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June 2024 Issue

I miss those cool days way back in April! Hopefully your gardens are surviving this heat. Enjoy this issue of The Dirt!

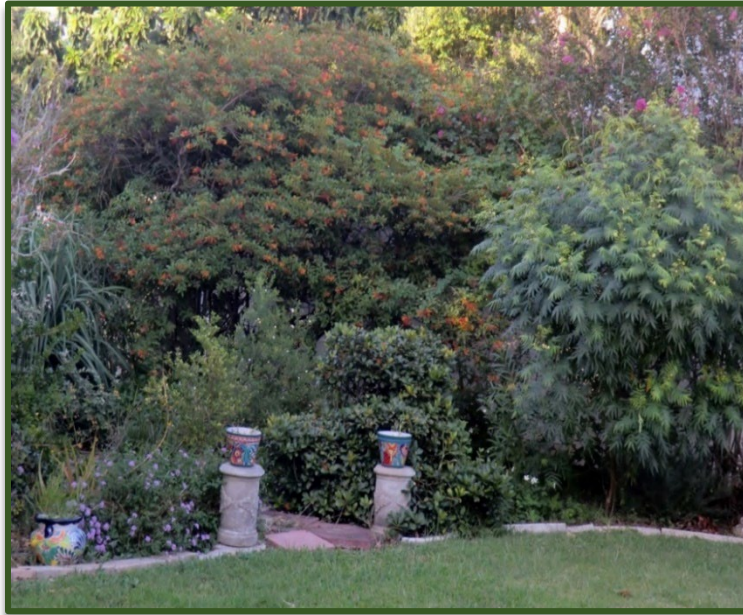
Firebush Belongs in a Pollinator Garden

By Ellen Mahany, Master Gardener Volunteer. Photos by Ellen Mahany.

The native firebush (*Hamelia patens*) has gorgeous orange-red, tube-shaped blossoms in terminal and axillary clusters that mature into purplish black fruit. This year-round bloomer provides nourishment for numerous garden residents.

- It furnishes its most significant pollinator, the small iridescent-green sweat bee (*Augochlora pura*), with nectar throughout this insect's long flying season from spring through early fall.
- Long-tongued native bees, including bumble bees, love the tubular blossoms.
- Our state butterfly, zebra longwing, as well the black swallowtail, gulf fritillary, Eastern tiger, monarch, and sulphurs, are among butterfly species that sip from its flower clusters.
- Hummingbirds cannot resist its nectar.
- Its extrafloral nectaries, located on its leaves and stems, appeal to ants and hummingbirds.
- Unidentified insects of various orders fly on and off its branches in their search for nectar.
- Among small mammals and birds that consume the ripe fruit are squirrels, mockingbirds, cardinals, wrens, and other backyard birds.
- It is the host and favorite nectar plant for the pluto sphinx moth (*Xylophanes pluto*).





*Centered around this firebush are Chapman's Senna (*Senna mexicana* var. *chapmanii*) to its right, Indian hawthorne (*Raphiolepis indica*) and lavender prostrate lantana (*Lantana montevidensis*) in the foreground, white indigo (*Randia aculeata*) at center left and white-blossomed Bahama strongback (*Bouyeria succulenta*) at center right of the firebush, and lemon grass (*Cymbopogon citratus*) to the left. Vines cover the fence.*

As the photograph confirms, firebush combines well with other flowering plants. Many native nectar-and-pollen rich pollinator plants offer a variety of groupings to choose from. Sunflowers (*Helianthus* spp.), twin flower (*Dyschoriste oblongifolia*), red salvia (*Salvia splendens*), beach verbena (*Glandularia maritima*) and wild coffee (*Psychotria nervosa*) are just a few examples of recommended companion plants.

The firebush also stands alone on its own merits as a specimen plant. Suitable for zones 9 through 11, it thrives in direct sunlight and, with fewer blossoms, in partial shade. In warmer areas it can reach up to 15 feet high and sprawl to 8 feet wide.

Truly the gardener's friend, it is heat, drought and salt resistant. It is easy to conclude the firebush is indispensable in a pollinator garden.



Got Salt?

By Susan Ladwig, Master Gardener Volunteer

As the climate changes and sea levels rise, more and more of us living near the water will be faced with saltwater inundation in our gardens. This article details some real-world experience with native plants that have been affected by saltwater and how well they recovered. These observations are based on plants impacted by the two most recent coastal flooding events, Hurricane Idalia and the unnamed storm of December 2023.

Plants that were least impacted by recent saltwater inundation:

- Florida privet (*Forestiera segregata*)
- sea grape (*Coccoloba uvifera*)
- sweet acacia (*Vachellia farnesiana*)
- Christmas berry (*Crossopetalum* spp.)
- muhly grass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*)
- necklace pod (*Sophora tomentosa*)
- varnish leaf (*Dodonaea viscosa*)
- salt bush (*Baccharis halimifolia*)
- aloe (*Aloe* spp.)
- seaside goldenrod (*Solidago sempervirens*)
- beach creeper (*Ernodea littoralis*)

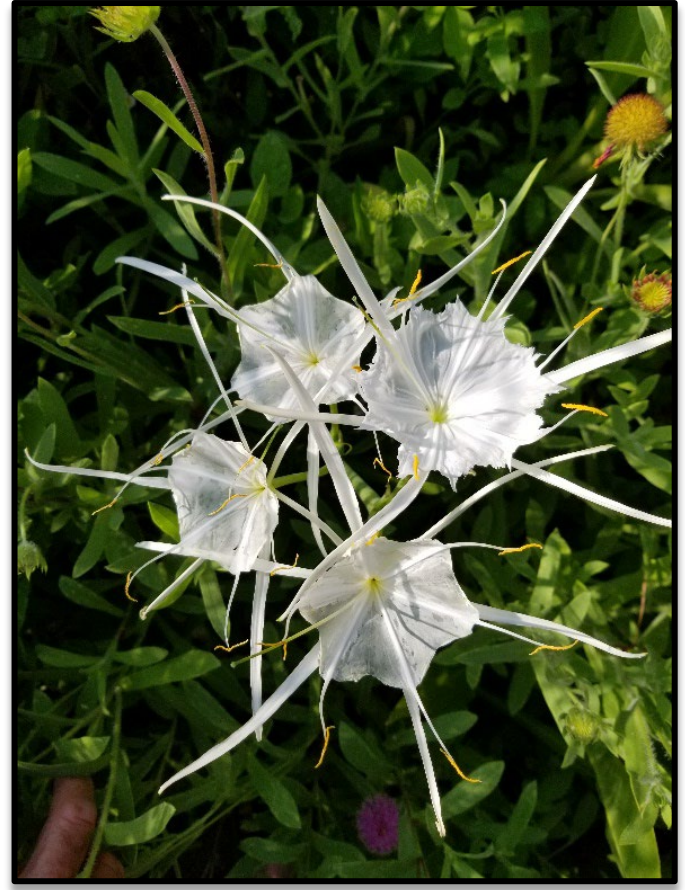
Plants that suffered greater impact but recovered:

- railroad vine (*Ipomoea pes-caprae*)
- coral honeysuckle (mature plants) (*Lonicera sempervirens*)
- beach sunflower (*Helianthus debilis*)
- elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*)
- tropical sage (*Salvia coccinea*)
- lyre leaf sage (*Salvia lyrata*)
- southern bee blossom (*Gaura angustifolia*)
- sunshine mimosa (*Mimosa strigillosa*)
- partridge pea (*Chamaecrista fasciculata*)
- bidens (*Bidens alba*) (you can't kill those things!)
- coral bean (*Erythrina herbacea*)

- scorpion tail (*Heliotropium angiospermum*)
- white (beach) spider lilies (*Hymenocallis latifolia*)



Railroad vine (Ipomoea pes-caprae).
Photo credit: Paul Waton (with permission)



Spider lily (Hymenocallis littoralis).
Photo credit: Paul Waton (with permission)

- mature, deep-rooted fire bush (*Hamelia patens*)
- yellow tops (*Flaveria linearis*)
- frostweed (*Verbesina virginica*)
- golden canna (*Canna flaccida*)
- climbing aster (*Ampelaster carolinianus*)
- red mulberry (*Morus rubra*)
- pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana*)
- starry rosinweed (*Silphium asteriscus*)



- swamp hibiscus (*Hibiscus coccineus*)



Swamp Hibiscus (Hibiscus coccineus). Photo credit: Paul Waton (with permission)

Plants that have not recovered:

- Wild Coffee (*Psychotria nervosa*)
- Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*)
- Frogfruit also known as turkey tangle fogfruit just to be confusing (*Phyla nodiflora*)

If you are a waterfront gardener, you will have to choose plants carefully and be sure to water generously after a saltwater inundation event to flush the salt from the soil. You can find more saltwater tolerant plants [at this UF/IFAS page](#).



Gazpacho Salad Recipe

By Debbie Ingram, Master Gardener Volunteer

Not a fan of cold soup? How about turning a traditional Gazpacho soup recipe into a great summer salad? Full of flavor and nutritionally dense, this recipe can serve as a basis for unlimited variations.

Ingredients:

- 1 large cucumber, chopped
- 2 pounds tomatoes, chopped
- ½ cup red onion, chopped
- 1 green bell pepper, chopped
- 2 stalks celery, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 1 Tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- 1 Tablespoon lime juice
- salt and pepper to taste
- ¼ cup fresh cilantro or basil, chopped

Optional Additions: chopped zucchini or yellow squash, fresh corn kernels, peas or beans of choice, or crumbled feta or goat cheese, sunflower seeds.

Instructions:

Add all vegetables to a large bowl. Add oil, vinegar, lime juice, salt and pepper, and mix well. Chill for at least one hour before serving.



Gazpacho Salad. Photo by Debbie Ingram



Discovering the Seagrape: A Delicious and Versatile Coastal Edible

By Theresa Badurek, Master Gardener Program Leader. Photos: Theresa Badurek

There are many native plants in Florida that have edible components. One such plant is the large and bold seagrape, *Coccoloba uvifera*. Seagrape can be a tree or a large shrub – growing up to 35'-50' tall. If left to grow naturally, it will form a large vase-shaped, multi-stemmed tree. The plant has large round (orbiculate), alternate leaves with red veins. These leaves often turn red and fall off in winter. Not all at once though – it is an evergreen plant. New leaves grow in a shiny bronze color. White flowers grow (mostly in spring and summer) in racemes up to a foot long. On female plants only, these develop into dense clusters of fruit (seagrapes) that ripen to a deep maroon/purple in late summer.

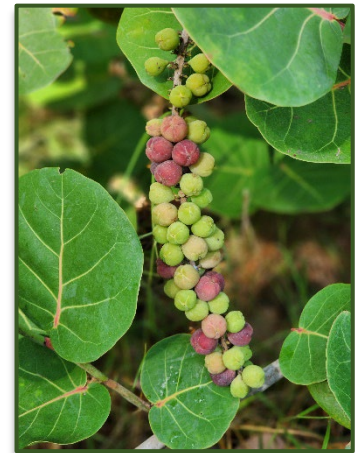
The fruit on each cluster ripens at slightly different times so hold a clean bucket underneath and gently run your hands down each cluster – the ripe ones will fall into the bucket. You can return later for the others or leave them for the wildlife. Birds and squirrels love them too! Do not harvest seagrapes on public property, harvest only from your own plants or from private property with property owner's permission. Ripe seagrapes can be eaten fresh, but I love to make jelly too. Here is one recipe I have tried and loved!

Seagrape Refrigerator Jelly

Ingredients

- 3 cups of ripe sea grapes
- 1 ½ cups water
- 1 cup sugar

Bring seagrapes and water to a boil, then reduce to simmer for around 30 minutes. Mash with a potato masher periodically to separate the seeds. Using a strainer, strain out the juice (mash with a spoon as you go to get all the juice you can). Some smaller pieces of pulp will come through- that's okay.



Seagrapes simmering



Strain off the seagrape juice

Combine one cup of this juice with one cup of sugar over medium heat. Bring it to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for a few minutes. How long? You can use the spoon/sheet method to check. Dip a cool metal spoon into the mixture and hold it high over the pot. If the liquid drips off it's not ready. It will slide off the spoon in a sheet when it is ready. Carefully pour into a glass jar and let it cool at room temp.



Seagrape jelly ready for the refrigerator.

Move it to the refrigerator to set further and to keep longer. This jelly needs to be used in two weeks, or frozen. This recipe yields about one 8-ounce jar of jelly. Scale up amounts proportionally to make more.

Seagrapes are nutritious, containing vitamins A and C and other nutrients, and are low in calories. Enjoy!



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 **October 10**. 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

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