JULY, AUGUST, SEPTEMBER 2025

CENTER PIVOT

UF/IFAS EXTENSION SUWANNEE COUNTY
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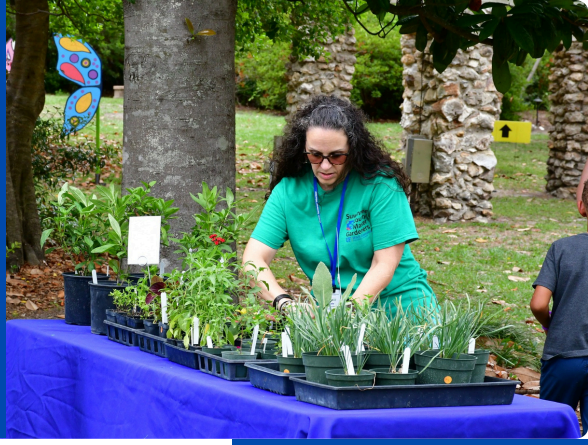

Blooms, Breezes, & Big Smiles: Wildflower Festival & Plant Sale

What began as a blustery, rain-soaked morning quickly blossomed into a vibrant celebration of nature, learning, and community at the Second Annual Wildflower Festival & Plant Sale, held May 10, 2025, at Heritage Park & Gardens. With a fresh addition of the "Plant Sale"—this year's festival drew in garden lovers, families, and curious minds alike. Once the skies cleared, the park came alive with color, conversation, and smiling faces.

All-Hands-on-Deck

As a co-sponsor, the UF/IFAS Extension Office hosted nearly a dozen interactive and educational booths. The Master Gardener Volunteers joined in on the plant sale and had an info booth. Our agents, staff assistants, and volunteers were excited for this event, and it showed! 4-H Agent Katie Jones along with Taylor Boyd, Staff Assistant, handed out over one-hundred bike helmets and water bottles, graciously donated by the Florida Freewheelers cycling group. Raymond Balaguer, Commercial Horticulture, Small Farms, & Natural Resources Agent, helped attendees “Build a Bug” from recycled items and even made a few of his own! Kim Griffin, Family & Consumer Sciences Agent, handed out botanical infused water and teas and shared with attendees the importance of hydration. Erin Dasher, Livestock & Forages Agent, educated attendees about bees, handed out a variety of honey sticks, and facilitated “Bee Bingo”. Carolyn Saft, Extension Director and Environmental Horticulture Agent, was instrumental in arranging the presenters for the day and assisted with tie-dying the Wildflower Festival t-shirts that were available for purchase. Sandra Wainwright, Staff Assistant, ensured the presentations ran smoothly and filled in where needed. Michelle Drummond, Staff Assistant, had her hands full with the MGV plant sale. Chelsea Wenz, Staff Assistant, helped with vendor setup and other related tasks. Katherine Allen, Family & Consumer Sciences Agent, who coordinated the event with Anda Chance, President of Live Oak Artists’ Guild, covered the grounds making sure that everything ran smoothly throughout the day and made time to lead one of the bee jewelry making activities.

The Extension Office, the library, and other volunteers facilitated fun activities like an obstacle course, bee jewelry, leaf art, owl pellet dissection, and seed bombs. In addition, the Florida State Parks Department held two interactive puppet shows for our younger festival goers. There were excellent educational presentations held in the Don Allen Cultural Center. The day was full of music—thirteen bands entertained on two different stages. And the middle of the park was filled with a wonderful mix of craft vendors, food vendors, non-profit organizations, and plant vendors.

Looking Forward to Next Year

The 2025 Wildflower Festival & Plant Sale was not only a blast, but it also gave the community an opportunity to learn. As an education-based institution, the Extension Office loves connecting with the community through events like this and we are looking forward to the next Wildflower Festival & Plant Sale on May 2, 2026!

BEAUTY FLUTTERING BY

CAROLYN SAFT, ENVIROMENTAL HORTICULTURE AGENT
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The monarch butterfly (Danaus plexippus) is one of North America's most recognizable and amazing butterflies. Monarchs are known for their striking orange and black wings and complex life cycle. Female monarchs lay tiny eggs on milkweed plants; the eggs hatch into caterpillars, caterpillars go through a stage in chrysalides, and then finally appear as butterflies. Each step of their lifecycle varies in length depending on the time of the year.

The monarch's journey begins in the spring, heading north from central Mexico, through the United States and into Canada. It takes three to four generations of butterflies to complete the migration, and each generation lives for only a few weeks; they mate, lay eggs, and the next generation continues north until they reach their summer breeding grounds. Interestingly, in the fall, the last generation of monarch butterflies live up to eight times longer than summer monarchs--they delay reproduction and instead begin the journey back to their overwintering range in central Mexico. What is extraordinary is that each new generation of monarchs instinctively know the route north and then back south to the overwintering sites—they have a sort of built-in compass guiding them back to the very forests their great-grandparents left.

There are, however, some exceptions to this migratory pattern--Florida is home to both migratory and non-migratory, or residential, monarch populations. This unusual behavior is due to Florida's warm climate and the over-planting of tropical milkweed. Although it may be exciting to have residential monarchs, this break from natural behavior comes at a cost to the species. Continuous breeding in one place and the lack of a natural migration cycle allows a harmful protozoan, *Ophryocystis elektroscirrha* (OE), to spread. OE affects monarch health, leading to wing deformities, smaller body size, and diminished flight ability, which in turn leads to increased OE in local populations.

You can help by planting native milkweed species: Asclepias tuberosa (butterfly milkweed), Asclepias incarnata (swamp milkweed), and Asclepias perennis (white swamp milkweed). These plants naturally die back each year, encouraging monarchs to continue their migratory behavior which helps to limit parasite transmission.

If you already have tropical milkweed (Asclepias curassavica) in your garden, consider cutting it back each fall to mimic seasonal dieback.

Enjoy the beauty of nature and help protect it by planting the right plants in the right places. We can help keep this remarkable species healthy for future generations by respecting the natural rhythms and planting only native Florida milkweeds.

Butterfly Milkweed,
Asclepias tuberosa

Swamp Milkweed,
Asclepias incarnata

White Swamp Milkweed,
Asclepias perennis

Non-native Tropical Milkweed,
Asclepias curassavica

4-H FAQS

KATIE JONES, 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AGENT
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This time of year, I start getting lots of phone calls and emails from families interested in our 4-H program. Here's just a few of the most common questions and their answers!

Who Can Participate in 4-H?

4-H is open to youth ages 5 to 18. Youth ages 5 to 7 are part of our Cloverbuds program, which focuses on exposure and participation rather than competition. During this time, they are not allowed to work with large animals. Starting at age 8, youth can participate in all aspects of the 4-H program. They are eligible for competitive teams, contests, and larger livestock projects. They also become eligible to participate in higher-risk project areas like shooting sports and equine activities.

Do I have to show an animal to be in 4-H?

While many youth get involved in 4-H because they want to show an animal, there are lots of 4-H projects that are not animal-based. We have citizenship, creative and expressive arts, robotics, STEAM, and plant science opportunities. The cool thing about 4-H is that if a youth has an interest, there's always an opportunity to help them explore that interest! Our goal with 4-H programming is to provide positive youth-adult mentorship experiences that focus on the youth's interests!

How much does 4-H Cost?

Cloverbuds (ages 5 to 7) do not pay an enrollment fee. 4-H members ages 8 to 18 pay an annual $20 enrollment fee, which provides access to participation in local activities and clubs. Some activities, like camps, have additional fees or costs associated with them. Generous scholarships are available at the local and state level for youth interested in participating who might have financial restrictions.

How do I know what would be the best 4-H Club for me?

Enrollment in the Suwannee County 4-H program provides youth access to all the clubs in the county, and they are not limited to only one club. Your 4-H participation can be as busy as your family desires! One of the best ways to decide which club(s) might be best for your family is to attend our 4-H Open House and check out all the clubs we have to offer. This year's Open House will be August 18, 2025, from 4:00-7:00pm at the Suwannee County Fairgrounds, Exhibition 2 Building.

How can I volunteer with 4-H?

4-H Volunteers are the heart of our program. They make it possible to reach additional youth that the agent alone could never reach. Our volunteers go through a level 2 background screening process to ensure that they are qualified to work with youth. They also receive annual training to help ensure that they are learning and growing along with our youth.

For more information on how to enroll in 4-H or as a youth member or volunteer, please contact Katie Jones, the 4-H Youth Development Extension Agent for Suwannee County.

NO BUG BITES!

KATHERINE ALLEN, FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES AGENT
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A friend once gave me a card that read, “Instead of getting upset that a bee landed on you, consider the perspective that they mistook you for a flower!”

I chuckled, but when it comes to preventing insect interactions, there really are some things you can do. Believe it or not, wearing clothes that are devoid of bright colors or flowery prints-which seems wrong in the summertime, but prevents insects from being attracted to you. Consider the fragrances you are wearing that could also be attracting them. Your scented/fragranced soaps, perfumes, or hair sprays are inviting to insects.

No spray?

If you are trying to reduce the amount of bug spray, dress in light weight clothing that covers skin, such as long pants and long sleeves. Now you know why folks in the old movies dressed in linen even in hot climates. Avoid areas where insects nest or congregate, such as garbage cans, stagnant pools of water, uncovered foods and sweets, and gardens.

For kids:

- Insect repellents should not be used on kids under 6 months old. Use mosquito netting made of cotton (first choice) or nylon over infant carriers.
- When applying bug repellent, do not allow children to handle repellents; apply the product to your own hands first, and then place it on a child’s skin.
- Avoid applying DEET on children’s hands or anywhere near their mouth to avoid possible ingestion.
- When returning inside, bathe children and wash clothes with soap and water.

Bug Spray Tips

- Consider repellant lotions, sticks or “direct sprays” rather than aerosols which can be inhaled.
- Only apply products containing DEET (30% concentration or lower) once per day.
- Always follow the directions on the label!

Alternatives?

Picaridin (KBR 3023), which is available in concentrations of 5% to 10%. Picaridin generally has a duration of action similar to DEET. Some of the Avon Skin-So-Soft products contain picaridin such as, Avon Skin-Soft Bug Guard Plus Picaridin. Picaridin has not raised as many concerns about neurotoxicity (harm to the brain) as DEET, but it also has not had as much safety testing.

What about natural products?

Oil of lemon eucalyptus products can also repel insects and have been tested by the EPA for effectiveness; however, these products have not been adequately tested on children under 3 years old and therefore should not be used on children under the age of three, pregnant women and nursing mothers. It is also less effective than DEET and picaridin in defending against Aedes mosquitoes that transmit the Zika virus.
Products that use botanical extracts such as: lemon grass, citronella, peppermint, geraniol, and rosemary have not been tested for safety or effectiveness by the EPA and may contain allergens in highly concentrated forms and their effectiveness varies greatly. So without testing to confirm the effectiveness of botanical products, there is only anecdotal evidence at their success of preventing bugs from biting.

PREVENTING FALLS: A PRIORITY FOR ALL AGES

KIM GRIFFIN, FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES AGENT
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Falls are a leading cause of injury for older adults but can affect individuals of all ages. Fall prevention is important not only for seniors but also for younger adults who may engage in high-risk activities such as sports, recreational activities, outdoor work, wearing unsafe footwear or walking while using a mobile device. In rural areas like Suwannee County, where healthcare services and resources are limited, preventing falls becomes even more important.

For older adults, a fall can lead to serious consequences such as broken bones, head injuries, or loss of independence. Most falls are preventable through actions like regular physical activity, managing medications, improving home safety, and having regular vision and hearing checks. For younger adults, especially those working in physically demanding jobs or engaging in sports and outdoor activities, fall prevention helps avoid injury that could lead to time off work or long-term disability.

In rural communities, fall-related injuries can have greater consequences due to fewer nearby hospitals, longer emergency response times, and limited rehabilitation services. Preventing falls isn't just a concern for older adults, it's a community concern that crosses generations. Investing in fall prevention means investing in health, independence, and a better quality of life.

Programs offered by UF/IFAS Suwannee County Extension play a crucial role in promoting fall prevention by providing education, practical skills, and resources to help individuals stay safe. These programs offer classes and share useful tips to reduce fall hazards at home and in the community. Below are details about our upcoming fall prevention program designed to support individuals and families in preventing falls and staying healthy.

A Matter of Balance is an evidence-based fall prevention program designed to help adults reduce their fear of falling, increase physical activity, and build confidence in managing fall risks. The program consists of eight two-hour sessions held twice a week in a small-group setting. The classes are led by trained coaches and the sessions include group discussion, problem-solving strategies, gentle physical exercises to improve strength and balance, and practical tips for making homes safer.

Live Oak
Program: A Matter of Balance – Fall Prevention
Where: Suwannee County Extension – 1302 11th Street SW, Live Oak, FL 32064
When: Mondays and Wednesdays from 10:00am – 12:00pm OR 2:00pm – 4:00pm
Dates: August 4, 6, 11, 13, 18, 20, 25, 27

Branford
Program: A Matter of Balance – Fall Prevention
Where: Branford library – 703 Suwannee Ave, Branford, FL 32008
When: Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1:00pm – 3:00pm
Dates: September 2, 4, 9, 11, 18, 23, 25, 30

HONEY BEE MANAGEMENT: SUPPORTING POLLINATORS FOR A HEALTHY ECOSYSTEM

ERIN JONES DASHER, LIVESTOCK & NATURAL RESOURCES AGENT
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Honeybees are critical pollinators for both agricultural crops and native plants, contributing significantly to food production and biodiversity. Effective honeybee management not only supports pollination services but also enhances colony health and productivity. Whether you're a backyard beekeeper or a commercial apiarist, successful bee management requires attention to hive maintenance, pest control, seasonal care, and environmental stewardship.

Hive Placement and Maintenance
Proper hive placement is the foundation of a healthy colony. Hives should be located in areas with ample floral resources, good sun exposure, and minimal wind. Avoid low-lying damp areas and ensure hives are elevated and well-ventilated to prevent moisture buildup. Regular hive inspections, ideally every 7–10 days during peak seasons, allow beekeepers to monitor for queen productivity, brood pattern consistency, and food stores.

Nutrition and Forage
Adequate nutrition is essential to colony strength. Bees require access to diverse pollen and nectar sources to meet their dietary needs. Planting or preserving native flowering plants and avoiding monoculture landscapes can help maintain a robust forage base. During periods of shortage, supplemental feeding with sugar syrup or protein patties may be necessary, especially in early spring or late fall.

Pest and Disease Management
Varroa mites are one of the most significant threats to honeybee colonies, weakening bees and spreading viruses. Integrated pest management (IPM) strategies, including monitoring mite levels, using screened bottom boards, and applying approved miticides, are vital for controlling infestations. Beekeepers should also remain vigilant for signs of Nosema, American foulbrood, and other pathogens, treating promptly and following best practices to reduce spread.

Seasonal Management
Each season brings unique management tasks. In spring, build colony strength and prevent swarming. Summer requires monitoring population dynamics and honey harvesting. Fall preparation involves ensuring adequate stores for winter and treating for pests. Winter tasks focus on insulation, ventilation, and minimal disturbance to overwintering bees.

Environmental Stewardship
Avoiding pesticide exposure is crucial. Collaborating with nearby landowners, timing chemical applications to avoid bloom periods, and advocating for pollinator-friendly practices can reduce risk. Responsible beekeeping also includes educating others and supporting local pollinator initiatives.
Honeybee management is both an art and a science. With careful attention and ongoing learning, beekeepers can contribute to pollinator conservation and the sustainability of our food systems.

INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT FOR NORTH FLORIDA FARMS

RAYMOND BALAGUER, COMMERCIAL HORTICULTURE, SMALL FARMS, & NATURAL RESOURCES AGENT
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Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is an approach to pest control that combines biological, cultural, physical, and chemical tools to minimize economic, health, and environmental risks. Its aim is to consistently keep problematic pathogens and pest populations from harming an economically important crop. This is done with less environmental and financial burden when more than one strategy is put into motion, such as seed selection, irrigation management, and fencing on a peanut crop, for example. In North Florida, whether on a small family plot or a large-scale commercial farm, the first step in implementing IPM is thorough monitoring and accurate identification of pests. This involves regular scouting, using traps or visual inspections, and accurate diagnosis of pest species and their life cycles. Early and correct identification helps in selecting the least disruptive control methods and avoids unnecessary pesticide use. For example, if we have an insect infestation, perhaps we could treat the spot where the damages were first observed and avoid treating the whole field. This could save money and reduce unnecessary exposure of humans and wildlife to pesticides.

The next step is setting action thresholds, which are defined levels at which pest populations and damage to the crop will result in more money lost than the cost of treating the pest or disease. These thresholds vary by crop and farm size, but the principle remains the same: don't take action until pest levels threaten net economic losses by reducing crop health or yield. North Florida farmers could also benefit from cultural practices such as crop rotation, planting pest-resistant varieties, adjusting planting times, and maintaining proper soil health to deter pests. These techniques, when combined with habitat conservation to encourage beneficial insects, reduce pest pressure naturally and cost-effectively.

Finally, if pest levels exceed thresholds, farmers can select the least toxic control options first, such as introducing biological controls (e.g., lady beetles or parasitic wasps) or using targeted physical methods like row covers or pheromone traps. Chemical controls, when necessary, should be used as a last resort and chosen carefully to minimize harm to pollinators and other non-target organisms.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) offers a multi-pronged approach to managing pathogens by combining prevention, monitoring, and targeted intervention strategies. Pathogens can be grouped depending on their genetic relationship and the season they are most problematic. Of such groups, the most represented ones that are problematic for crop production season after season are fungi, viruses, nematodes, and bacteria. You will notice that control strategies include decisions that are made well before anything is sown, such as site selection and preparation, as well as seed selection, seed treatments, and planting dates.
The use of integrated pest management can help growers protect their crops with reduced input costs and help preserve the health of their land and surrounding ecosystems. IPM isn't just a method, but a mindset that prioritizes informed decisions, long-term solutions, and environmental responsibility.

JOIN US FOR THESE UPCOMING EVENTS

Visit www.suwanneecountyextension.org for details and registration links.

July 2025

No MGV Q&A at Library

July 8-11: Bug Builders Camp
July 9-11: Trash to Treasure Camp
July 14: Junior Fun Workshop
July 17: Corn Field Day NFREC
July 21-24: Canines & Clovers Dogs 101

August 2025

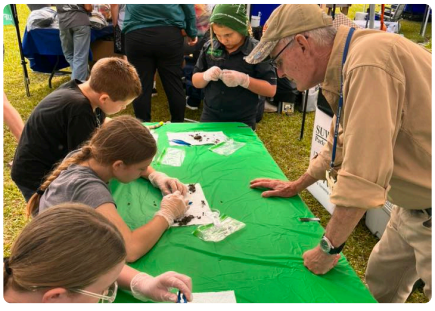
No MGV Q&A at Library

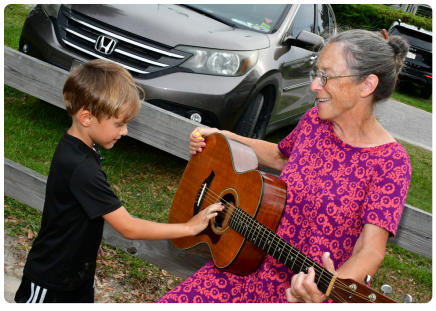
Aug 4: Matter of Balance - Live Oak
Aug 5: High Blood Pressure Class - Branford
Aug 6: Matter of Balance - LO
Aug 7: Quilt Camp Binding Day
Aug 11: Matter of Balance - LO
Aug 12: High Cholesterol Class - B
Aug 13: Matter of Balance - LO
Aug 18: Matter of Balance - LO
Aug 20: Matter of Balance - LO
Aug 21: Virtual Homebuyer's Class
Aug 22: Homesteading Series (SUW)
Aug 25: Matter of Balance - LO
Aug 26: Diabetes Class - B
Aug 27: Matter of Balance - LO
Aug 28: Virtual Homebuyer's Class
Aug 28: CORE Pesticide Class - LO
Aug 29: Homesteading Series (TAY)

September 2025

MGV Q&A at Library Resumes

Sept 1: Labor Day - Office Closed
Sept 2: Matter of Balance - B
Sept 4: Matter of Balance - B
Sept 5: Homesteading Series (TAY)
Sept 4: Private Applicator Pesticide Class - LO
Sept 9: Matter of Balance - B
Sept 11: Matter of Balance - B
Sept 12: Homesteading Series (SUW)
Sept 18: Matter of Balance - B
Sept 23: Matter of Balance - B
Sept 25: Matter of Balance - B
Sept 30: Matter of Balance - B





Federal Student Loans IDR Plans

What is an Income-Driven Repayment (IDR) Plan?

Income-driven repayment plans apply to federal student loans and are based on your income and family size. These plans are designed to make your student loan debt more manageable. Depending on the plan, your loans may be eligible for forgiveness after twenty or twenty-five years of monthly payments.

What do I need to do?

To find out if you are eligible for an IDR plan, visit www.studentaid.gov/idr and fill out an application. You will need a verified Federal Student Aid (FSA) ID, your financial information, your personal information, and, if applicable, your spouse's information. There may be more than one plan that you qualify for that you can choose from. You will need to ensure that your information is up-to-date every year. You would also update your information if your financial situation changed at any point throughout the year.

Are court actions impacting IDR plans?

In February 2025, a federal court impeded the implementation of the Saving on a Valuable Education (SAVE) Plan and parts of other IDR plans making them temporarily unavailable. This may have impacted borrowers who had already signed up for IDR plans. As of March 2025, IDR plans are available and being processed for new applicants. To stay up-to-date with court actions, please visit www.studentaid.gov/annoucements-events/idr-court-actions

OUR MISSION OF EDUCATION

UF/IFAS Extension provides practical education you can trust to help people, businesses and communities solve problems, develop skills and build a better future. When you use UF/IFAS Extension, you can be confident that experts have reviewed and developed educational programs to ensure that you receive the best information for your needs. UF/IFAS Extension employees and volunteers work hard at improving the quality of life for our neighbors and communities. We provide solutions to everyday problems. We offer a variety of educational programs and information:

Agriculture and Natural Resources: Local farmers and ranchers are provided technical assistance and education to enhance their profitability and sustainability.

Horticulture: Programs are designed to meet the needs of residents by utilizing Florida-Friendly Landscaping principles.

Master Gardener Volunteer Program: Master Gardener Volunteers receive training in exchange for service to the community. The Master Gardener Volunteers assist with the Seed Library and hold plant clinics every Wednesday from 1:00-3:00PM both at the Live Oak Library. Volunteers also staff a Seed Library and plant clinic at the Branford Library on Tuesdays from 2:00-5:00pm.

Family and Consumer Sciences: Family and Consumer Sciences programs offer you information about health and nutrition, food safety, food preservation, money management, home concerns, relationships, community development and many other topics.

4-H Youth Development: The UF/IFAS Extension 4-H Youth Development program uses a learn-by-doing approach to help youth gain the knowledge and skills they need to be responsible, productive citizens. This mission is accomplished by creating safe and inclusive learning environments, involving caring adults, and utilizing the expertise and resources of the University of Florida and the nationwide land grant university system.

Carolyn Saft- County Extension Director, Environmental Horticulture Agent and Master Gardener Volunteer Coordinator

Katherine Allen- Family and Consumer Sciences Agent (FCS)

Bonnie Box- Nutrition Educator, Family Nutrition Program (FNP)

Kim Griffin- Family and Consumer Sciences Agent (FCS)

Erin Jones Dasher- Livestock, Forages and 4-H Agent

Katie Jones- 4-H Youth Development Agent

Raymond Balaguer - Commercial Horticulture, Small Farms and Natural Resources Agent

Michelle Drummond- Staff Assistant, Horticulture and Agriculture

Sandra Wainwright- Staff Assistant, Bookkeeper

Chelsea Wenz - Staff Assistant, Family & Consumer Sciences (FCS)

Taylor Boyd - Staff Assistant, 4-H and Agriculture