

Winter 2022, Issue 21

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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/pdf/files/EP/EP45100.pdf> or The Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/vh021>

Florida Arbor Day Tree Giveaway

Celebrate Florida Arbor Day with UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County Master Gardener Volunteers as they distribute trees at Bartram Library, Hastings Library, Anastasia Island Library, Publix at Murabella, and Publix at Nocatee).

Friday, January 21, 2022

9:00 am to Noon (Bartram Library, Hastings Library, Publix at Murabella, and Publix at Nocatee.

10 am to noon at Anastasia Library

Free Bareroot Native Trees/Shrubs:

Buttonbush, Yaupon Holly, Southern Red Cedar, Arrowood Viburum, Baldcypress



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Nocturnal Superheros of the Garden

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©Steve Buchmann

Mexican Long-Tongued Bat (*Choeronycteris mexicana*). Photo by Steve Buchmann

Often underrecognized for their contributions to our environment, bats play a pivotal role in keeping insect populations under control while also providing fertilization and pollination services.

Pest Control

Emerging from their roosts at dusk, a single insectivorous bat can consume thousands of insects per night, reducing pest populations around gardens, agricultural lands, wetlands, forests, and your neighborhood retention pond. These nocturnal creatures control insects that spread mosquito-borne diseases such as zika and prevent unquantifiable amounts of damage to our food crops. Fortunately for us, more bat species and a greater population abundance are located in northern Florida than the southern part of the state.

Pollination

Bats are responsible for pollinating more than 300 species of fruit-producing plants, along with many other night-blooming perennials. While most flower-visiting bats are found in Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands, some bat-pollinated plants that can be grown in our area of

northeast Florida include bananas, peaches, figs, yucca, guava, evening primrose, goldenrod, datura, and night-blooming jessamine.

Characteristics of bat-attracting plants include:

- Open at night
- Pale or white nocturnal flowers
- Strong fermented, musty, or fruit-like fragrance
- Large bell-shaped blooms of 1-4 inches (bell-shaped flowers enable bats to use echolocation to find their nectar source!)

Creating a native wildlife habitat garden will also serve to attract insects for the bats to feast upon.

Fertilization

Bats contribute to healthy ecosystems with their poop! While flying around they drop nutrient-rich guano which is especially rich in nitrogen and also serves as a soil conditioner. If you are lucky enough to have an occupied bat house beneath which guano collects, it can be used in the garden fresh or dried.



Lesser long-nosed bat. Photo by Merlin D. Tuttle, Bat Conservation International.

Springing into Weed Season

Gail Wheeler,
Master Gardener Volunteer
UF/IFAS Extension SJC

North Florida lawns will soon be perking up with the return of longer daylight hours and warmer temperatures, bringing us into prime weed season. Sparser areas in the lawn are opportunistic for weeds to grab hold, particularly after a tough winter with lawn dieback.

Warming up to the spring weather, are two common weeds that can quickly over-take home lawns, in particular Saint Augustine turf. One is Pennywort (or commonly called Dollarweed) and the other are various Spurges. Dollarweed is a perennial that reproduces by tubers, rhizomes and seeds. It can flower with elongated spikes at the top of a longer stalk. If you are hand weeding, loosen the soil and follow the long white string like tuber to remove the entire weed. Various spurges love bare spots in the lawn, forming rounded masses of hairy, branched stems. Some of the more common Florida lawn spurges are Garden Spurge, Hyssop Spurge and Roundleaf Spurge.

While not desired in the lawn, some weeds give us a pop of color. Wondering what those flowering weeds are? Hearty Asiatic Hawksbeard often survives the winter putting out a flowering stalk with yellow to orange-yellow flowers. Evening primrose is drought resistant and has large white to pink four petaled flowers. Wild carrot (or Queen Anne's lace) is a branched biennial with small, white dense flowers in flat clusters.



Asiatic false hawksbeard
Youngia japonica
Photo by Ann Murray

Asiatic Hawksbeard, *Youngia japonica*,
<https://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/plant-directory/youngia-japonica/>



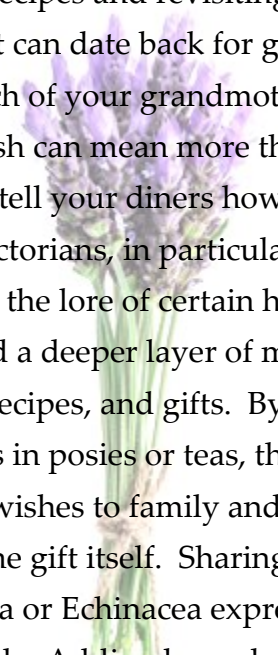
Queen Anne's Lace, *Daucus carota*, <https://assessment.ifas.ufl.edu/assessments/daucus-carota/>

As we spring into the warmer months check your lawn frequently for signs of weed spread and get ahead of the problem. Hand weeding if possible is the most eco -friendly option. Pre-emergent weed control is effective, but it should be noted that pre-emergent weed killer does not kill existing weeds, only the seeds of new weeds, preventing them from sprouting; and herbicides are less environmentally friendly than hand pulling

Source: *Weeds of Southern Turfgrass/UF/IFAS*

Holiday Messages with Herbs

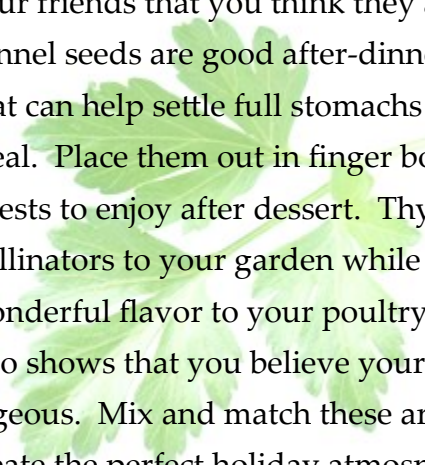
Pat Ludwig, Jane Palmer, Linda Mundy, and Melissa Clark
Master Gardener Volunteers
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The holiday season is a time for dusting the flour off of family recipes and revisiting decorating traditions that can date back for generations. Putting a pinch of your grandmother's favorite herb into a dish can mean more than just great flavor. It can tell your diners how you feel about them. The Victorians, in particular, placed a high value on the lore of certain herbs and flowers to add a deeper layer of meaning to their decorations, recipes, and gifts. By combining specific plants in posies or teas, they would convey their wishes to family and friends beyond just the gift itself. Sharing a tea mixed with calendula or Echinacea expressed a hope for good health. Adding lavender to a bouquet showed devotion to the recipient. Simmering some parsley or fennel into a sauce shared joy and remembrance with everyone who ate it. This season, you can express your feelings for family and friends by using herbs as part of your holiday traditions.

The cooler months in Florida mean that you don't have to head to the grocery store to find fresh herbs to share. Harvesting herbs from your home garden is a cost-effective way to celebrate the joy of the season. Rosemary, parsley, cilantro, chives, fennel, and thyme thrive outside in the winter months in St. Johns County and have special meaning in herbal lore. Rosemary is a hearty evergreen that grows well throughout the winter in Zone 9a. It is a traditional decorative replacement for evergreen

trees, especially if you have limited space, and will scent your home with its uplifting aroma that encourages everyone to remember your time together. Place small pots of it around your home with holiday ribbons or ornaments, twist it into a wreath or hanging posey, or add a sprig to your napkin rings for place settings. No matter how you dress it up, your guests will know that you want them to remember that you care for them.



Parsley and cilantro won't flower until the spring, so you can enjoy harvesting their leaves all winter long to add to sauces and salsas. Adding a sprig of either herb as a garnish adds a pop of color to your plate while also expressing your gratitude for your loved ones. Chives are prolific growers and will replenish their leaves regularly after cutting. Add them to butters or baked goods for a tasty treat and to let your family know that they're needed. The shoots, leaves, and seeds of the fennel plant make savory additions to breads, fish, and salads and tell your friends that you think they are lovely. Fennel seeds are good after-dinner digestives that can help settle full stomachs after a big meal. Place them out in finger bowls for your guests to enjoy after dessert. Thyme will attract pollinators to your garden while providing a wonderful flavor to your poultry and sauces. It also shows that you believe your guests are courageous. Mix and match these aromatic herbs to create the perfect holiday atmosphere.

Holiday Messages with Herbs

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

Whether using fresh or dried herbs, the message remains the same. So, while you're brewing a pot of chamomile tea, dropping a bay leaf into a stew, or hanging a rosemary wreath, you're sharing more than just cozy moments around the table. You're letting your family and friends know your wishes for them during the holidays and into the New Year.

Here are the meanings of some of the herbs in your garden and pantry:

Angelica: inspiration

Basil: love

Lovage: strength

Bay laurel: success

Calendula: health

Oregano: joy

Mint: joy

Chamomile: comfort

Parsley: gratitude

Hops: mirth

Sage: wisdom

Echinacea: capability, health

Hyssop: cleansing

Thyme: courage

Violet: loyalty

Vervain: good fortune

Lavender: devotion

Yarrow: healing

Chives: usefulness.

Lemon balm: sympathy

Fennel: worthy of
praise

Rosemary: remembrance.



Sources:

Gips, Kathleen. *Flora's Dictionary: The Victorian Language of Herbs and Flowers*. Village Herb Shop,



From Food Chain to Food Circle

**Dianne Battle,
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One sure sign of a recent holiday is overflowing trash containers. A large percentage of refuse is uneaten food. The USDA estimated that in 2019 the annual average amount of food wasted was \$1,500 per family. During the holidays it increases 25%. It's unfortunate that a holiday should generate so much trash, and even sadder is what happens to it in a landfill.

The worst place for food (or other items) to end up in is a landfill. The garbage in landfills only yields more waste; slower decomposition in an anaerobic environment produces polluting byproducts. The biggest byproduct of landfills is biogas: methane and carbon dioxide, two potent and flammable greenhouse gasses. Solid waste facilities must minimize gas emissions. They can sell it to companies that can produce heat or electricity. However, gas energy is not totally clean nor renewable. Products intended to nourish us need not end up as problematic chemicals.

Landfills are straight line dead ends. Think of food use as a circle – employ practices that reduce food waste and use it to benefit your community and the environment. Here are some recommendations from EPA along with some other ideas:

SELECTION: Shop for produce that is in season. Minimize buying meal kits or in-store prepared foods; remember that those products have already created food waste.

PREPARATION AND STORAGE: Fruit or vegetable peels can be chopped and incorporated into casseroles. UF/IFAS have resources to help you safely freeze or can other food items.

SHARE THE WEALTH: Over 40 million Americans are food-insecure. There are organizations that collect non-perishable foods; others accept fresh produce or even prepared meals. Contact Feeding Northeast Florida or the St. Johns County United Way for charities that accept donations. Many local churches run collection stations for non-perishable food. Livestock and wildlife can benefit from your discarded food. Be sure you understand what and how to feed wild animals so they don't become dependent or draw in undesirable animals. If you have a livestock farm nearby, be sure you know what the farmer accepts.

RENEWING THE LAND: Composting is an essential part of the food circle. Even if your homeowner's association prohibits compost bins, community gardens may appreciate your discarded produce. Don't think a composter needs a big ugly container; your HOA may approve something smaller. See the UF/IFAS publication, "Recycling Organic Materials," for homeowner-friendly methods to return those nutrients to the earth, and create a food circle.

Do you Believe in Fairies?

**Patty Plourde and
Melissa Clark
Master Gardener Volunteers
UF/IFAS Extension SJC**

If you are very quiet and look very carefully as you walk along a less traveled trail at the St. Johns County Extension demonstration garden, you may catch a fleeting sight of a fairy.

Construction on the fairy garden began in August 2021. If you look about you will begin to see fairy houses made from old stumps, broken clay pots, and even an old boot.

Fairy gardens are miniature landscapes that bring the charm of nature into our lives. They provide something for everyone to enjoy. It may be a quiet spot to sit and think, an opportunity to use our senses to discover small intricate scenes, as well as a chance to enjoy the beauty of small plants that serve as trees for small creatures in the woods.

It is important to remember that fairy gardens are not only for the young but also for the young at heart. The purpose of making this fairy garden is to generate a place of relaxation, meditation, and an inviting space for children and adults to think creatively. In today's busy world that leans on electronics for entertainment, fairy gardens can take us away from the fast-paced life of multi-tasking.

Our first step was the selection of a location that was quiet, protected from inclement weather, and

provided shade trees. It is important to protect all plant life in the garden during the construction process which means that trees in the garden are not punctured with screws, nails, or staples. In addition, painting on trees is avoided due to toxic exposure to the bark of tree trunks.

To create the feeling of a fairy village, we focused on scaling all the installations to a specific size. The doors are all no larger than six inches, and the dwellings are scaled accordingly. Each fairy building uses unique materials to demonstrate the variety of styles that can fit into a fairy garden. Different containers have been creatively used for the fairy houses, including wooden stumps, trees, birdhouses, and clay pots; however, plastic and ceramic objects are discouraged. We want to use natural materials that won't harm the environment when they eventually decompose.

It is our goal for adults and children to have an opportunity to explore their natural environment with all their senses. This process gives people a chance to form an important connection with nature and become observers of the world around them.

Please look for our next news article which will address proper plant placement as well as the mental health advantages of fairy gardens.





It Isn't Always About the Flowers

Shirley Barber,
Master Gardener Volunteer,
UF/IFAS Extension SJC



Mustard 'Southern Giant'

There are so many ways to add color to your garden. Now that the weather has cooled you may have planted cool season flowers, such as, snapdragon, alyssum, dianthus, petunia, larkspur and calendula. However, vegetable plants with colorful foliage are stunning bedding plants.

Mustard can be incredibly beautiful in the garden and a good companion to cool season flowers. All-America Selections® (AAS) announced the Japanese mustard Mizuna 'Red Kingdom' an AAS winner in 2016. 'Red Kingdom' with its vibrant reddish-purple foliage and mild flavor can be used in stir-fry or salads. Its compact size allows it to be grown in containers or at the front of the garden border.

'Southern Giant Curled' is still a popular mustard even though it was named AAS winner in 1935. This dependable vigorous variety yields plenty of bright green leaves. The attractive curly leaves look best towards the back of the border.

Mustard 'Red Giant' is absolutely gorgeous and sparked plenty of interest in our gardens. Big bold maroon leaves with deep green midribs are as delicious as they are ornamental. Leaves are slightly textured and present a delicious garlic mustard flavor. A recently introduced Japanese style mustard 'Miz America' is showing promise as an ornamental in the garden with its burgundy deeply lobed and serrated leaves.

Mustard enjoys cool weather and can tolerate light frost. Warm weather will diminish quality and flavor. Harvest mustard when leaves are full grown or at 3-6 inches for baby leaf or garnish. Easily grown from seeds sown outdoors or indoors and transplanted outside. The unique spicy flavor adds zest to a variety of dishes.

Colorful foliage works well in the garden and provides excitement and drama to floral displays. Visit the AAS gardens in the Botanical Gardens at St. Johns County Extension Center where you will discover how vegetable plants can be beautiful and useful.



Mizuna 'Miz America'