



# 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

**UF** | IFAS Extension  
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

 **Sarasota County**

# UF/IFAS Extension and Sustainability





**UF** UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

UF/IFAS  
Extension  
Sarasota County

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# About Us

Sarasota County UF/IFAS Extension and Sustainability operates as a partnership of Sarasota County, the University of Florida, and the United States Department of Agriculture. We translate expert research into community initiatives, classes, and volunteer opportunities related to six core areas: 4-H youth development; agriculture; gardening and landscaping; natural resources; nutrition and healthy living; and sustainability.

# Our Team

Our team consists of 29 dedicated employees (13 from the University of Florida, 15 from Sarasota County, one grant-funded), drawing experience and expertise from myriad backgrounds to serve the community across our core areas of education and in administrative operations.



# Vision

Sarasota County Extension is the most-trusted resource for education and programs that cultivate vibrant communities, thriving businesses, and healthy environments.

# Mission

To provide lifelong learning, programs, and services to help the Sarasota County community develop skills, implement solutions, and build a better future.



# Sarasota County



## Sarasota County Commission

(Pictured, left to right) Joe Neunder, Chair (District 4); Ron Cutsinger, Vice Chair (District 5); Tom Knight (District 3); Teresa Mast (District 1); and Mark Smith (District 2)



## Sarasota County Administrator

Jonathan R. Lewis

# University of Florida



## University of Florida Board of Trustees

(Pictured) Morteza "Mori" Hussein, Chair; (not pictured) David Brandon; John Brinkman; Richard Cole; Christopher Corr; James Heavener; Sarah Lynne; Daniel O'Keefe; Rahul Patel; Marsha Powers; Fred Ridley; Patrick Zalupski; and Anita Zucker.



## UF/IFAS

## Extension Dean

Dr. Andra D. Johnson

# Funding and Partners

Our services are supported by funding from Sarasota County Government, the State of Florida (University of Florida), and the United States Government (U.S. Department of Agriculture). In addition, staff develop an array of projects, programs and other education efforts with grant funding from and partnerships with multiple agencies and organizations, including: the Florida departments of Environmental Protection, and Children and Families; U.S. Department of Energy and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; Charles and Margery Barancik Foundation; Gulf Coast Community Foundation; The Patterson Foundation; Mote Marine Laboratory & Aquarium; Sarasota 4-H Foundation; American Red Cross; Friends of Sarasota County Parks; Friends of Myakka River; and Florida Wildlife Foundation, among others. Partnerships with nonprofits, county and city departments, and volunteers also aid our success.





# From the Director

This 2024 Annual Report highlights Sarasota County UF/IFAS Extension and Sustainability's diverse programs and services. Extension serves our community with education, technical assistance, and youth development, through a partnership between Sarasota County and the University of Florida that ensures a scientific approach. We help solve local challenges and increase awareness on water quality, health and nutrition, housing affordability through energy and water conservation, workforce training for economic growth, and so much more.



The past year brought extreme challenges not seen in Sarasota County for years, in the form of three hurricanes that seriously impacted this area. Extension helped residents prepare, with disaster readiness education and resources, and delivered information and support after to assist residents, businesses and organizations. Despite those significant disruptions, this report demonstrates a continued commitment to community education in our foundational programs, as well as specific new programs developed around new residents (check out the new Sarasota County Starter Kit), activating our demonstration landscapes for education, and resiliency planning.

Extension provided countless programs for area employees to support critical licenses and professional development in areas as diverse as pesticide applications, teacher curriculum, and ecotourism. Youth programs got students out into nature and got their hands dirty in the garden growing their own food. We delivered workshops, site visits, and direct consultations to homeowners associations to help save money and decrease resource use. And financially challenged families now benefit from lower utility bills and better nutrition thanks to many programs specifically serving those struggling to make ends meet. Our 258 incredible volunteers answered questions at Plant Clinics, gave garden tours, mentored youth, and provided hands-on education, at a value of over \$370,000.



This past year, we also provided direct education to more than 45,000 individuals by hosting 364 classes, along with requested presentations, technical support, and consultations. The 4-H Youth Development program reached nearly 10,000 youth participants in clubs, camps, competitions, and more. And, through our online resources, including 247 new videos, engaging social media content, and educational blogs, we reached a combined audience of more than 2.3 million people. We are excited to reach even more in the coming year, including through new programs focused on edible gardening, plastic waste reduction, and the health benefits of nature.

Thank you for being part of Sarasota County Extension's story in 2024 and we look forward to more impactful and meaningful interactions in 2025.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Lee Hayes Byron". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light background.

Lee Hayes Byron  
County Extension Director  
Sarasota County UF/IFAS Extension and Sustainability



# 2024 At a Glance

## 364



Classes, workshops, camps and other events hosted, with roughly **8,200** total registrants.

## 45,134



Clients educated through classes, field visits, phone calls, emails or other direct consultations.

## 247



New videos produced on Extension topics, reaching a total audience of **130,973**

## 258



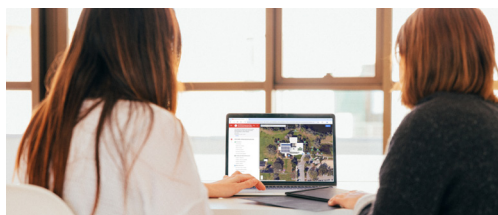
Extension volunteers provided **11,804** hours of service, worth **\$373,147** in labor.

## 63



Newsletters delivered across Extension program areas, reaching a total audience of **174,260**.

## 2.3 million



Online connections, including web visits, blog posts, video views, and social media interactions.

**91%** of clients satisfied\*

**99%** benefitted from contact\*

**76%** used information\*

\* Sarasota County Extension client survey (2024)



# What Our Clients Tell Us



## FARM AND RANCH TOUR

“ I found the tour to be most informative! This year I brought a friend with me. As a resident of Sarasota county, he had no idea what agricultural endeavors were in his county. We were both impressed and encouraged by the farm school operation. It is so refreshing to see our youth becoming involved in food production and animal husbandry. ”

## FLORIDA-FRIENDLY LANDSCAPING™

“ We are located on the waterfront in Osprey. Extension has helped educate our community on Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ and, recently, how to fertilize appropriately. We have been able to institute better communication and good practices with the community landscaping group and our residents as a result of these presentations. ”



## SUSTAINABILITY

“ Thank you so much for participating in Audubon’s “Powering Progress” workshop. Of note is the different avenues of funding you have explored and succeeded in bringing home. I know it was very helpful for the other local governments who attended the workshop ... to hear of these successes and learn how to get started with this work. ”

## MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEERS

“ Before joining the Master Gardener Volunteer program, I felt lost and unsure of my life purpose. But in just three months, I’ve made true friends, discovered new skills, and reconnected with causes that matter deeply to me. There’s no way to put a price on that, and I’m so grateful to you. ”

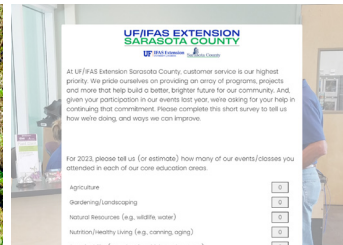




# Strategic Plan Actions

## 2024

- ☑ Education for New Residents
- ☑ Extension Demonstration Landscape
- ☑ Extension Virtual Tour
- ☑ Vulnerability Assessment and Resilience Plan
- ☑ Extension Annual Survey
- ☑ Extension Facility Funding Evaluation



## 2025

- ☐ Plastic Waste Reduction Education
- ☐ Hands-On Exploration
- ☐ Eating Locally Grown
- ☐ Workforce Training and Career Development
- ☐ Health Benefits of Nature





# 2024 Program Highlights

## 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

- 9,969 youth participants in 4-H programs, placing Sarasota County among the top of all Florida counties.
- 604 group learning events (such as club and volunteer leader meetings, trainings, camps, and more), with a participation of 2,981 youths and 952 adults.
- 15 active 4-H community clubs, with 175 youth members who participated in experiential learning on topics including: livestock, rabbits, poultry, dogs, clothing/sewing, ecology, leadership, plants, robotics, and more.
- Coordinated participation of dozens of youth at the annual Sarasota County Agriculture Fair, in 4-H events and activities related to livestock/poultry/ small animal judging and competitions, photography, arts and crafts, essay writing and more.
- Hosted youth-oriented, week-long “Exploring Your Environment” summer day camp, with classroom education, field trips to natural areas, and hands-on activities teaching ecology, science, water quality and more.
- Delivered education about and hands-on experiences with freshwater systems, coastal environments and other ecosystems for nearly 900 local fourth and fifth grade students via the Learning in Florida’s Environment (LIFE) program.
- Local youth attended Extension’s annual 4-H Day at the Capitol in Tallahassee, with opportunities to learn about the legislative process, along with meeting local lawmakers.
- Partnered with nonprofit organizations to conduct a local event on agriculture and outdoor safety, providing youth and families with information on minimizing risks on farms and in rural areas.
- Delivered youth education and information events on agriculture, nutrition, solar energy, energy conservation and more at multiple events.



# 2024 Program Highlights

## SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

- Provided sustainable agriculture technical assistance to multiple farmers and ranchers, on topics including soil testing, weed management, pasture renovation, plant diseases, and livestock best practices. This included site visits to agricultural operations assessments and to address questions.
- Provided guidance on hurricane recovery options, assistance, and government funding possibilities for agricultural and nursery operations.
- Provided educational opportunities on local food systems, backyard gardening/growing, agriculture awareness, and more.
- Developed and led Sarasota County Farm and Ranch Tour, with 100-plus attendees visiting and learning about local ag industry and history, including stops at a cattle ranch, vegetable farm, ag museum, and school district farm site.
- Initiated promotion and technical support for the Sarasota County Soil and Water Conservation Board's \$275,000 National Association of Conservation Districts grant to assist local landowners with measures to control feral hog damage and populations.
- The "Small Farm Incubator Program," in collaboration with Mote Aquaculture Research Park, continued to provide beginning farmers with hands-on experience in vegetable/fruit production on a two acre site.
- Organized and led distribution of more than 300 pounds of fresh produce to 135 families at a CenterPlace Health back-to-school event.
- Eighteen households completed Extension's Small Farm Startup School in 2024, with two sessions of the eight week training course offered on aspects of starting a farm business, including production, sales, marketing, and legal and regulatory considerations.





# 2024 Program Highlights

## GARDENING AND LANDSCAPING

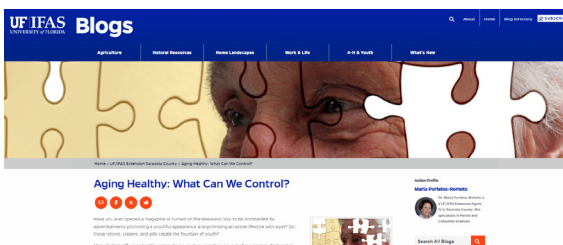
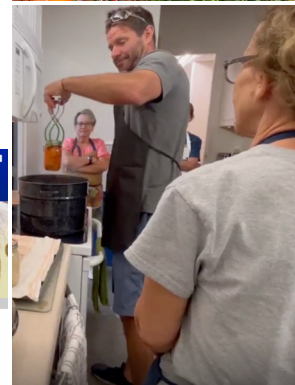
- Hosted the 18th Annual Plant Sale + EdFest, with more than 350 attendees, total plant sales and donations exceeding \$15,500 (used for future educational efforts), and dissemination of landscaping, conservation and other Extension information.
- Distributed seeds, gardening supplies, education materials and other items to 30 school garden sites, reaching roughly 5,500 Sarasota County youth.
- Plant Clinic help desks, staffed by Master Gardener Volunteers, assisted 7,300-plus contacts on topics related to landscapes, gardening, insects, and more.
- Installed educational greenhouse to complete first phase of the Educational Outreach Gardens (EOG) project, with future plans to support Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ education.
- Conducted nearly two-dozen guided tours of the Demonstration Gardens at Twin Lakes Park and Shamrock Park and Nature Center, sharing Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ practices with almost 450 participants.
- Coordinated a local business donation of vegetable, fruit and other plant seed packets, with an estimated \$5,000 value, with distribution to school gardens, community gardens and others.
- Master Gardener Volunteer program member earned Sarasota County School District “Outstanding Volunteer of the Year” award for his educational work with youth at Emma Booker Elementary School.
- Hosted citizen science-focused “The Great Southeast Pollinator Census!” event, to educate on pollinator importance and conservation and to gather local data.
- Presented post-disaster coastal landscaping recovery information to 125 attendees through Longboat Key homeowners association and community meetings.
- Delivered continuing education training for “green industry” professionals on best management practices, as well as focused training for environmental professionals and horticulture industry representatives.
- Recorded multiple segments of “Florida’s Flora and Fauna” television show for Tampa Bay Arts & Education network (TBAE), on Extension-related teaching to protect manatees, epiphytes, owls and other natural resources.
- Installed new coastal demonstration garden to showcase native plants adapted to sandy soils, salt spray, and wind, and provide education on resilient landscapes and post-storm replanting/recovery.
- Developed a video and blog series showcasing Master Gardener Volunteers, to recognize the significant contribution volunteers provide to the community.



# 2024 Program Highlights

## NUTRITION AND HEALTHY LIVING

- Delivered 335 nutrition education, healthy lifestyle, and gardening classes to youth audiences totaling 5,220 students through Extension's Family Nutrition Program.
- Delivered nutrition education and healthy lifestyle classes to adult audiences, via online and in-person presentations.
- Delivered storm readiness/disaster preparation lessons and techniques to more than 240-plus community members, through workshops across the county, and distributed a series of related fact sheets.
- Collaborated with area non-governmental organizations to deliver nearly 200 disaster preparation/resiliency information and 175 self-help kits — containing information, hand-crank radios, flashlights, batteries and other response items — to households facing financial challenges.
- Created disaster-related quick-hit video series and supporting documents, with topics including pre-storm preparations, tax-free hurricane supply shopping, post-storm best practices, post-storm food safety, and post-storm fraud avoidance.
- Family Nutrition Program partnered with 23 non-government and government organizations to provide education to 17 distinct sites across Sarasota County.
- Completed 9-part "Aging Healthy" blog series as a complement to ongoing Extension classes that provide seniors with information on nutrition, exercise, and other health topics.
- Engaged in healthy-living partner meetings, including Health Services Advisory Committee, Health Equality Coalition of Sarasota County, and Florida Department of Health (Sarasota County).
- Family Nutrition Program supported seven gardens in the community, with a reach of 900-plus youth participants.

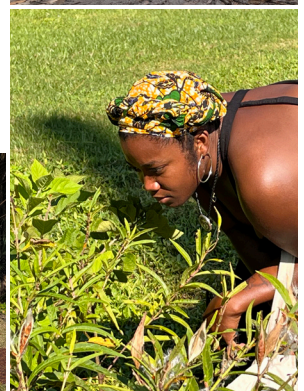




# 2024 Program Highlights

## NATURAL RESOURCES

- Through the new Sarasota County Starter Kit program, delivered information to new (and existing) residents about best practices for living in Southwest Florida's unique environment.
- Delivered 14 educational presentations on wildlife identification and protection, habitat management, safety-related information to various homeowner associations, reaching 670 residents.
- Developed a 16-post social media campaign to increase awareness of the negative impact of invasive species on Florida ecosystems and economy.
- Partnered with UF/IFAS Extension in Gainesville on a 2-week food waste and composting study, enrolling 100 Sarasota County households in the grant-funded project to gather data on waste generation and handling.
- Provided 34 direct consultations to homeowners and homeowner associations regarding best irrigation practices, stormwater management, water conservation and other water quality issues.
- Provided technical assistance on erosion control, stormwater runoff from roofs, best management practices of storm ponds, Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ options, and more for multiple neighborhoods.
- Presented on Sarasota County's Water Quality initiatives at the national Gulf of Mexico Conference.
- The freshwater and the uplands modules of the Florida Master Naturalist Program, each 40 hours of instruction, provided important workforce training opportunities on water quality-related issues for professionals from government, private and non-profit sectors.
- Partnered with Sarasota County Mosquito Management Services to deliver mosquito "scavenger hunt" activity—e.g., locating mosquito eggs and larvae—for 80-plus youth at Woodmere Park summer camp.
- Partnered with the City of North Port to launch "Green Industries Best Management Practices" professional training for the city and nearby areas.



# 2024 Program Highlights

## NATURAL RESOURCES (cont'd)

- The Green Business Partnership added five new partners, increasing membership to more than 250 local businesses, and measured an increase of 72 percent in recycling among partners.
- Provided workforce training on pest and beneficial insect identification and control methods and pesticide application for roughly 100 professionals.
- Developed "Aquatics Test" at the Manasota Envirothon competition, for 115 student participants from Sarasota-Manatee regional high schools.
- Collaborated with Parks, Recreation and Natural Resources team to provide youth mindfulness and nature exploration programs for 116 youth and 18 adults at Colonial Oaks Park summer camp.
- Partnered with Parks, Recreation and Natural Resources, Myakka River State Park and other partners to deliver two days of freshwater educational programming to more than 125 youth ages 5-10 at summer camp.
- Delivered eco-friendly, biorational pesticide training to area green industry representatives, providing continuing education (CEU) credits to professionals.
- Partnered with Unidos Now to develop and deliver a Spanish-language lab session related to water quality for area students.
- Provided workforce training on mangrove trimming best management practices to environmental professionals and landscapers operating in Sarasota County.
- Assisted with composting at seven community locations and five additional sites, helping to divert roughly 5,000 pounds of waste from landfills.
- Collaborated on training Lee County Extension Master Gardener Volunteers about ecofriendly pest management, and presented beneficial insects education to Landscape Inspectors Association of Florida members.
- Presented to the Florida Trail Association NextGen Coalition on techniques and tools to connect audiences with nature.





# 2024 Program Highlights

## SUSTAINABILITY

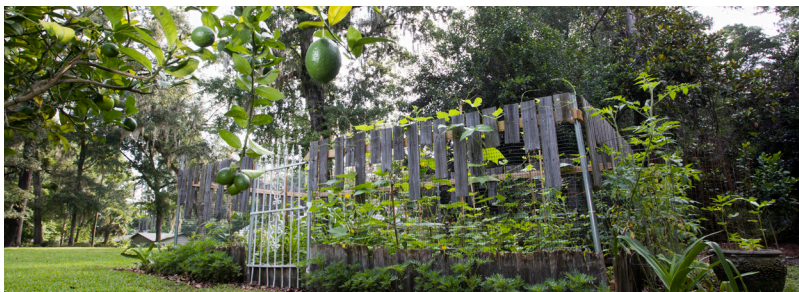
- Delivered energy-saving devices, low-flow products, and conservation education to financially challenged households, with estimated annual savings of:
  - 296,378 kilowatt-hours of energy,
  - 832,916 million gallons of water, and
  - \$41,413 in utility bills.
- Reached more than 5,200 individuals with sustainability information and tools related to energy and water conservation, solar energy options, “green” living practices, and more.
- Developed and hosted the 19th Annual Sustainable Communities Workshop, with staff and other experts delivering information about sustainability, conservation, quality of life, and more to audience of 170 in person and online.
- Secured \$1 million federal grant to develop a “Comprehensive Climate Action Plan,” key to our region’s efforts to address air and climate pollution.
- Completed “energy sweep” inspections and related energy-reduction retrofits at 13 Sarasota Housing Authority single-family homes, finishing all housing authority properties.
- Led community meeting about Resilient Florida Vulnerability Assessment and Adaptation Plan results, sharing information with and receiving input from nearly 50 in-person and virtual attendees.
- Collaborated with NASA to launch a local “extreme heat” outreach campaign, reaching more than 270 individuals with information about extreme heat risks and steps to remain safe, and presented actions to peers at Southeast Sustainability Directors Network.
- Delivered information about Sarasota County sustainability and resilience activity and planning to 330-plus professionals at Tampa Bay Regional Resiliency Summit.
- Reached nearly 200 individuals with energy- and water-efficiency information, along with distribution of ENERGY STAR-certified holiday lights, at five Sarasota County holiday-themed community events.





# Looking Ahead: 2025

## EATING LOCALLY GROWN



Our **“Grown and Gathered”** project will use blog posts, social media, publications and more to promote Florida-friendly fruit trees and other edible landscaping. Stay tuned for garden tours and classes on foodscaping and other topics to help you eat locally grown.

Learn more: [tiny.cc/ufsaraext\\_growngathered](https://tiny.cc/ufsaraext_growngathered)

## HANDS-ON EXPLORATION

Get your hands dirty and your feet wet! Join us to **“ex•plore”** (or, Extension Explorations) in a fun, hands-on way. Connect with nature, dig into gardening, dive into water resources, and much more. No experience needed—just a sense of adventure.

Learn more: [tiny.cc/ufsaraext\\_explore](https://tiny.cc/ufsaraext_explore)



## EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH GARDENS



We’re working on a number of new garden areas at our Extension Twin Lakes Park complex, to showcase sustainable landscaping practices for homes or businesses. Visit our grounds to learn about bioswales, butterfly/pollinator gardens, coastal landscaping, edible gardening and more.

## SARASOTA COUNTY FAIR

Don’t miss the Sarasota County Fair and the scores of 4-H youth who participate with projects, from arts and crafts to livestock showing. **March 14-23, 2025.**

Learn more: [www.sarasotafair.com](http://www.sarasotafair.com)





# Looking Ahead: 2025 (cont'd)

## PLANT SALE + EDFEST



These FREE, family-friendly events feature sustainable gardening education, landscape issue diagnosis, and thousands of plants for sale, plus an open house to showcase all Extension offers. **March 01 and Oct. 12, 2025.**

Learn more: [tiny.cc/ufsaraext\\_plantsale](https://tiny.cc/ufsaraext_plantsale).

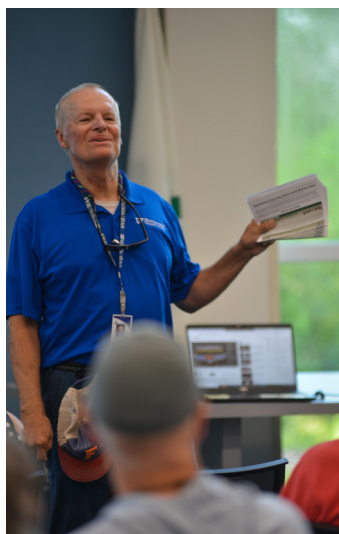
## SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES WORKSHOP

Get information on best practices to build lasting, equitable communities, with expert speakers, an array of panels, networking opportunities, exhibitor demonstrations, and more. **Nov. 06, 2025.**

Learn more: [tiny.cc/ufsaraext\\_scw](https://tiny.cc/ufsaraext_scw).



Find all our events and activities at [ufsarasotaext.eventbrite.com](https://ufsarasotaext.eventbrite.com), or subscribe to our "Class Blast" newsletter ([tiny.cc/ufsaraext\\_news](https://tiny.cc/ufsaraext_news)) for biweekly updates. And, don't forget to find and follow us: [Facebook.com/ufsarasotaext](https://Facebook.com/ufsarasotaext), [Instagram.com/ufsarasotaextension](https://Instagram.com/ufsarasotaextension), [YouTube.com/@ufsarasotaext](https://YouTube.com/@ufsarasotaext), [LinkedIn.com/company/ufsarasotaext](https://LinkedIn.com/company/ufsarasotaext), and [Pinterest.com/ufsarasotaext](https://Pinterest.com/ufsarasotaext).









Green Building, Twin Lakes Park

6700 Clark Road, Sarasota

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