

Native Color Now: American Beautyberry (Callicarpa Americana)

By Sally Herb, Master Gardener Volunteer



Beautyberry flowers Photo: UF/IFAS



Beautyberry Photo: K Granberg



Beautyberry Photo: K Granberg

There are few plants as strikingly eye-catching and easy to grow as the American beautyberry. In spring, clusters of small, pale pink flowers emerge on new growth, attracting a wide range of pollinators. Late summer into fall, abundant clusters of vivid purple berries appear (there is also a white berry variety). These berries bring a nice pop of color to the garden as well as enticing many bird species.

Suitable for zones 8-11, beautyberry will tolerate full sun (when mature) to partial shade. It is not picky about soil type and is drought tolerant once established. Growing 5-6 feet, it can become a sprawly shrub. Beautyberry should be pruned in winter / spring before new growth appears in order to thicken it up. Early Florida settlers made jam from the berries and there is evidence that the crushed leaves may be useful as a natural mosquito repellent as they contain the bite-detering chemical, callicarpenal. Leaves were once placed under horse harnesses to repel biting bugs.

References:

- https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/FP090
https://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/stjohnsco/2018/02/08/beautyberry-callicarpa-

Master Gardener Plant Fair!

Mark your calendar: October 15th, from 8AM to 1PM. at the UF/IFAS Manatee County Extension Service office (1303 17th St. W., Palmetto.) Annuals, perennials, vegetables and herbs, trees, natives and wildflowers are all priced to sell.

Register Here:



https://bit.ly/3zMcV0l



# Fallen Leaves - Litter or Habitat?

By Norma Kisida, Master Gardener Volunteer



Leaf litter is an important habitat for many wildlife species, including butterflies, moths, salamanders, box turtles, toads, shrews, earthworms, fireflies, lady bugs, and other insects. Many of these habitats are in decline due to the practice of raking leaves from the garden. Birds depend on these insects to feed their young in the spring, so without insects, the birds are also in decline. There are things homeowners can do to support wildlife and the food web, which are so important in a healthy ecosystem.

When left undisturbed in natural areas, leaves slowly break down and enrich the soil by supplying organic material, retaining moisture, and preventing compaction of the soil, as well as providing habitat for many creatures. A light layer of leaves can be left on the lawn without harming the grass or they can be mowed into the turf with one or two passes. Shredded leaves enrich the lawn in place of artificial fertilizers. Thicker areas of leaves or leaves in walkways can be gently raked into the mulch or soil around trees and landscape beds or simply left piled in a discreet area. If you do not have mulched areas, consider placing some around existing trees and shrubs or creating new areas with native plants which are essential to support the life cycle of animals they have evolved with over many years.

Another way to support wildlife in the fall and winter is to leave the clean-up of dead plants until warm weather so the stalks can be used as over-winter nesting sites for pollinators and the seeds can feed the birds.

Wildlife Connections: Leaf Habitat - <https://ufi.ca.uky.edu/treetalk/wildlife-leaf-habitat>

Hidden in the Leaf Pile: Luna moths (see middle photo above), woolly bears, and swallowtails all need a safe place to "hibernate" - <https://www.purduelandscapereport.org/article/hidden-in-the-leaf-pile-luna-moths-woolly-bears-and-swallowtails-all-need-a-safe-place-to-hibernate/>



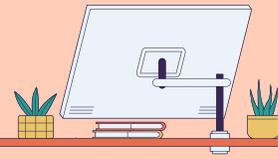
Leave the Leaves sign  
Photo: K Granberg

## Manatee County Master Gardener Volunteer Plant Clinics

Location	Address	Day(s)	Time
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
Robinson Preserve	840 99th St. N.W., Bradenton (South entrance, near pavilions)	Fourth Sundays	9AM - 12PM
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
UF/IFAS Extension Manatee County Tel. 941-722-4524 <a href="mailto:manateemg@gmail.com">manateemg@gmail.com</a>	1303 17th St. W., Palmetto	Every weekday except Wednesdays	9AM - 4PM

# Ask a Master Gardener

By Karen Holleran, Master Gardener Volunteer



## Dear MGV,

We have recently moved here from Canada and are very much interested in learning more about the Florida landscape. We are looking for information on different plant diseases as well as mitigating certain common landscaping issues. We are currently working on a proposal for a property that has lots of infected palms. Do you know anyone who would be able to help us resolve this issue and even possibly meet us on site?

## Dear reader,

Master Gardener Volunteers (MGVs) are not able to make site visits, however, UF/IFAS Extension publishes a lot of information for homeowners to help them manage their landscape using the nine principles of Florida Friendly Landscaping™. We also offer classes and workshops, many of which are free. Manatee County Extension has a YouTube channel with informative videos. Last but not least, MGVs publish an award-winning newsletter ten times a year with interesting articles and information for homeowners. On the back page of that newsletter is a list of upcoming classes and events. (See links below.)

MGVs also run a Plant Clinic for plant, insect, and weed identifications as well as diagnostic evaluation for plants and trees through samples or pictures. We can test your soil and water to determine pH and salt content for a small fee. (See address and hours below.) We also have a demonstration garden on-site.

Florida-Friendly Landscaping™

<https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/care/florida-friendly-landscapes/the-nine-principles.html>

YouTube Channel

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3jXr\\_BhsH7sLjji6QUX6jg](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3jXr_BhsH7sLjji6QUX6jg)

Newsletter

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/manatee/lawn--garden/garden-bench-newsletter/>



Master Gardener Volunteer Karen Holleran answers your email questions. Send questions and/or photos for identification or for diagnosis of residential gardening problems to [ManteeMG@gmail.com](mailto:ManteeMG@gmail.com). Or call us at 941-722-4524 weekdays from 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. and press 1 to speak to the Master Gardener Diagnostic Plant Clinic.

# WHAT'S THIS (IN MY POOL)?: RING-NECKED SNAKE

By Maureen Hirthler, Master Gardener Volunteer



Ring-necked snakes often curl up their tails in defense.

Photo: Reddit



Ring-Necked Snake

Photo: Luke Smith, floridamuseum.ufl.edu

Non-venomous ring-necked snakes (*Diadophis punctatus*) are commonly found in residential pools: they come to have a drink and, because of their small size, they cannot get out! They may also surprise you in leaf litter or mulch, on walkways, in flowerpots, or in your home. They are easy to identify by the unmistakable red, yellow or orange ring around their necks and matching-colored bellies. On top they are generally black. Maximum length is about 14 inches and they are very skinny.

Ring-necked snakes are primarily active at night or twilight, and their diet consists of smaller salamanders, earthworms, and slugs. Slug damage to plants is unattractive, so protect your hungry ring-necked friend and allow it to dine!

## For information:

<https://www.floridamuseum.ufl.edu/florida-snake-id/snake/ring-necked-snake/>



## Deciduous Orchids

Text & photos by Maureen Hirthler, Master Gardener Volunteer



"Help! My orchid leaves are turning yellow and falling off!" Depending on your orchid type, this may be a regular autumn occurrence. Dendrobium, Catasetinae, and Lycaste orchids can be deciduous and enter a dormant period during cooler weather.

Dendrobiums are popular orchids and some of the easiest to grow in Florida because they like our summers and winters. Their flowers are bright and colorful, and they are widely available. They require good light but not direct sun and love temperatures in the 70s and 80s. They do well tightly lashed to palm trees that get lots of sun. In pots they should be watered before they dry out, when still slightly moist. During the growing period, fertilize at every watering with half-strength fertilizer; I use a 13-3-15 with micronutrients.



Dendrobium

Stop feeding in September. In the wild, Dendrobiums rest during cooler temperatures and the dry season, so we must replicate this environment to bloom successfully.

As our temperature falls, water Dendrobiums less often until you only water to prevent the canes from shriveling. The leaves will fall off, leaving you with a dry stick. Don't cut these off until they are brown and very dry as they provide nutrients to the plant. When the temperature increases and you see new growth, gradually return to regular watering and fertilizing. Don't repot a Dendrobium unless it grows way out of the pot; they like to be very snug.

Lycaste orchids like cooler temperatures than our summers, so they can be challenging to grow here. Despite their large leaves, the culture – light, water, and fertilization – is very similar to Dendrobiums, including a winter rest. I move my Lycaste hybrid indoors in the summer, and it is delighted.

Most people don't know about the Catasetum orchids and their hybrids, but they are perfect for Florida with just a bit of extra care. They come in all kinds of flower shapes and colors; one of the most popular types is almost black! They have scents ranging from medicinal to floral and are spectacular when in flower.

When you buy a Catasetum, you'll receive a bulb with several leaves. Place it in a semi-shady spot, water and fertilize normally (weakly, weekly), and treat it the same as a Dendrobium except that you will completely stop watering when most of the leaves are gone.

At this point, some growers will remove the leafless bulb from the pot, put it in a bag and leave it in the garage. It works for them, but I found my bulbs dried out too much. I use a mini-greenhouse made from a 1-liter soda bottle. I cut off the bottom, place the bulb in a plastic net pot, and add a small amount of water that doesn't reach the roots. The top without a cap gets nestled inside the bottom, and I seal it with duct tape. It goes to a shady place on my lanai for a month or two, and I ignore it. Eventually, a new bulb will grow. Have patience until you see new roots; when they are 2-3 inches in length, it's time to repot. I use a shallow clay pot, gently wrap some barely damp moss around the roots, then put it in the pot surrounded by my traditional inorganic media.



Catasetum Orchids

Over a few days, I increase the light to very bright and water more frequently. In a few weeks, the new bulb with leaves will appear, and it is time to fertilize at every watering with full-strength fertilizer and keep it moist. They are starving and thirsty when growing. Some will bloom before they lose their leaves, but most will bloom after the leaves are gone. Let the show begin!

Understanding and re-creating the natural environment of a deciduous orchid species is the secret to success in growing them.



# Ficus Among Us

By Nancy Hammer, Master Gardener Volunteer

There are indeed Ficus among us... 800 species worldwide. Among our tallest and most recognizable trees in Florida are Ficus (the terms "ficus," "fig", and "banyan" are often used interchangeably in common names, but Ficus is the proper genus). Some don't play nicely with others, some make beautiful bonsais, and others are popular houseplants. The Ficus species below thrive in zones 10b-11.

Weeping fig (*Ficus benjamina*) was introduced to the nursery trade in Florida in the 1950s. Growing as tall as 60 feet with a 100-foot spread – it is suitable only for the largest landscapes. As it matures, it will produce weeping branches, surface and aerial roots, and messy fruit. Aerial roots descend from branches, touch the ground and take root. It is not a good option near sidewalks or driveways. Despite its mature size in the landscape, with pruning it can be maintained as a hedge, screen, or espalier. It is the most popular containerized indoor tree and is also used for bonsai.

Strangler fig (*F. aurea*) is one of two native species in Florida and is aptly named. It often starts as a seed deposited in the limbs of a tree or boots of a palm, such as the cabbage palm. As it grows, it wraps around its host plant, eventually killing it. Initially it is vine-like, but eventually becomes a tree which may reach 50 feet in height and spread. It develops aerial roots which form rigid trunks after reaching the ground. Seeds germinate easily which allows strangler figs to spread.



Strangler fig aerial roots  
Photo: Gitta Hesing, UF/IFAS



Fiddleleaf fig  
Photo: UF/IFAS

Shortleaf fig, also known as wild banyantree (*F. citrifolia*), is the second Florida native. It reaches 40-50 feet in height and gets its common name from the shorter length of its leaves compared to other figs. The species name *citrifolia* indicates its leaves resemble those of citrus trees. The shortleaf fig can only be pollinated by a host-specific wasp and is a larval food for several butterflies, moths, and wasps. Its milky sap is extracted to make chewing gum. You will see these trees in older neighborhoods close to the Gulf. It is not as aggressive as the strangler fig, however roots can be a problem if planted too close to a drive or sidewalk.

Fiddleleaf fig (*F. lyrata*) has attractive 8- to 15-inch-long and 10-inch-wide fiddle-shaped leaves and grows 15-25 feet tall. Since it is prone to wind damage due to tight branches, appropriate pruning is advised. It will form aerial roots, but not as many as several other ficus. It can be planted in a container or as an interesting specimen tree in a protected area of the landscape. It is a popular indoor plant.

Cuban-laurel fig (*F. microcarpa*, previously *F. retusa*) has several other common names, including Chinese banyan, laurel fig, and Indian laurel. It is a fast grower in zones 10b-11: up to 50 feet with a similar spread. It may be found growing on trees and has long, thin aerial roots. It was introduced to Florida in the early 1900s as an ornamental tree, and then spread after accidental introduction of species-specific pollinating wasps. This is a popular species for bonsai and as an indoor plant. According to their website, Marie Selby Gardens' iconic banyan trees are Cuban-laurels planted in 1939. This species is currently in the caution category for Central and South Florida in the UF/IFAS Assessment of Non-Native Plants.

Unfortunately for fig lovers, the common or edible fig (*F. carica*) has been predicted to be a high invasion risk throughout Florida by the UF/IFAS Assessment of Non-Native Plants since 2018.

## For more information

- <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/ST/ST25000.pdf> (Strangler fig)
- <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/ST/ST25100.pdf> (Weeping fig)
- <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/ST/ST25500.pdf> (Cuban-laurel fig)





# Power Tool Maintenance

By John Dawson, Master Gardener Volunteer

Garden power tools are time and labor savers, allowing you to perform tasks that would take much longer and be more fatiguing with ordinary hand tools. When not properly maintained, however, these tools will cost you time and money in repairs or replacement. Power tools have evolved from gasoline to electric cord and now to battery powered. Before cleaning and maintaining your power tools, and before using them for the first time, it is important to review the manufacturer's instruction to avoid tool failure and possible personal injury. Work safely by always turning off gas engines and disconnecting electrical power sources, whether cord or battery, before working on or maintaining power equipment. Remember, cutting tools can still cut, even when the power is off.

For gasoline engines, the main culprit of failure is the bio-fuel additive ethanol. Ethanol is hygroscopic, meaning it absorbs water from the air. Over time, it will gum up carburetors and dissolve fuel lines and rubber gaskets. Ethanol-free gas is available, but it is more expensive and sometimes hard to find. Add ethanol fuel stabilizer to your regular fuel storage containers and remove all fuel from the engine if not using it within the next 30 days. If your engine does not have a separate carburetor drain plug, running the engine until it stops should drain it. Stored fuel should not be kept for more than three months. Check your engine oil level prior to each use and add the proper oil type as recommended by your owner's manual to the "full" mark.



For gas-powered, walk-behind mowers, change and replace the engine oil at least once a season or every 50 hours of run time. For riding mowers, change and replace the oil every 100 hours of run time. During an oil change, inspect and replace as necessary oil, fuel and air filters, drive belts, and spark plugs. Keep mower decks clean and moving parts lubricated. Your mower blades should be sharpened at least twice a year. They may need more frequent sharpening depending on the size of your lawn, grass type, and how often you mow. Inspect your blades of grass to make sure they are being cut and not torn (see photo).



Torn vs cut blades of grass  
Photo: UF/IFAS

A well-maintained gas-powered garden tool uses less gas, has cleaner exhaust, and will last longer than one poorly maintained. Most small engines (2- and 4-cycle) require oil to be mixed with the gasoline at a ratio prescribed by the manufacturer; failure to use the correct ratio, or failure to add oil at all, will cause engine failure. Leaking oil and excessive smoke are signs of engine trouble. For most homeowners, it is best to take your engine in for repair.

For tools using a power cord, it is essential that the cord remain undamaged. Any nicks or visible wear and tear should be fixed or replaced. When using an electric hedge trimmer, make sure the power cord is always behind you.

For optimum performance from your battery-powered equipment, keep the battery completely charged; frequent use is better for the battery. Keep batteries dry and protected from extreme heat and cold. For large jobs, it is best to have a second charged battery ready for use.

Keeping your power tools properly maintained, will reduce unwarranted expensive repair and frustration when you need them the most.



## OCTOBER CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Date	Time	Event
Thursday 10/13/22	11:30AM	<b>Talk Plants with Me: Ask a Horticulture Agent</b> Submit your questions to our Horticulture Agent for live Q&A. <a href="https://www.eventbrite.com/e/talk-plants-with-me-tickets-391234883067">https://www.eventbrite.com/e/talk-plants-with-me-tickets-391234883067</a>
Friday 10/14/22	9:00AM	<b>Organic Gardening Series: Soils &amp; Composting</b> Organic gardening success begins with soil building. This class will cover soil amendments for adding organic matter and nutrients to keep plants healthy and stress-free. <a href="https://www.eventbrite.com/e/organic-gardening-series-soils-compost-tickets-395982202427">https://www.eventbrite.com/e/organic-gardening-series-soils-compost-tickets-395982202427</a>
Friday 10/21/22	9:00AM	<b>Organic Gardening Series: Propagation</b> Organically grown transplants for the garden can be difficult to find. Learn where to source organic seeds, how to grow and plant them, and tips for propagation by cuttings. <a href="https://www.eventbrite.com/e/organic-gardening-series-propagation-tickets-401250138967">https://www.eventbrite.com/e/organic-gardening-series-propagation-tickets-401250138967</a>
Saturday 10/22/22	9:00AM	<b>Perico Preserve Tour</b> 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. <a href="https://www.eventbrite.com/e/perico-preserve-tour-tickets-423309348657">https://www.eventbrite.com/e/perico-preserve-tour-tickets-423309348657</a>
Saturday 10/22/22	10:00AM	<b>Orchid Mounting - Make and Take Workshop</b> A workshop demonstrating how to mount an orchid on wood or other found objects – and you will make your own to take home! <a href="https://www.eventbrite.com/e/orchid-mounting-make-and-take-workshop-tickets-368543231727">https://www.eventbrite.com/e/orchid-mounting-make-and-take-workshop-tickets-368543231727</a>
Saturday 10/22/22	10:00AM	<b>Our Native, Solitary Bees (Kids Only)</b> In this program, children will learn about the many kinds of native bees that are beneficial in the garden along with anatomy and interesting facts about native bees. Kids will create their own bee hotel to hang outside their home. <a href="https://www.eventbrite.com/e/for-kids-only-suggested-ages-6-12-our-native-solitary-bees-tickets-407967982217">https://www.eventbrite.com/e/for-kids-only-suggested-ages-6-12-our-native-solitary-bees-tickets-407967982217</a>
Friday 10/28/22	9:00AM	<b>Organic Gardening Series: Pest Management</b> Learn about integrated pest management, focusing on preventative, biological, and mechanical means of controlling vegetable pests. <a href="https://www.eventbrite.com/e/organic-gardening-series-pest-management-tickets-401240018697">https://www.eventbrite.com/e/organic-gardening-series-pest-management-tickets-401240018697</a>
Friday 10/28/22	11:00AM	<b>Home Composting</b> Composting has significant environmental benefits and is easier than you might think! It happens very naturally and creates a useful soil amendment for your landscape plants and vegetable gardens. <a href="https://www.eventbrite.com/e/home-composting-tickets-395935322207">https://www.eventbrite.com/e/home-composting-tickets-395935322207</a>

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