

A quarterly online magazine published for Master Gardeners in support of the educational mission of UF/IFAS Extension Service.

## Is it really January?

By Ellen Mahaney, Master Gardener

As I write this article, we have yet to experience frost or freeze, so my garden looks more like July than January. Year-round blooming plants such as firebush, plumbago, senna, Simpson's stopper, white indigo, sparkleberry, trailing lavender lantana, false rosemary, porter weed, rouge plant, bulbine, and coreopsis offer a summery appearance. Several common butterfly species have gone to winter homes further south. However, Monarch and Sulphur butterflies still show up, welcomed by their larva plants—sennas for sulphurs and the somewhat controversial tropical milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*) for monarchs. (Although I did not do so this year, it is advisable to cut tropical milkweed back in fall.)



Senna is a popular larva plant for Sulphur butterflies. Photo credit: Ellen Mahaney.

## January 2019 Issue 16

Is it really January?

Foraging Hubs: Maximizing ecosystem services in the built landscape

Gardening with Children

Seeking a Green Thumb? Grow Some Herbs

Around the World in 80 Trees

Pictures from South China Botanical Garden

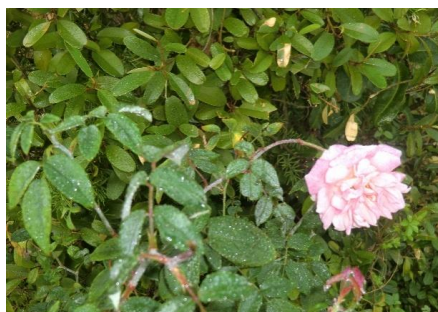
International Master Gardener Conference

Master Gardeners Speakers Bureau

Send in your articles and photos

This is the best time of the year for the dozen or so low maintenance Earth-Kind® and old garden roses in my garden. January brings relief from the long, grueling Florida summer when rose leaves droop like tongues panting in the heat. After a drop in temperatures and an unusual amount of soothing rain during the fall, they bloom profusely, according to their individual cycles. The Mutabilis blossoms change from yellow to pink to crimson. Duchesse de Brabant, Belinda's dream, Carefree Beauty and a "cracker rose" are in the pink. St. David's, which is a Bermuda mystery rose, Louis Phillippe and Mrs. B.R. Cant offer rich red blooms. The Knockout and Smith's Parish have pinkish white flowers. The flowers of Archduke Charles are red with pink centers. In the winter, the rose shrubs can relax and look their best before we all begin our struggle against heat and humidity.

If my rose bushes could speak, they might say, "Is it really January? How wonderful." And I would agree with them.



Clockwise from top left: St. David's, a Bermuda mystery rose, loves cool weather. St. David's sits in front of a Louis Phillippe rose bush. Belinda's Dream blooms above a pot. Mutabilis cycles from yellow to pink to crimson Photo credits: Ellen Mahaney



## Foraging Hubs: Maximizing ecosystem services in the built landscape

By Kaitlin Hammersley, Master Gardener

Did you know there is an online tool that can help you to select plants that maximize ecosystem services in your landscape? Based on research conducted by Dr. Doug Tallamy, the National Wildlife Federation's (NWF) 'Native Plant Finder' tool (<https://www.nwf.org/NativePlantFinder/>) does just that! The idea is that there are certain plants that support a large number of caterpillar species, acting as "foraging hubs" for birds. Dr. Tallamy's team, in partnership with the NWF, has made it easy for you to identify which plants can serve as foraging hubs in your area, so you can choose landscape plants more wisely.

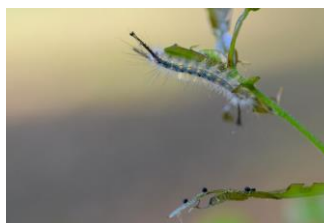
How do you use this magical tool, you ask? The site provides clear instructions here: <https://www.nwf.org/NativePlantFinder/About>. You enter your zip code and a list of plants appears. The plants (or genera, really) that support the most caterpillar species appear first. If you click on a given genus, the detail page lists specific plant species that are native to your area.

For example, when I enter my zip code, I can see that the *Solidago* genus (goldenrods) supports 82 different caterpillar species. After clicking on the genus, I find that Chapman's goldenrod and Seaside goldenrod are the two species native to my area. Good thing I planted a goldenrod last week! When I scroll down to the 'Trees and Shrubs' section (which appears below the 'Flowers and Grasses' section), I see that the *Quercus* genus supports a whopping 395 caterpillar species in my area, and the *Prunus* genus supports 247! Wow!

It is also possible to search by butterfly or moth, to see which plant species a given caterpillar utilizes as a host. You can even create a saved list of plants you would like to use. How convenient!

We all know that planting natives is "important", but if gardening for wildlife is truly a priority, this tool provides essential information to aid in plant selection. It allows gardeners to get the biggest bang for their buck, so to speak, by identifying plant species that will support the most lepidopteran diversity.

Now, go forth and plant a foraging hub!



Left: A Monarch drinking goldenrod nectar. Photo credit: Donna Legare, UF/Leon County Extension.  
Right: Tussock moth caterpillar feeding on oak leaves. Photo credit: Adam Dale, University of Florida, Gainesville.

## Gardening with Children

By Debi Ford, Master Gardener

Children have a natural fascination for growing things. They love to plant seeds, watch them grow, and harvest the flowers, fruits and vegetables they helped nurture. Aside from planting seeds, there are a number of other activities to help keep them interested in gardening.

In addition to working in your own garden, consider a field trip to visit some of the wonderful nature preserves and gardens in the area—Brooker Creek, Weedon Island, Florida Botanical Gardens, Sunken Gardens, and Marie Selby Gardens. All of these venues offer wonderful opportunities for children to learn more about plants and gardening. Other ways to engage children are to plan specific garden-related projects:

- Try growing sprouts in a simple plastic or glass jar.
- Make a wind chime from a terra cotta pot, some beads, and some twine.
- Design garden markers from craft sticks and shapes.
- Take children with you when you shop for plants. Letting them choose which plants to take home will offer the opportunity to keep them interested after planting.
- Create a terrarium using small plants and decorative items such as stones to make a natural environment they can observe indoors.
- In our cooler months, make a bird feeder using pine cones spread with creamy peanut butter and rolled in bird seed. Hang from a tree branch and keep a log of the different birds that come to feed.

Keeping children interested can foster a life-long love of gardening, so look for opportunities to keep that love growing!



Photo credits:  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org>



## Seeking a Green Thumb? Grow Some Herbs

By Janis Rosser, Master Gardener

In the last issue, I wrote about growing basil. Another easy-to-grow herb to consider is mint (*Mentha spp*).

No matter what you believe about your green thumb capabilities, I can assure you that you will be a successful mint grower. Mint is ideal for beginning gardeners. It grows rapidly (even to the point of being aggressive), will survive most conditions, and particularly loves containers so that it can show off its ability not to be contained!

A hardy perennial with a minty, sweet aroma, its serrated leaves vary in color from dark green to blue, gray-green and paler shades. Its flowers range from white to purple. As mint loves heat and moisture, it is a natural for Florida growing.

Whether in the ground or in containers, mint grows best in soil that retains moisture. A word of warning here—do not let mint dry out or it will shrivel up and die. Keep the soil moist at all times. True to its Mediterranean roots, it prefers full sun but can tolerate some shade. Finally, start your plants either by cuttings or by dividing an existing plant.

Like most herbs, mint is subject to old Greek myths. According to Greek mythology, Minthe, a nymph, was Hades lover. However, Hades' wife, Persephone, discovered the affair. In a rage, she turned Minthe into a low-lying plant to be forever trod upon. Minthe, though, made sure that every time someone stepped on her, the air would fill with a sweet perfume, thus denying Persephone a full revenge. Remember Minthe when you are enjoying those Mint Juleps or other wonderful mint-flavored dishes.

### References:

History and Folklore of Herbs (<http://www.oocities.org/sseagraves/historyherbs.htm>).

Herbs in the Florida Garden (<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/vh020>)



Mint. Photo credit: UF/IFAS.

## Book Review: Around the World in 80 Trees by Jonathan Drori

By Dianne L. Fecteau, Master Gardener

Botanical Gardens Conservation International estimates there are over 60,000 tree species in the world. From this number, author Jonathan Drori chose 80 for his book. His objective was to illustrate not only the diversity of trees across continents but also how these trees play a role in all parts of human life—economics, health, food, building materials, and more. Starting in his native England, he traverses Europe, Africa, the Eastern Mediterranean, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas. He describes each tree as to its foliage, stem, fruit, and flowers. More importantly, he examines how tree species connect to one another and the ways humans and these trees have interconnected over the centuries. Some of the trees are familiar—elm, rubber, and sugar maple, for example. Others are unusual.

One of the trees he chose from North America is the Florida native, the red mangrove (*Rhizophora mangle*). After noting how its long, stilt-like roots (rhizophores) form dense thickets that create and preserve shore lines, he identifies the threat they face. "They can grow only in the tiny gap between mean sea level and the highest tides. If the sea level rises, the trees must move inland, where space may already be taken" (p. 219).



*Rhizophora mangle* red mangrove. Photo credit: Ed Gilman, UF/IFAS

Trees disperse seeds in a variety of ways, using wind, animals, birds, or in one case, "explosion". The sandbox tree (*Hura crepitans*), native to tropical regions of North and South America, produces large seed pods about the size of a tangerine. As the pods lose moisture, they dry out and "enormous tension builds up until there's a sudden release...and the pod explodes. The seeds are jettisoned with astonishing force, accompanied by a large bang" (pp. 190-191). This force can propel the seeds up to 230 feet a second, carrying them up to 150 away so they do not compete with their parent. He notes that the pods provide



homes for small colonies of ants. The poisonous seeds discourage birds and other predators, making a pod a very safe place for the ants, "with the slight drawback that at any moment their whole world may be blown to smithereens" (p. 191).



Leaves and seed capsule of the sandbox tree.  
Photo Credit: Encyclopedia Britannica

Descriptions of the medicinal uses of trees range from the dragon's blood (*Dracaena cinnabari*) resin used to treat rashes and sores to white willow (*Salix alba*) as a source of salicin, used in the making of aspirin. Noting that the numerous neem (*Azadirachta indica*) trees in India produce an insecticide that is "effective, safe, cheap, sustainable, and biodegradable" (p. 121), he ponders why it is not in wider use around the world. The explanation? Because of its long tradition of use, it is difficult for commercial firms to obtain patents. It is more profitable for them to develop and sell synthetic chemicals.

Each of the chapters is brief, making it a perfect choice for bedtime reading or for picking up when you have only a few minutes to fill.

Drori concludes with an extensive list of books and resources, providing additional in-depth sources for the curious. He also includes several online resources, many with free access.

## Some Pictures from the South China Botanical Garden

By Dianne Fecteau, Master Gardener

I took these pictures in November during my visit to the South China Botanical Garden in Guangzhou, China. The garden, founded in 1929, covers 835 acres and contains 38 themed collections, including magnolias, gingers, palms, and orchids.

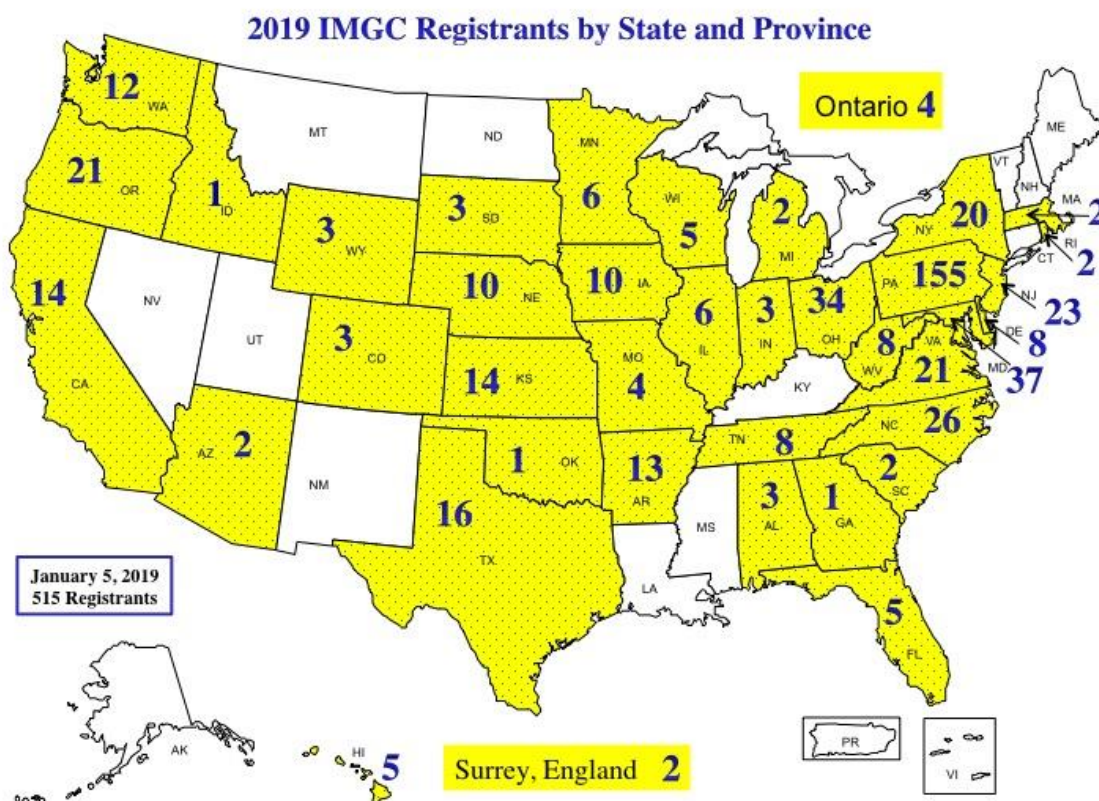


Left: One of the many peaceful scenes throughout the garden. Right: A statue of Li Shizhen (1518-1593) outside the entrance to the medicinal plant collection. The Chinese consider him one of the greatest doctors in China. He compiled a compendium of 1,892 medicinal plants with over a thousand illustrations.



## 2019 International Master Gardener Conference

The 2019 International Master Gardener Conference takes place June 17-21, 2019 in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. In addition to the conference itself, there are half- and full-day tours to area public gardens on June 16, 17, and 21. So far, over 500 people have signed up (but only five from Florida). Visit the web site for more details. <http://www.internationalmastergardener.com/>





### Send your Articles and Photos

**The next Issue of *The Dirt* is April 2019. The deadline for articles is March 29.** Share your passion for gardening with your fellow Master Gardeners by writing an article for *The Dirt*. Include images where possible. However, if you include images they must fall under one of the following guidelines:

- your own
- UF/IFAS image
- open access image, as in wiki-commons, where all rights are open and the photographer is credited
- used with the express permission of the photographer

When you do send images, please do not embed them within the article. Include them separately. Please send all files as Word files. I cannot edit .pdf files.

Do you like to photograph plants or trees but don't like to write? Send me your photos with a description, even without an accompanying article, and I'll publish them with the description as well as a credit to you, the photographer.

Send your articles, images, and your photos to Dianne Fecteau at [dianne@kendiacorp.com](mailto:dianne@kendiacorp.com). My phone number is 727.366.1392.

All articles are subject to editing. In addition, Theresa Badurek, Urban Horticulture Extension Agent and Master Gardener Coordinator, reviews and approves all articles prior to publication.

### *The Dirt*

Published quarterly for Master Gardeners by Master Gardeners:  
April, July, October & January

**UF/IFAS Advisor:** Theresa Badurek, Urban Horticulture Extension Agent and Master Gardener Coordinator

**Editor:** Dianne L. Fecteau.

**Contributing Writers:** Debi Ford, Ellen Mahany

**UF/IFAS: An Equal Opportunity Institution**

