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### Welcome to Spring!

Time for spring cleaning, dealing with pollen, and getting ready for the next hurricane season! In this month's issue you can hear about the new Master Gardener podcast. Our own Theresa Badurek is the guest for the first episode. Check it out – I learned a few things, and discovered we have even more talented Master Gardener volunteers!

### Two Peas and a Podcast

*By Charlotte Vaughn, Master Gardener Volunteer*

One of my college professors often said "Peas are easy pick'ens" but he was talking about alliteration, rather than just snappy green veggies. In that vein, Alan Shapiro and I are pleased to present the Pinellas MGTV Podcast, "Planting Pinellas" which launched its first episode in March of 2025.

The name is a revival of an old Extension blog, which is set to rebrand as an outreach newsletter called the "Planting Pinellas Post." Our Extension Agent and MGTV Coordinator, Theresa Badurek, has been very supportive and encouraging throughout the last few months of preparing the launch. She even appeared as our first guest on the show! The Barbara Strickland Endowment funded the necessary equipment, and now the show is streaming on several platforms including Spotify and iTunes.



Our goal is to begin with one episode a month and see if we want to adjust the frequency over time. We are starting with a series diving into the 9 Principles of Florida Friendly Landscaping, which should carry us through the end of this year. We will also be highlighting seasonally appropriate plants, tasks, and local garden related events, so please



send us any recommendations of episode content. Also, if you have a topic or event you'd like to present, we can feature you as a guest on the show!

The biggest way our MGV community can support us right now is to follow or subscribe to the show on your favorite podcast app. You can also leave a rating or review and share the show link with your gardening friends. We hope the show will grow as many people around our county give us "peas" a chance!

## The Elegant Thread-Waisted Wasp Is Stronger Than She Looks

By Ellen Mahany, Master Gardener Volunteer. Photo Credit Ellen Mahany

The thread-waisted wasp (*Ammophila procera*) pictured here is balanced to sip nectar from a cupped bloom on a Little Strongback bush (*Boussieria cassinifolia*). Nutritional breaks keep up her energy for the remarkable labor she performs for her offspring.



*The double silver bars on each side of the thorax authenticate the identity of the *Ammophila procera*, which can be confused with other thread-waisted species in the Sphecidae family. Photo by Ellen Mahany*

First, she excavates her burrow. By pressing her head against the chosen nest area, she can quiver her flight muscles to loosen the sandy soil. Next, she moves the soil with her powerful mandibles. When she has provided a nest cavity, she carefully seals the opening before she begins hunting for caterpillars and other soft-bodied arthropods. She grips her unfortunate victim behind its head and uses her long ovipositor to inject paralyzing venom. Then she performs her most astounding chore: using her jaws to drag or fly her passive prey, often larger than she is, to her burrow.





There she lays an egg on the still body. The hatched egg first consumes nonessential body parts. In this way, its live nutrition lasts throughout every larva stage. This wasp prefers to supply her offspring with moth, skipper, or sawfly caterpillars. Her final responsibility is refilling the hole with dirt and concealing the nest.

She inhabits open, dry areas, including gardens and other urban locations. She may wrap her tired inch-long body around a twig to sleep. Although primarily a vegetarian as an adult, her diet can also include tree sap, honeydew, and small insects. Both a predator and a pollinator, this hard- working solitary wasp is an asset in pollinator gardens.

## A Beginner's Rain Garden

By Susan Ladwig, Master Gardener Volunteer



*Spider lily (Hymenocallis latifolia). Photo credit: UF/IFAS.*

It's only a few months till the rainy season, and I will be ready for the downpours this year. Usually, my gutters just pour onto the mulch or some rocks, then the water soaks away into my yard. This year, I have created a new rain garden near one of my downspouts.

UF/IFAS defines a rain garden as a "landscaped area with appropriate flowers, grasses and other vegetation that catches rainwater from a roofline or gutter system and filters it back into the ground, where it can recharge groundwater resources."



Much of the stormwater we receive in Florida runs off driveways or other hard surfaces, washing harmful chemicals into the groundwater. According to studies, a rain garden can filter approximately 40% of metal pollutants from roof shingles, automobile fluids, and soil.

In addition to preventing runoff, I wanted an excuse to grow spider lilies (*Hymenocallis latifolia*). They are so cool. Now I have a “beginner” rain garden near a downspout in my backyard with spider lilies, milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*), swamp hibiscus (*Hibiscus coccineus*), lyreleaf sage (*Salvia lyrata*), and gaillardia (*Gaillardia pulchella*). I learned that you can never have enough milkweed – the caterpillars just keep appearing and poof! No more milkweed leaves.

Recommended flowers for rain gardens in our area include:

- African iris (*Dietes iridioides*)
- Blue flag iris (*Iris virginica*)
- Canna lily (*Canna* spp.)
- Goldenrod (*Solidago* spp.)
- Milkweed (native and non-native species) (*Asclepias* spp.)
- Shrimp plant (*Justicia brandegeana*)
- Swamp sunflower (*Helianthus angustifolius*)

To learn more about building a rain garden in your yard, see the [UF IFAS rain garden guide here](#).

## What Was Wrong With this Dombeya Seminole?

By Bob Burns, Master Gardener Volunteer

This plant, commonly called Tropical hydrangea or Florida hydrangea, has pink snowball flowers with a long bloom season (November through April); scores of bees are attracted to the flowers while in bloom. The plant is considered Florida Friendly because it is the work of crossing two other *Dombeya* species by the USDA Plant Introduction Station in Miami, FL in 1973 (1). During the summer, the plant can grow quickly to a height of six feet, with many lush green heart-shaped leaves. Additionally, this plant needs supplemental irrigation during dry periods but does not need any fertilizer. The shrub is free of pests and disease (2).

In early January 2025, I noticed significantly more leaf drop than observed in the prior growing seasons on two shrubs planted next to each other in the alley.



*Dombeya seminaole*. Photo credit: Bob Burns

Despite twice weekly irrigation, both shrubs displayed small leaves that quickly turned yellow and fell off. I decided to send a soil/root sample to the Nematode Lab in Gainesville, which showed nothing out of the ordinary for Florida soils. I subsequently dug up one of the two shrubs that appeared almost dead, but the roots did not show the gnarling typical of a high nematode population. Another gardener who was growing the same shrub told me that his *Dombeya* Seminole (*Dombeya spp.*) only lived about 5 years and then died out.

Over the subsequent weeks the shrub made a slow comeback, with leaves staying green for longer. As of early April, the attached picture shows a reasonably healthy shrub that matches what I recall from April in prior years. My conclusion is to be more patient and let plants take their natural course of life. If indeed a short-lived perennial shrub, enjoy it while you have it.

1. [https://www.chicagobotanic.org/plantcollections/plantfinder/dombeya\\_seminole--tropical\\_rose\\_hydrange](https://www.chicagobotanic.org/plantcollections/plantfinder/dombeya_seminole--tropical_rose_hydrange)
2. <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=962161401406260&set=a.752255295730206> (Port St Lucie Botanical Gardens)





## "It's Spring, Time to Clean Up."

*By Marva Perry, Master Gardener Volunteer*

The other day as I was perusing my front yard garden and adoring the last of my red and green cabbage, ripening tomatoes, onions, celery, and mini roses, I spotted the little black demons. They were back! Up from the depths of hell, baby Eastern Lubber Grasshoppers were invading. What could I do that was nontoxic and would not leave my vegetables poisonous?

There are so many Lubbers that the soapy water methods would not work at this stage. They would just jump off the fence and return later for dinner. I needed something that would control the masses quickly.



*Lubber grasshopper. Photo credit: J. Castner, UF*

Then it hit me! My shop vac. I planned my attack for Saturday morning when it was cool. I knew they would be clinging to the chain link fence. With an extension cord to the front porch outlet I was ready. My neighbor came out and saw what I was doing. He became my assistant when the Lubbers moved to his side of the fence. We must have sucked up two hundred of those little demons. I have many crinum lilies, amaryllis, and other Lubber delicacies that I need to protect from these invaders.

So, it is time to join me and clean up these demons from hell with your shop vac. (Editor's note: cleaning out the shop vac afterward may be an interesting exercise!?)



## Submit Your Articles and Pictures to The Dirt

*The Dirt* is published January, April, June, and October for Master Gardeners by Master Gardeners. The deadline for the next issue is **June 11**. If you would like to submit an article or photo feature, see the following guidelines:

- Articles should be 250 to 300 words.
- NOTE! All images must be open source – i.e., your own work, photos from UF/IFAS, or an image for which you have been granted permission.
- The topic can be anything you would like to share to educate your fellow gardeners.
- You may send pictures, poetry, or garden-related articles.
- Submit only Word documents, not PDF, so that edits are possible.
- Send tips or information about a community or Master Gardener project for a potential article.
- Include proper attribution for photos/images.
- Send submissions to Susan Ladwig at [ladwig.susan@gmail.com](mailto:ladwig.susan@gmail.com)

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