

THE GARDEN BENCH



THE MANATEE COUNTY MASTER GARDENER E-NEWSLETTER

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Gardening Bloopers *I Have Made*

Text & photos by Nancy Hammer,
Master Gardener Volunteer

As a Master Gardener Volunteer I should have known better, but gardening mistakes were made. To quote Matt Candeias in his book, "In Defense of Plants" (see this issue's book review): "To garden is to fail... a lot."

I know the Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ guiding principles ... the first one being "right plant, right place" (RPRP). In Exhibit #1, note the bougainvillea (*Bougainvillea spp.*) planted to the right of the front entry sidewalk of my house (our previous homeowners get credit for that blooper!). I have pruned back this beautiful, but assertive and thorny vining shrub from the roofline, porch, and walkway more times than I can count. I have been savaged by its barbed thorns and sport the scars to prove it. To the left is a crinum lily (*Crinum spp.*) of which I am fond. However, I neglected to research the mature spread of this plant. This, too, requires frequent pruning back from the walkway.



Exhibit 1

With vines, appreciate what you are getting yourself into. I have a queen's wreath vine (*Petrea volubilis*) I planted on a small trellis seven years ago. Sometimes called "Florida wisteria" and spectacular when in bloom, the trellis is now comically inadequate. My husband even built a pergola to accommodate this monstrous plant and climbs an extension ladder every three months to curb its growth. (Exhibit #2.)

Another example of NOT following RPRP is taking chances planting Zone 10 plants "out east." East of I-75 is a different ballgame when it comes to cold weather. At times, I rolled the dice by planting shrubs better suited to coastal areas of the county. Some of them died when the temperatures dropped below freezing at night, and some have proven to have cold hardy roots and come back.



Exhibit 2

There were **pruning** errors, as well. So-called hurricane pruning (removal of green fronds: Exhibit #3) of palms is an ill-advised practice because it removes nutrients from the plant and exposes the growing point to damage from wind. It can actually *increase* the chances of hurricane damage. Indiscriminate and improper lopping of hardwood tree limbs (Exhibit #4) is also not good!

For more information about avoiding bloopers, visit:

9 Principles - Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program - University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences - UF/IFAS (ufl.edu)

For expert tree pruning, hire a certified arborist: <https://www.treesaregood.org>



Exhibit 3



Exhibit 4



Native Blooming Now: Bahama Senna (*Senna mexicana var. chapmanii*)*

Photos & text by Sally Herb, Master Gardener Volunteer



Bahama Senna flower



Bahama Senna bush

The year-round yellow flower clusters of the Bahama senna make a cheery addition to any landscape. This is a fast growing, two- to four- foot perennial shrub suitable for Zones 10-11. Although short-lived, it is easy to grow, being unfussy about soil, fairly drought tolerant, and easily pruned. In full sun, the Bahama senna will be a dense sprawly shrub with a three- to five-foot spread.

The Bahama senna is a lovely native typically found at the edges of pine rocklands and rockland hammocks and because it has such a small range, is a state-listed threatened species. A pollinator magnet, it is both a larval and nectar plant for yellow butterflies: the cloudless sulphur, sleepy orange, and orange-barred sulphur butterflies. If you are looking for a similar looking shrub but want more height than sprawl, privet cassia (*Cassia ligustrina*, another Florida native) looks similar but will grow six to eight feet. As always, source from a native nursery; there are several non-natives that may look similar but are not suitable for planting here.

<https://www.fnps.org/plant/senna-mexicana-var-chapmanii>
FPS111/FP111: Cassia bahamensis Bahama Cassia (ufl.edu)

*Other taxonomists refer to this plant as *Senna champanii* and it was previously known as a *Cassia*.



Reviewing Books for Gardeners & Naturalists

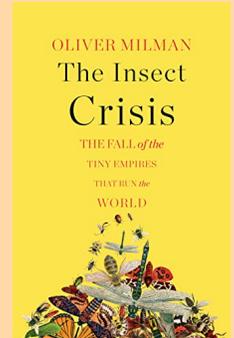


By Amy Stripe, Master Gardener Volunteer

The Insect Crisis: The Fall of the Tiny Empires that Run the World

By Oliver Milman (W.W. Norton & Company, 2022)

Milman is a British journalist who documents the decline in abundance and species diversity of insects, which represent three out of every four known animal species on Earth. Fascinating facts about insects abound, and you will become acutely aware of the critical role played by insects in our ecosystems and for our very existence. The book tips heavily on negative outcomes without offering – disappointingly – particularly practical solutions. Nevertheless, you will think twice before “spraying something.”



The Island of Missing Trees

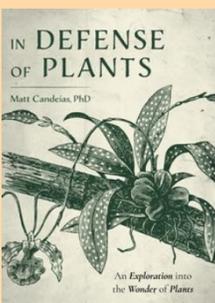
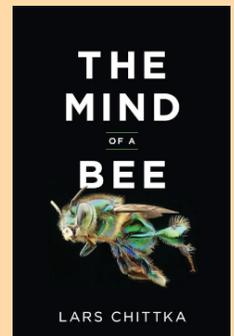
By Elif Shafak (Thorndike Press, 2022)

This novel (a love story) is set in Cyprus, spanning the island's partition in the 1950s, through the 1974 civil war to present day. The protagonist is *Ficus carica*, the edible common fig. I am not a fan of anthropomorphism, but here it works. The fig arrives in England as a cutting via a Cypriot botanist; they share astute observations about nature and the not-so-natural world around them. The well-established tradition in the Mediterranean of burying fig trees in trenches underground for winter cold protection is particularly intriguing.

The Mind of a Bee

By Lars Chittka (Princeton University Press, 2022)

Chittka, a professor of sensory and behavioral ecology, has conducted and documented decades of research on the cognitive abilities of bees: how they perceive, learn, behave, and even develop personalities. Technically written and illustrated, this book reveals in astonishing detail the survival skills packaged within a bee. A passionate advocate for the solitary bee, Chittka points out that honeybees are domesticated animals that are not under threat whereas wild bees are; honeybees are critical to OUR food sources, but they sometimes compete with native pollinators.



In Defense of Plants

By Matt Candeias, PhD (Mango Publishing Group, 2021)

Blogger and podcaster Candeias is an ecologist sharing his “aha” moments about plants: their amazing adaptations, coevolutionary and symbiotic relationships with other plants and animals, and his own journey to respect and appreciate their role in the ecosystem. To you plant nerds, some of this may be elementary. But Candeias’ curiosity, observations and thoughtfulness about plant origins, sex life, cultivation, and roles make for a fun and educational read.

FLORIDA BOBCATS: SPITFIRES OF THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

By Jim Haupt, Master Gardener Volunteer

Bobcats are found throughout Florida, except in the Florida Keys. Usually on the prowl at dusk, dawn, and throughout the night, bobcats are solitary, elusive, and highly territorial carnivores. The bobcat, a stealthy, cunning predator, can jump 12 feet to catch a low-flying bird and run up to 30 miles an hour in pursuit of a rabbit. Only twice the size of a housecat, this tenacious feline will climb trees, swim across bodies of water, and race through streams to chase down a meal. Equipped with retractable claws, these efficient stalkers position their back feet the same place as their front feet to reduce noise and blend in with their surroundings. Because of their clever, fearless, and determined nature, bobcats are known as “spitfires” of the animal kingdom.



Florida Bobcat
Photo: Reed Bowman

The name bobcat derives from its short, bobbed, black-tipped tail. The black spots peppered on its buff brown coat provide camouflage to easily blend in with dense vegetation, rocks, and brush. The tufts at the top of its ears are believed to improve their hearing, while the white circular, black and white markings on the back of their ears, called “eye spots” or “false eyes,” are believed to make them appear larger to discourage predators, like coyotes.

Bobcats are opportunistic, meaning they are not particularly choosy about what they eat or where they live. They prefer smaller mammals like rabbits, squirrels, and rodents but will prey upon amphibians, reptiles, moles, insects, feral cats, snakes, birds, and even small livestock and white-tailed deer. Found wherever food is available, bobcats are perfectly comfortable living in enclosed oak hammocks, swamps, flatland, scrublands, grasslands, beaches, and even urban and suburban areas.



Black “eye” spots
Photo: Sibley Nature Center

A male bobcat’s territorial range can extend more than five square miles. To avoid confrontations, a bobcat will mark its territorial boundaries with claw marks, urine, feces, and gland secretions. A bobcat rarely backs down from a fight, especially when encountering another one in its territory. Although a rare occurrence, a bobcat will fight to the death to protect its food supply, or face starvation.

Known as Florida lynx, pallid lynx, red lynx, bay lynx, lynx cat, or wildcat, the Florida bobcat, *Lynx rufus floridanus*, unlike panthers, are not considered an endangered species. In fact, of all the seven wildcats found in North America, the bobcat is the most common. Because of their remarkable resilience, bobcats quickly adapt to alterations in the landscape, population growth, and rapid development.

Bobcats play a significant role in maintaining a healthy ecosystem for other wildlife. They eat carrion (dead animals) and help control rodents. Bobcats have been documented eating python eggs in the Everglades and killing green iguanas in South Florida.





WHAT'S THIS?

African Blue Basil

By Nancy Hammer, Master Gardener Volunteer



African Blue Basil

Photo: Beth Bolles, UF/IFAS Extension

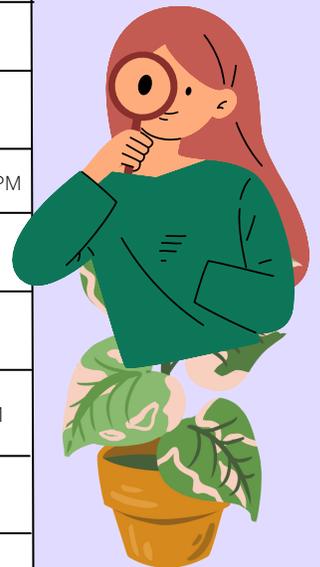
Ocimum kilimandscharicum x basilicum is a beautiful pollinator plant that hums with native bees, native wasps, and honeybees. As indicated by the x in its botanical name, it is a cross between an East African camphor basil and the 'Dark Opal' *basilicum* cultivar. As with other basil, it is edible, but the camphor scent and flavor may be an acquired taste. It is more commonly planted to increase native bee and wasp numbers in pollinator and vegetable gardens.

African blue basil can grow one to three feet in height and spread. It produces square stems, purplish green leaves, and bountiful tubular lavender-pink flowers almost year-round. It is a tender perennial herb which thrives in full sun in zones 10 and 11. In areas that get occasional frosts, the plants should be covered or moved inside. This hybrid is sterile and does not produce seed, but like other plants in the mint family, it is easily propagated from cuttings or may be purchased at nurseries. This is a humdinger of a plant!

African Blue Basil: A Pollinator Favorite | Gardening in the Panhandle
[\(https://nwdistrict.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/2017/07/05/african-blue-basil-a-pollinator-favorite/\)](https://nwdistrict.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/2017/07/05/african-blue-basil-a-pollinator-favorite/)

Master Gardener Volunteer Plant Clinics

Location	Address	Day(s)	Time
Bob Gardner Park	2710 White Eagle Blvd., Lakewood Ranch	Third Sundays	9AM - 12PM
Crowder Bros. Ace Hardware	5409 Manatee Ave W., Bradenton	Third Saturdays	9AM - 12PM
Central Library	1301 1st St. W., Bradenton	Third Saturdays	11:30AM - 2:30PM
Lakewood Ranch Farmers Market	Waterside Place, 7500 Island Cove Terrace, Sarasota	First Sundays	10AM - 2PM
Rocky Bluff Library	6750 US Hwy 301 N., Ellenton	Second & Fourth Saturdays	10AM - 1PM
St. George's Episcopal Church	912 63rd Ave. W., Bradenton	First and Third Thursdays	9AM - 12PM
Island Branch Library	5701 Marina Dr., Holmes Beach	First Saturdays	10AM - 1PM
UF/IFAS Extension Manatee County Tel. 941-722-4524 manateemg@gmail.com	1303 17th St. W., Palmetto	Every weekday except Wednesdays	9AM - 4PM



Master Gardener Volunteer Amy Stripe & Joy Dersken, Co-Editors Contents reviewed & edited by Alyssa Vinson, Extension Agent. The University of Florida is committed to providing universal access to all our events. For disability accommodations such as alternate formats of written material, please contact Katie Granberg katiebg@ufl.edu at least 1 week in advance.

What You Need to Know About Tree Removal

By Alyssa Vinson, Residential Horticulture Agent, Manatee County UF/IFAS Extension Service

Trees provide innumerable benefits to our community including their beauty and services to our ecosystem. As an Extension agent and certified arborist, I field many inquiries regarding tree care, planting, and pruning. One of the most common questions concerns removal of trees in neighborhoods.

In 2019, Florida passed a new law, Florida Statute 163.045, which sets certain parameters for homeowners to remove trees without permits or permission from their local government. After much quibbling over the use of the term “dangerous,” the law was amended in 2022 with updated definitions.

The Florida Chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture has created a tool to help individuals navigate the tricky territory of the new tree law. You will need to do a bit of homework prior to answering the questions in [this decision matrix](#) which walks individuals through some of the following questions:

- Is the tree located in a municipality (city limits) or county (unincorporated area) with existing tree protections or permitting requirements? (Go to your city or county government websites for tree ordinance information.)
- Is the tree on single family residential property?
- What is the concern with the tree?
 - Risk of failure (e.g., could blow down in high wind, diseased)
 - Tripping risk (e.g., popping up sidewalks, low hanging limbs)
 - Infrastructure conflict (e.g., roots are blocking drains, overhead power lines)
 - Visual obstruction (e.g., trip hazard, obstructing an intersection)

Not ALL these concerns meet the criteria to qualify for removal without a permit! If you think that your tree does warrant removal, first [contact a certified arborist](#) with Tree Risk Assessment Qualification to evaluate your tree and provide a written report.

Some trees may have additional considerations: if they are counted as a required “street tree” you may need to replace it with an acceptable species of a certain size or you may be prohibited from removing. Always contact your HOA/COA board or management company as well as your municipality /county government to determine legality when dealing with a potential “street tree.”

Before you remove any tree, please consider the multitude of direct and indirect benefits that you are likely to lose: the birds you will not see, the shade you will not enjoy, the kids who will not be climbing branches.

Resources and additional readings below:
Decision Matrix- <https://www.fltreelaw.org/>
Find a certified Arborist- <https://www.treesaregood.org/findanarborist/findanarborist>
The Gift of Trees- <https://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/manateeco/2021/12/29/the-gift-of-trees/>
From Soil to Sky: Roots- <https://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/manateeco/2022/08/15/from-soil-to-sky-roots/>
From Soil to Sky: Leaves and Branches- <https://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/manateeco/2022/08/29/from-soil-to-sky-leaves-and-branches/>
From Soil to Sky: Flowers and Fruits- <https://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/manateeco/2022/09/05/from-soil-to-sky-flowers-and-fruits/>



Trees touching power lines
Photo: E. Gilman, UF



Tree buckling lifting sidewalk
Photo: UF



Diseased tree felled in hurricane
Photo: UFL



Corn Gluten: *Perfect Pre-Emergent or Herbicide Hype?*

By Jennifer-Tonge-Martin, Master Gardener Volunteer

What if there were a natural, safe, organic product we could spread on our lawns to prevent weeds from sprouting, while fertilizing at the same time? That only had to be used twice a year? Enter this miracle herbicide: corn gluten!

Corn gluten (which is not dietary gluten at all, just a gluten-like substance from corn) is the byproduct of ethanol production. Being 60-70 percent protein, it has been used extensively and safely as animal feed. In 1991, Dr. Nick Christians at Iowa State University (ISU) discovered that corn gluten acted as a pre-emergent herbicide. ISU patented this application, and it has been marketed as an organic pre-emergent herbicide ever since. It is 10% nitrogen by weight, so it also acts as an organic fertilizer. Continued research at ISU has confirmed and refined corn gluten's suppressive effect on seed-germination. Their most effective results have been in greenhouse settings, but abundant anecdotal evidence touts corn gluten for home and agricultural use. Readily available commercially, corn gluten is listed as the only recommended organic pre-emergent weed killer by eminent institutions such as the University of Georgia. When spread at the variable rate of one to four pounds per 1,000 sq ft, it is fairly inexpensive. And safe? People, pets, and other animals can roll in it after application with no ill effects. Even if spread at the rate of ten pounds per 1,000 square feet, it would not exceed the recommended amount of nitrogen fertilizer for your lawn. What could be the downside of corn gluten?



Corn Gluten
Photo: Phu Thinh Co/Flickr

Well, it might not be effective after all. A two-year "real life study" completed as graduate research at Oregon State University in 2006 found "no weed control with corn gluten meal under any of the test circumstances on lawns or shrubs." * Washington State University Associate Professor Linda Chalker-Scott asserts that corn gluten is ineffective because it has to work by "desiccating the soil and reducing water uptake." ** Yet ISU research found corn gluten works best in moist soil conditions. The commercial products advise "watering-in" the meal application for best results, similar to chemical pre-emergent. Professor Scott also warns against excessive nutrient run-off. This may happen only with higher than recommended application rates, but the nitrogen in corn gluten is NOT slow release. Good for a quick "green-up" only, this source of nitrogen should be supplemented by 100% controlled-release nitrogen, plus potassium and micronutrients.

University of Florida/IFAS publication EP575 notes that corn gluten offers control of several broadleaf and annual weeds but not all weeds. Plus, corn gluten does not control existing weeds and the added nitrogen may increase the growth of these weeds.

Hype or not, corn gluten is well-regarded in organic gardening literature. With "caveat emptor" in mind, it may be worth trying.

*Tom Cook, December 2006, graduate research Oregon State University

**Linda Chalker Scott, 2015, "The Myth of Weed-Killing Gluten" Horticultural Myths (blog) Washington State University Extension

EP575 Florida Homeowner Herbicide Guide: Considerations, Applications, and Selection

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/EP575>

Register on Eventbrite: <https://bit.ly/3u111RR>

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MARCH CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Date	Time	Event
Tuesday 3/7/23	10:30AM	Gardening with Mushrooms Join UF/IFAS Extension Manatee County for a conversation about using 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. https://www.eventbrite.com/e/gardening-with-mushrooms-tickets-519089038287
Thursday 3/9/23	11:30AM	Talk Plants with Me Submit your questions to our Horticulture Agent for live Q&A! We will talk about hot topics in the plant world and may have a few guests join us along the way. https://www.eventbrite.com/e/talk-plants-with-me-tickets-391234883067
Saturday 3/11/23	10:00AM	Plant ID for Beginners Not sure what that plant is in your backyard? New to Florida and unfamiliar with the new species? If you've ever wondered how to figure out what plant is which, join this beginner plant ID class! https://www.eventbrite.com/e/plant-id-for-beginners-tickets-500970204367
Thursday 3/16/23	6:30PM	Precious Pollinators Learn about pollinators, their favorite plants, and make your own bee box! Located at the Palma Sola Botanical Park. https://www.eventbrite.com/e/precious-pollinators-tickets-546402934887
Friday 3/24/23	10:00AM	Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ for Newcomers New to Florida? Or just baffled by the plants and conditions here? This class aims to help you get to know us better. We'll introduce you to the 9 Principles of Florida-Friendly Landscaping™, why it is so important and how to get the right plant in the right place for future gardening success. https://www.eventbrite.com/e/florida-friendly-landscapingtm-for-newcomers-tickets-519104063227
Thursday 3/30/23	8:00AM	Mangrove Trimming Best Management Practices This workshop will cover: Mangrove Ecology and Identification, Mangrove Trimming Regulations, Mangrove Trimming Demonstration of Best Practices. https://www.eventbrite.com/e/mangrove-trimming-best-management-practices-tickets-532008781587

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