zones 4-9

Marigold (*Tagetes* spp.) contains lutein which provides strong yellows. Zones 2-10

St. John’s Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) produces a variety of colors (red, pink, yellow, maroon, and green) depending on the mordants used, time of year and the number of dye baths. Zones 4-9

Common hedge nettle or betony (*Stachys floridana*) is a perennial weed in the mint family commonly found in Florida. Used with the mordant alum, it creates a chartreuse dye. Zones 8-10

Black elder or elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*) yields purple dye from the berries. Zones 3-9

True indigo (*Indigofera tinctoria*) has been in cultivation since at least 4,000 BC and was a cash crop in the Southeastern U.S. in the 1700s. It is still grown on small farms for those wanting natural blue dyes. Zones 10-12

Hopi black sunflower (*Helianthus annuus* ‘Sonja’ and ‘Valentine’ are suitable for Florida) is used by Hopi Native Americans for dyeing baskets purple.

Consult: [https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/design/outdoor-living/growing-plants-for-dye.html](https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/design/outdoor-living/growing-plants-for-dye.html)
Q: The hardiest part of my yard is mostly Mexican clover. Is there a way to get it to fill in areas of my yard where I cannot get grass to grow? I know it is considered invasive, but it is here and seems to be a survivor. We have a one-acre yard, so irrigation is impractical. Your thoughts?

A: It is my experience in gardening that if you want it, it will not grow, and if you hate it, it seems to thrive! Seriously though, *Richardia grandiflora*, Mexican clover, is spread by tiny seeds carried on the bottom of lawnmowers. That is why you will often see it in rows on home lawns, medians, and roadsides. Mowers pick up the seeds and drop them in their path. So, to spread *Richardia*, you mow it while it is blooming and setting seed. Irrigation is not necessary. *Richardia* may not necessarily fill in the spots where the turf is failing because the same conditions that are causing the turf to fail might affect *Richardia*. There may not be enough sun since turf and Mexican clover like full sun to thrive. The area may be too wet. Tree roots will out-compete turf for water and nutrients, and the same may apply to the clover. For obvious reasons, seeds are not available for purchase; you will have to rely on mowing to spread it. For more information, go to https://mrec.ifas.ufl.edu/research/weedsbyflowercolor/white/richardiabrasiliensis/

The University of Florida does not classify Mexican clover as invasive, but rather as a “caution” species. In other words, it needs to be managed to prevent escape from cultivation. To learn more about invasives, visit https://assessment.ifas.ufl.edu/

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Master Gardener Volunteer Karen Holleran answers your email questions at ManateeMG@gmail.com. Or call our diagnostic plant clinic 941-722-4524 weekdays except Wednesdays from 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. In person visits are welcome at the Manatee County Extension Office at 1303 17t St. W, Palmetto.

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What’s This?: The Vinegaroon

By Joy Derksen, Master Gardener Volunteer

Here’s another reason to avoid walking around barefoot in Florida at night. The giant whip scorpion (*Mastigoproctus giganteus*), also known as the vinegaroon, is an arachnid that is native to Florida and a few other southwestern states. Whip scorpions are not actually scorpions, although they do look like them at first glance. They are more closely related to the spider (arachnid) family. Whip scorpions have long, curved tails and two claw-like appendages on their front legs. They use these appendages to capture and crush their prey, which consists of big insects like cockroaches, crickets, and termites. Whip scorpions are nocturnal creatures. They spend the day hiding in burrows or under rocks. At night, they emerge to hunt for food.

Whip scorpions are not venomous, but they can defend themselves by spraying a foul-smelling vinegary liquid from their abdomen (thus the name “vinegarroon”). Raccoons and armadillos like to eat them; the noxious vinegar spray gives the vinegaroon time to escape. Even though they look scary, whip scorpions are not aggressive creatures and are not a threat to humans. Some people even keep them as pets. They can grow up to six inches long and have a lifespan of up to seven years.

For more information: https://entnemdept.ufl.edu/creatures/misc/misc/giant_whip_scorpion.htm
Our January 2023 newsletter (https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/media/sfylifasufledu/manatee/docs/pdfs/master-gardeners/newsletters/The-Garden-Bench---January-2023.pdf) advised on choosing cold-hardy plants and protecting the landscape, but cold damage still can happen. Let us look at what comes next.

There are three types of cold damage: chilling, radiational, and hard freeze. Chilling affects tropical plants exposed to cold temperatures above freezing; radiational freeze occurs on calm and clear nights when leaf surfaces experience colder temperatures than the air. The damage to plants from a hard freeze depends upon temperatures below freezing and the length of exposure. We rarely see a hard freeze in south central Florida.

After a cold spell, do not panic! Plants are resilient and surprisingly hardy if selected with our climate conditions in mind. Also, have patience. There is no need to move quickly; see what happens over time.

Cold weather dehydrates plants. Check and water your plants if needed. Do not fertilize until the risk of cold weather has passed; the best time to do it is when you see new growth. Be alert for rot and fungal disease. Rotten plants (particularly annuals) need to be removed.

The biggest challenge is to wait to remove or prune damaged areas. It takes time for the entire harm to appear, dead leaves or fronds may protect plants from other cold spells. Pruning itself is stressful for plants.

Turf is very susceptible to cold, but since it is typically brown in winter, it may be difficult to assess the damage until spring. Damage may be spotty, and some areas may need resodding or reseeding in the spring.

We are at the northern end of the climate zone for coconut palms, so they may show the most effect from cold weather. With other palms, the damage may range from dead fronds to spear leaf death and trunk death. Avoid removing dead fronds until spring.

Finally, pay attention to cultural practices. Water and fertilize appropriately. Use clean, sharp tools for trimming. Adjust your expectations. Some plants will die. Most will have slower growth the following year and less flowering or fruit.

For more information:
https://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/osceolaco/2018/02/07/recognizing-cold-damage-on-plants/
https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/care/weather/treating-cold-damage.html
Saltbush: A Native Plant We Really Want to Keep Around
By Jim Haupt and Maureen Hirthler, Master Gardener Volunteers

Looking for a plant with a dramatic fall appearance? Our native saltbush (*Baccharis halimifolia*) features a cloud of white atop its branches when in bloom. The name was chosen because the plants retain salt in their leaves; they can grow in areas affected by soil salination. Saltbush is a densely branched woody perennial found growing naturally in coastal areas, brackish freshwater wetlands, along roadways, swamps, coastal uplands, and dunes. Saltbush remains hidden among other green plants during spring and summer. However, in late September and early October, when flowers of most plants wilt and whither, saltbush take center stage showing off their tiny clusters of cottony bristled flowers, each adorned with downy white parachutes.

Saltbush is an underused plant in the home landscape. It tolerates both wet and dry conditions, and full sun to light shade. Saltbush grows in both the marsh and the desert. Male plants are preferred because seeds from the females spread easily and may take root in undesired locations. A secret benefit is that saltbush is also a nectar plant for butterflies and other pollinators.

If you have room, and conditions are right, saltbush can make a nice buffer or screen. They are ideal in rain gardens and around stormwater ponds. Saltbush provides nesting sites and cover for birds and nectar for many species of butterflies and pollinating insects. Saltbush is resistant to many insects and diseases and can thrive without supplemental irrigation and chemical fertilizers. People with allergies, however, may be bothered by pollen produced from flowers that bloom near the end of ragweed and dog fennel season. The seeds of saltbush are poisonous to humans.

According to Steven Brown, Lee County Extension Agent, “Every fall, guess what happens? A spectacular display of saltbush occurs. Over the Caloosahatchee Bridge, north of Ft. Meyers, one can see a spectacular sighting of this native Florida plant, something we really want to keep around. There is nothing like it!” You can view Steven’s entertaining video by going to https://youtu.be/dAS8j6nWS1M?si=wKn9K2j-2Q-JEFTF

Blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/escambiaco/2016/09/16/saltbush-a-native-beauty-of sorts
Blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/lakeco/2018/01/03/blooming-winter-color-central-florida/

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<td>5701 Marina Dr, Holmes Beach</td>
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<td>UF/IFAS Extension Manatee County</td>
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Sadly, this ends as either a death sentence for the pet or an introduced nuisance to our ecosystem. **Pythons** and other exotic snakes and lizards are products of the pet trade. Released into the wild, such as our Everglades, they quickly become apex predators, even taking alligators and competing for their food sources. Pet tegu and monitor lizards and iguanas (South Florida) grow large and eat almost anything, including small animals, birds, fruit, vegetables, and eggs.

Pet fish also pose ecological threats. The **lionfish** as an example, an attractive venomous saltwater aquarium fish, with no known predators and a voracious appetite. It is causing a significant threat to our native fish in the gulf.

One critter you would never suspect as harmful is the **household cat**. Usually left behind during a move or escaped from a home, kitties have found a way to survive and become feral. It is estimated that cats kill 1.3 billion to 4 billion birds each year in the U.S. alone.

The **giant African land snail** is back in the news. It has been successfully eradicated three times in Florida, but it keeps coming back. This pet snail can harbor a serious disease. First discovered in the 1960's, wildlife officials spent more than $1 million over 10 years to eradicate it. Another pet freshwater aquarium snail on the loose is the non-native **apple snail** recently found in Manatee County. It also can harbor disease and is a threat to our fresh-water ecosystem.

No matter how hard we try and how much money is spent, rarely do we ever fully eradicate an invasive species. Whereas it is fruitless to take on nature, we can strive to learn from and discontinue our mistakes. Pet owners, please be responsible and take proper care and disposal of your unwanted invasive pets. Call the Florida Wildlife Commission's Invasive Species Hotline at **888-Ive-Got One** (1-888-483-4681) to report invasive critters.

(All photos UFL)
## NOVEMBER/DECEMBER CALENDAR OF EVENTS

<table>
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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>11/1/23</td>
<td>10:00AM</td>
<td><strong>Gardening with Mushrooms</strong> Learn how to use mushrooms to enhance your gardens. Not always nefarious, fungi in the garden can be used to help build soil, process compost and support plant health.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/3/23</td>
<td>10:00AM</td>
<td><strong>Nature Journaling</strong> Join UF/IFAS Extension agent Alyssa Vinson, for a weekly class series devoted to growing your Nature Journaling skills. This series is aimed at beginners however some modules will include plant identification skills that would be beneficial to the experienced journalist.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/7/23</td>
<td>3:00PM</td>
<td><strong>Backyard Wildlife</strong> Discover the diverse range of wildlife species that call your backyard home. Learn about their habits and how to create a welcoming environment for them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/9/23</td>
<td>11:30AM</td>
<td><strong>Talk Plants with Me</strong> Submit your questions to our Horticulture Agent for live Q&amp;A. We will talk about hot topics in the plant world and may have a few guests join us along the way.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/9/23</td>
<td>7:30AM</td>
<td><strong>Farm City Week Agricultural Tour</strong> Celebrate the 32nd year of Manatee County Farm City Week by visiting a few of our outstanding agricultural operations. This is a fun-filled, day-long tour! Stops include Jones Potato Farm, Wish Farms, Gulf Coast Ag, and Sweet Bay Nursery.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/9/23</td>
<td>6:30PM</td>
<td><strong>Uncommon Edibles</strong> Join experts from UF/IFAS Extension and the Manatee Rare Fruit Council to discover some of the lesser known edible plants that can be a successful addition to your garden or landscape. Attendees will tour the fruit tree orchard and participate in a planting activity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/11/23</td>
<td>9:00AM</td>
<td><strong>DeSoto/Riverview Pointe Preserve Tour</strong> Casually stroll through the beautiful Riverview Pointe Preserve and learn about Florida’s native plants and inhabitants of a coastal environment. Suitable for all ages.</td>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Gardening with Mushrooms</strong> Learn how to use mushrooms to enhance your gardens. Not always nefarious, fungi in the garden can be used to help build soil, process compost and support plant health.</td>
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<td>11/18/23</td>
<td>9:00AM</td>
<td><strong>Rye Preserve Tour</strong> Take a hike through upland habitats along the beautiful Rye Preserve and learn about Florida’s native plants, natural history, and early settlement of the area. Suitable for all ages.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/25/23</td>
<td>9:00AM</td>
<td><strong>Perico Preserve Tour</strong> Explore one of Manatee County’s newest preserves and learn about Florida’s native plants, how they benefit wildlife, and how they can be used in the home landscape. Learn about the wide variety of ecosystems on display and how the preserve was transformed into what it is today. Suitable for all ages.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12/2/23</td>
<td>10:00AM</td>
<td><strong>Tillandsia Wreath Make &amp; Take</strong> Learn about these lovely epiphytes that only require air and water to live. This is a “make and take” workshop where you will create a living wreath using Tillandsia plants. Bring wire cutters and pliers if you have them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/2/23</td>
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<td><strong>Emerson Point Preserve Tour</strong> Casually stroll through the beautiful Emerson Point Preserve and learn about Florida’s native plants and inhabitants of a coastal environment. Suitable for all ages.</td>
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Scan the QR code below with your smartphone's camera to register for any of the events listed above.

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University of Florida IFAS Extension - Manatee County  
1303 17th St. W., Palmetto, FL 34221  
**Telephone:** (941) 722-4524  
**Website:** [http://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/manatee/](http://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/manatee/)  
**Email:** ManateeMG@gmail.com