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SOLUTIONS

UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County

St. Johns Lawn and Garden Gazette

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In this Issue

Veggie Garden

Bulbing onions, lettuce, arugula, spinach and more thrive this time of year. For a complete list, download the North FL Gardening Calendar: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/EP/EP45100.pdf or The Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/vh021

Holiday Centerpiece Workshop

Friday Dec. 16, 2022

10 am to 1 pm

$25.00 Registration Fee

Pre-registration required,

Non-refundable

Register at:

https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/ufifas-extension-st-johns-county-holiday-centerpiece-workshop-tickets-457025634977

Located at SJC Extension Auditorium

3125 Agricultural Center Dr

St. Augustine, FL 32092

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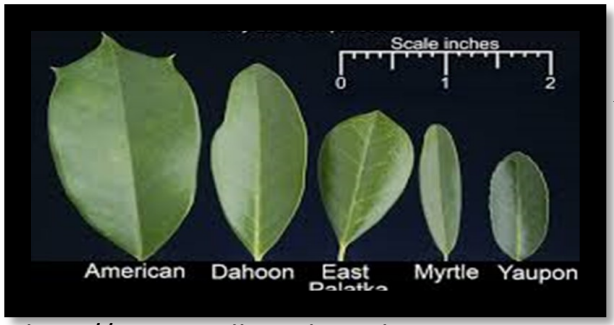
Florida-Friendly Hollies for the Holidays

Terra Freeman, Urban and Commercial Horticulture Agent, UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County



http://www.ppdl.purdue.edu

Foraging from our native Florida landscape can be a fun and creative way to create unique holiday decorations and gifts. Holly berries make colorful additions to winter wreaths, garland, centerpieces and swags. When gathering, look for various shades and textures of foliage. Gather showy, evergreen foliage, berries and cones from native plants such as Eastern Red Cedar limbs and their bluish berries; palm fronds; fresh pine branches and pine cones; magnolia leaves and seeds; beautyberries; grass seed heads and more to use in your creation. Add a bow or ornament and you're on your way to creating a one-of-a-kind holiday decoration. This activity can be done with the kids or other family members to create special memories of your holidays, or to give as gifts (without having to mingle with the holiday shopping crowds!). For a tutorial on how to create a simple evergreen swag, visit:

https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/design/outdoor-living/diy-evergreen-swags.html

I'd be remiss without adding an element of plant identification to your holiday crafting, so let's explore some basic characteristics and differences among Florida's native hollies—which have gorgeous berries and foliage to add to your creations. Florida is home to several native hollies, notably the Dahoon, American, Yaupon, and a hybrid of American and Dahoon known as 'East Palatka'. Hollies offer different forms, sizes and functions in the landscape, although one thing they all have in common is they are dioecious (meaning they have separate male and female plants; only the female plants produce berries), evergreen, and alternately arranged along the stem.

The Dahoon Holly, *Ilex cassine*, has a narrow form at 20' – 30' tall by 8'-12' wide, and leaves that are 2"- 4" long with a few sharp leaves along the upper half. The leaves are thick and stiff, dark green shiny on top, and paler green underneath. It's evergreen leaves and color resemble the American Holly (*Ilex opaca*), except the American Holly is stiffer and usually has sharp, spine-toothed margins; and is taller at 30'-50' by 15'-25' wide. Also, American holly wouldn't be found in the poorly drained habitat of the Dahoon. Both have red berries of approximately ¼".

The Yaupon Holly, *Ilex vomitoria*, has a rounder shape and modest size of 15' to 25' tall by 15' to 25' wide. The leaves are small at ½" to 1 ½ " long with crenate margins, which sets it apart from other native hollies. It's 1/4" berries can be red, orange or yellow. *Ilex vomitoria* 'Shillings' is a popular dwarf shrub in home landscapes and *Ilex vomitoria* 'Pendula' is a classic weeping form. Yaupon Holly is also becoming popular as an alternative crop grown for tea.

Whether you use this information to practice your native plant identification skills, or to create a special holiday embellishment, I hope the information inspires ideas on how to spend some enriching time in the fresh, outdoor air as our temperatures begin to drop and become more comfortable for outdoor adventures.

Florida-Friendly Native Hollies

Terra Freeman, Urban and Commercial Horticulture Agent, UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County

American Holly, *Ilex opaca*

Dahoon Holly, *Ilex cassine*

Ilex x attenuata 'East Palatka' Holly. Photo by Ed Gilman, UF/IFAS

Yaupon Holly, *Ilex vomitoria* (left is standard form; right is weeping)

Growing Herbs Indoors

Pat Ludwig, Jane Palmer, Linda Mundy, and Pam Hutcherson
Master Gardener Volunteers
UF/IFAS Extension SJC

We are fortunate to live in an area that supports growing herbs in our gardens or patios year round. Of course, we must heed those frost warnings and take care of our vulnerable plants, including herbs. Thankfully, even in North Florida, frost warnings are still rare.

Some gardeners in our area have experience growing herbs indoors because they have moved from northern climates where that was their only choice during winter months. These gardeners know there are benefits to growing indoor herbs, particularly when gardening space outdoors is frozen or at a premium. Indoor herbs can add different green hues to an interior and contrast the green of existing house plants.

Some herbs can add a wonderful fragrance to a space. Herbs can also add texture to indoor plant collections, particularly delicate, leafy green herbs that contrast with larger, smooth leaves of some houseplants. In addition, many households are cooking at home more and the convenience of quickly clipping herbs for garnish or to use in recipes enhances our meals and their presentation. When cooking with herbs, remember that the oil concentration in dried herbs is greater than in fresh, so it is recommended that 2 tablespoons of fresh herbs be used when a recipe states for 1 teaspoon of dried herbs.

Herbs such as mint, basil, rosemary, thyme, parsley, sweet marjoram, and oregano grow well in indoor environments, as do other less fussy herbs. One can grow herbs from seed, but growing the herb from a cutting and putting it in water until new roots sprout may take less time. Herb seedlings are available from nurseries as well, but these may be sparse at certain times of the year.

When herbs are planted, good potting soil in a container that allows for drainage is a must. A simple clay pot will do but any pot that one chooses should have a drainage hole. Ceramic pots that match or complement the kitchen are available to spruce up a counter.

The light in a room will dictate the placement of herbs, to provide at least six hours of sunlight per day. If that much sun isn't available or there is not much south-facing window exposure, a grow light can be used. If a grow light is used, place the herbs under two 40-watt, cool white fluorescent bulbs for 14-16 hours. Place the herbs 6-12 inches from the light. If herbs are placed on windowsills, rotate the pots so that each side gets enough light. Otherwise, the plants may not grow uniformly.

Herbs grown indoors in small pots do not require much water. Water thoroughly when the soil becomes dry. Herbs should be fertilized about every two weeks with a low dose of water-soluble fertilizer.

Many herbs like a humid environment and certainly herbs grown outdoors in most parts of Florida are in a humid environment. If the indoor environment has low humidity, herbs can be placed close together or in a container with pebbles on the bottom with a small amount of water.

Growing herbs indoors can provide any gardener the satisfaction of producing many fresh, versatile herbs at home. Looking for more information on growing your herbs indoors? Please refer to UF/IFAS online or publications. Have fun with your herbal houseplants!

References:

Herbs in the Florida Garden: https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/edibles/vegetables/herbs.html

Indoor Gardens: https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/houseplants/indoor-gardens.html

Growing Herbs Indoors: https://extension.psu.edu/growing-herbs-indoors

Thrips Show Promise in Controlling the Invasive Brazilian Peppertree in Florida

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Brazilian peppertree thrips larvae and adults feed on a Brazilian peppertree. (Photo by Dale Halbritter, D4993-1)

Brazilian peppertree thrips (*Pseudophilothrips ichini*) showed promise as biological control agents for invasive Brazilian peppertree populations in Florida according to a recent study published in the *Florida Entomologist*.

Thrips are common insect pests on horticultural plants, but specialized Brazilian peppertree thrips from South America feed exclusively on the Brazilian peppertree's leaves and stem tips. Their feeding results in reducing the peppertree's growth rate, plant height, number of leaves, and green stems as well as fruit and flower production.

Scientists from the United States Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) collaborated with University of Florida and Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services researchers to mass produce and release thrips throughout 567 sites in Florida between May 2019 and December 2021.

The study results show that these thrips persisted in 60 percent of the survey sites for at least one generation as indicated by the recovery of adult thrips at least 60 days after their release.

"This is a significant finding, because it indicates the thrips have a self-sustaining population at up to 60 percent," said Gregory Wheeler, research entomologist at the ARS Invasive Plant Research Laboratory in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Native to South America, the Brazilian peppertree is a woody and evergreen shrub known for its bright red berries and green foliage. This invasive species grows in dense thickets in invaded ranges and crowds native vegetation. Its fruit is toxic when consumed by wildlife, and many people have allergic reactions to its pollen and sap.

In the U.S., the Brazilian peppertree has made its way to California, Florida, Hawaii, and Texas. In Florida alone, the Brazilian peppertree tree has colonized most of the state's peninsula and covers more than 700,000 acres of land.

Use of biological control agents can be a solution for land managers seeking to control invasive populations, according to Wheeler. "Biological control agents like thrips can be a cost-effective and environmentally friendly means of pest control that can be a part of an integrated approach that includes a number of different tactics," said Wheeler.

Thrips are the first biological control agent for this invasive species released in Florida. Researchers will continue field releases and assessments to determine thrips' effectiveness.

The Agricultural Research Service is the U.S. Department of Agriculture's chief scientific in-house research agency. Daily, ARS focuses on solutions to agricultural problems affecting America. Each dollar invested in U.S. agricultural research results in $20 of economic impact.

Butterflies in the Library

Dianne Battle,
Master Gardener Volunteer,
UF/IFAS Extension SJC

The Switzerland Garden Club has partnered with St. Johns County Master Gardener Volunteers to enhance the Freedom Native Plant Butterfly Garden at Alpine Groves Park. Since we started the project last spring, we have over fifty species of Florida native plants that provide support to pollinators. We are seeing more butterflies, bees, moths and other pollinators than ever before.

October is the month that many pollinators migrate to warmer areas or begin hibernating. We decided on a project that would call attention to these pollinators and explain how our garden supports them. We teamed up with the Bartram Trail Library to showcase the life cycle of the iconic monarch butterfly. Library staff, especially Donna Braasch, helped us set up a display area with live monarchs in a rearing cage. The culmination of the three-week display was a family-friendly presentation on the monarch, its life stages, its risk of extinction, and how we all can help sustain these special creatures.

Patrons from toddlers to senior citizens were fascinated at the changes in the caterpillars over the next three weeks. The caterpillars did their part by eating non-stop and growing fat and healthy. One by one each caterpillar enclosed itself in a beautiful jade colored chrysalis. In ten days the first emerged as a perfect butterfly. The next two butterflies emerged a few days apart. All three were females. We named them, “Thelma”, “Louise”, and “Thumbelina.” They were released at our County park native plant garden. The second one emerged on the day of our, "Butterflies of October," presentation. That allowed the children who won the rearing cage at the presentation to join us at the garden and release the middle "sister" of the three.

It was amazing to watch our three butterflies, Thelma, Louise, and Thumbelina soar into the sky on their journey to their overwintering grounds. Many thanks to the Bartram Trail Library for working on this project with us. To learn more about butterflies and the Garden Club of Switzerland, visit our website, www.switzerlandgc.org.. To learn more about the Master Gardener Volunteer program, visit our website at https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/lawn-and-garden/florida-master-gardener-program/.

Beauty is in the Eye of the Butterfly

Dianne Battle,
Master Gardener Volunteer,
UF/IFAS Extension SJC

Our native plant butterfly garden at Alpine Groves always features giant swallowtails, *Papilio cresphontes*, because citrus trees, its host plant, are plentiful nearby. In recent years, however, many local citrus trees have been affected by citrus greening. I was concerned the declining citrus populations would diminish the giant swallowtails' numbers.

I was able to find alternate host plants at the University of Florida Natural History Museum's plant sale. Within a few weeks of installing a Hercules Club, *Zanthoxylum clava-herculis L.*, I noticed a giant swallowtail flitting near it, then laying an egg. Several weeks later one of our garden volunteers spotted something quite ugly on the Hercules Club. It looked like a large bird dropping, but was actually a late-stage caterpillar instar of the giant swallowtail. Its bird-dropping mimicry was part of its defensive arsenal, which also includes a gland that secretes noxious chemicals. I hope to see its pupa next, hanging like a dead leaf nearby.

Giant Swallowtail Larva on Hercules Club, Photo credit: Paulina Lemos

As ugly as it is in its immature state, the giant swallowtail's adult form is stunning. It's one of the largest of the swallowtails, sporting a creamy yellow underside. The Hercules Club, should you plant it, needs to be located carefully; the trunk has many needle sized thorns. I'm excited to see whether the hoptree, *Ptelea trifoliata L.*, we just planted as a second host for this same species will be accepted so quickly. The thorns on the hoptree are smaller and present less risk to visitors. Its pleasing aroma may make it a candidate for your home landscape.

Adult giant swallowtails need nectar. Your flowering plants needn't be native, as long as they are good nectar sources and are not treated with pesticides. These butterflies will readily feed from many flowering plants, including azalea, bougainvillea, and goldenrod. They will also sip on fresh dung – but let's not go there. If you can accept the leggy look and fast-spreading style of native plants such as Spanish needle (*Bidens alba*) or Ironweed (*Vernonia*) your swallowtails will never go hungry. There's nothing as beautiful to a butterfly as copious nectar, no matter how it's packaged.

Look for growers that specialize in providing wildlife appropriate or native plants. One of your best plant sources are the plant sales at our local UF/IFAS Extension centers in St. Johns, Duval, and Clay Counties. An even wider selection of plants can be obtained at the University of Florida Natural History Museum's plant sale. Do your research, then do your shopping, and don't be distracted by a pretty appearance.

Digging, Nibbling, Rooting, Oh No!!

Patty Plourde
Master Gardener Volunteers
UF/IFAS Extension SJC

After spending hours and hours of arduous work, suddenly your beautiful garden looks like a combat zone. There may be chewed leaves, no leaves, small holes, large holes, and plants that seem to have been ripped out of the ground! Take a deep breath and let your anger subside.

Animals come into your yard for the simple purpose of finding food, water, and shelter. These animals can dig up gardens, or even assume a habitat of their dreams inside your house. By identifying what is drawing this wildlife to your yard, it is easier to produce a plan that solves the problem. Learning to identify which animal is responsible for the damage is the first step. Two common late night yard visitors are the armadillo and rabbit.

Armadillos

Nine-banded armadillos are an invasive species in Florida. While looking for food, they dig dozens of shallow holes in lawns and gardens. They are also the only animal, other than humans, that are capable of hosting leprosy (Ober, 2017). They live in burrows which are frequently found at the base of trees. The most effective means of reducing armadillo damage is removing the food they like to eat, which are invertebrates; however, insecticides have their own negative effects on the environment. Currently live traps placed in proximity of burrows are the only effective means of safely removing armadillos from yards.

Rabbits

While rabbits present themselves as cute furry little creatures, their enjoyment of vegetables as well as flowers, such as pansies, petunias, and various young flowering plants, make them a garden nuisance. Tender young plants can vanish overnight with just a small stem left as a reminder of their location. Since rabbits like to have protection from their predators, family pets can play a beneficial role in reducing damaged plants. In addition, chicken wire or netting can be place around young plants to keep rabbits from nibbling away. It is also noteworthy that rabbits do not like plants such as mint, oregano, and parsley, so intermingling these among your other plants can help reduce rabbits' late-night munchies.

In addition, here are a few other precautionary measures to help deter unwelcome wildlife:

- Keep garbage in a garbage can with a lid.
- Do not leave pet food outdoors.
- Consider fencing garden areas if repeated digging occurs.
- Install screens over window, doors, and chimney flues to prevent entry.
- Caulk any openings that animals may crawl through.
- Limit grubs and earthworms that attract armadillos by reducing fertilization and watering
- Remove ripe and fallen fruit

References: Living in Harmony: https://wec.ifas.ufl.edu/extension/gc/harmony/wildlife/conflict.htm

https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/UW368