Echo, Edison Intrigue MG’s

By PAT DIETRICH, MG

On a cool but crystal clear morning, 33 Pinellas County Master Gardeners and recently-retired horticulturalist Allen Cordell journeyed to southwest Florida to explore the botanical bounty of two diverse sites.

Our first stop, in North Fort Myers, was E.C.H.O. Farms—Educational Concerns for Hunger Organization—whose motto is “Sustainable options to World Hunger.” ECHO is a non-profit inter-denominational Christian organization “dedicated to fighting world hunger through innovative options, agricultural training, and networking...ECHO seeks to find agricultural solutions for families growing food under difficult conditions.” After viewing a short video, we were able to tour the Global Demonstration Farm. Highlights included a jackfruit tree, a pummelo (which was crossed with an orange to create grapefruit), macadamia trees, a black sapote (the chocolate custard fruit), a sapodilla (the original source for Chicklets gum) and a miracle fruit bush. We learned about use of zai holes to improve soil, drip irrigation and water purification methods, and growing moringa as a living fence. Finally, we visited their nursery and seed bank before re-boarding the bus.

After a short ride to Edison House, we enjoyed our picnic lunch close to the river near an impressive ficus tree. Debbie Hughes, Staff Horticulturalist, gave a wide-ranging tour. As a historical site, the gardens try to mainly feature plants Thomas Edison would have owned. For example, there are many clumps of bamboo, because Edison originally tried to use bamboo fibers as filaments in early light bulbs. During World War I, Edison’s research centered about finding an alternative to rubber. Hence there are many milky-sap-producing (latex) plants on the grounds, ranging from milkweed to rubber trees. Incidentally, Edison obtained the best results with goldenrod! He also tried to find an alternative source for oil; his best outcome was with a variety of jatropha. Debbie showed us many unique plants, including a candle-tree and Florida apricot or gooseberry. The grounds sport several allees, alleyways of trees that were a popular landscaping feature in Edison’s time. Edison and his wife harvested thousands of orchids from the Everglades, and most trees on the grounds host one or two orchids. There are several champion trees, a small formal rose garden, and a charming moonlight garden, mainly featuring white blooms. We had time to tour the houses and the museum that was once Edison’s laboratory before making our purchases at the nursery and gift shop and meeting near the remarkable banyan tree—at 84 feet tall and 376 inches in circumference, it is the largest in the continental US.

We lucky MG’s munched homemade cookies and dozed deliciously en route to Extension, and wish to thank our organizers and hosts for a splendid experience. Another MG field trip, another thoroughly enjoyable, enriching day, free from market reports and economic calamities! Who could ask for more?
We are especially appreciative of staff, MGs, and others who contribute articles, events, and other items of interest to The Green Leaf each month. Please submit your input by the 20th of each month. This will help us assemble and publish the newsletter in a timely manner. Also, to save mailing costs, please limit your articles to 700-800 words or less. Limited newsletter space does not allow for full photograph viewing. If you would like a copy of any photograph presented in the newsletters, please contact me @ 727-582-2117.

Chuck Scaffidi
MG Editor

The Green Leaf is published by Pinellas County Extension for the County Master Gardeners and depends on submission of articles from Master Gardeners, Extension Staff and other authors.

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The Green Leaf is available online by clicking on newsletter at: http://pinellas.ifas.ufl.edu/master_gardener/index.shtml

A Green Tree for the Holidays
By JAMES STEVENSON, Public Education Specialist, FBG

Once we’ve sobered-up from this year’s Thanksgiving feast, many of us will be ready to begin the annual tradition of bringing a tree into our homes, decorating it, and enjoying a time-honored tradition. Most theories of where this tradition began, point to the belief by ancient Europeans that evergreen trees had special, magical powers allowing them to stay “alive” all winter long.

Whatever the origin, there will be close to 40 million trees harvested for this year’s holidays. 98% will be grown on farms, while 2% will be chosen from a nearby forest. Here in Pinellas, we are hard-pressed to find that “nearby forest” so those of us who choose to include a tree as part of our holiday decorations will be purchasing a harvested tree (if we choose a live tree, that is; only 31% of households displaying trees will have a formerly-live specimen, while 49% have gone the route of artificial.)

When making your choice this year, you may want to consider the three tenets of sustainability: the Environment, the Economy and Society. Here is an opportunity to benefit all three by comparing all the choices available to consumers of this commodity.

First, the Environment: How can your tree be environmentally-friendly? The real die-hards may choose a live tree, to be planted after the season is over. There are a few native trees that would make attractive, if not perfectly conical, Tannenbaum. One native tree that would suit is the Eastern Redcedar (Juniperus virginiana.) Though more common north of Pinellas County, this is still a great plant for wildlife and does not grow as large as a sand pine (which can grow to 100’.) Another is the native Dahoon Holly (Ilex cassine) or the ‘Little Gem’ cultivar of the southern magnolia (Magnolia grandiflora.) Check these fact sheets to see which would suit your landscape: Eastern Redcedar: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/document_st327, Dahoon Holly: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ST299 and Little Gem Magnolia: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ST375

Another environmental factor is the miles the tree has traveled to get to your outlet. Canadian-grown trees have BIG emissions tags. Consider sourcing your tree from closer to home. This brings us to our next tenet of sustainability, the Economy.

Do your part to help Florida’s economy by supporting a Florida tree grower. A list, provided by the University of Florida may be found at: Florida Christmas Tree Association (www.flchristmastrees.com.)

Finally, think of how to benefit the Local Community to provide for a societal impact on this year’s choice. Consider purchasing a tree from a charity that sells trees to raise money. Many places of worship, youth clubs and communities sell trees each year to raise funds for a particular community outreach endeavor.

However you choose to select this year’s tree, please keep in mind the idea that the environment, economy and society are all linked. There will be no “wrong” choice if you consider one or all of the above suggestions!

When the season is over, don’t let that tree go to waste! See: Pinellas County Christmas Tree Disposal (http://www.pinellascounty.org/utilities/getridofit/christmas_trees.pdf) for information on getting rid of it!

We at Extension want to wish you and your family the very best holiday season, and keep Thinking Green!

Editorial Comment by Chuck Scaffidi:

Pam presented a holiday tree alternative on her Channel 10 Friday TV spot. She purchased a rosemary plant shaped like a holiday tree at Target to demonstrate. Well Target found another customer, me, and here it is on our condo deck enhancing our waterfront view. A great idea!!
On Wednesday, November 5th, Pinellas County Master Gardeners hosted 35 visitors from Martin County Extension, where we were so kindly welcomed a year ago. The weather was curiously gray and chilly, but Gail Robertson and her crew turned the Magnolia Room into a warm and inviting autumn venue, featuring tables decked with colorful gourds, pinecones, leaves and treats. Following welcomes by Pam Brown and Chuck Scaffidi, a sumptuous luncheon buffet was enjoyed, with over 50 Pinellas County MG’s on hand to mingle with our guests.

Next, MG Jason Beck and Brian Pelc from Wilcox Nursery gave an informative presentation on Native Plants. They discussed the increasingly popular landscaping movement toward “going native” because of the plants’ innate ability to survive varying weather and soil conditions. They cautioned this does not mean one can drop the plant in the ground and expect success, as even natives require T.L.C. for a while. They also brought a number of exciting native plants along, and featured many of them for the eager MG’s. Best of all, following their talk, they made the plants available for sale, and most went on to new homes!

Eager and curious to tour our gardens, the Martin County group broke into several groups. Some set out armed with maps to travel at their own pace, while others joined groups led by Donna Z., Chuck Scaffidi, Pat Dieterich, Gay Lazur, Michaele Adams and Mike Stewart. As we strolled the grounds, we were reminded once again how lucky we are to volunteer in this large and varied site. If you recall, Martin County Extension has small gardens near their building and a greenhouse behind. Many MG’s volunteer at the Tropical Ranch, which is a 5-acre privately-owned botanical garden elsewhere in the county. We began touring at our Butterfly Garden, which is also a feature of the new Children’s Trail, and moved on to the Fruit Garden, where Charley Kohnken answered questions before we briefly viewed the Native Pond area. After crossing McKay Creek, we strolled through the Palm Garden and the Tropical Walk, before “wowing” them with our Wedding Garden, where workers were busily preparing for our Holiday Lights event. En route to the Bromeliad Garden near the museum, we visited the Cactus Garden, then crossed over and walked back to Extension through Heritage Village, noting the Victory Garden on our way. Next, our weary visitors toured the Native Plant area and the Herb Garden before returning to their bus.

Sometimes the best part of having company is seeing your “same old” through their new, fresh viewpoint. Those of us who spent the afternoon with the Martin County MG’s were reminded again by their wonder and awe that we have something really special here. Give yourself a treat—get out of the greenhouse or the corner of the gardens where you usually volunteer—grab a friend or a holiday guest, or just go alone and marvel at this treasure in the heart of the county that is ours. Martin County MG’s highly recommend a visit!
HITTING THE WALL SPRINGS PARK
By Jude Bagatti, MG

It was a brilliant mid-October day when our small, but merry band of native plant enthusiasts left Pinellas Extension Center in two vehicles and headed for Palm Harbor. The sun sparkled, the mild breeze refreshed, the ground was dry, and the humidity low. Halloween was ten days away, but for some reason it was on my brain, as we forged into hidden, unknown territory. So began our experience of "Walloween," if you will, though the only hint of witches in this wilderness was a plant called "broom grass." And just maybe those paw prints we saw in the sand, were those of a werewolf, not a coyote. The full moon had, after all, shone its face only a few nights before.

But nothing spooked us. Led by Jean Field, Horticulturist II, and Deborah Chayet, Grants Specialist, 20-year Park Horticulturist, ecologist and birder, we made our way past the main public portal to Wall Springs Park, turning left off Alt. 19 a short distance north. That road led to Wai-Lani, the Girl Scout camp, but we veered off on to an unpaved one, which brought us to land parcels more recently acquired by the County not yet open to the public. We had special access to bump down the rutted road in our vehicles and walk along unmarked sandy paths.

After Deborah showed us the lay of the land on a map in a house transformed into park offices, we set out. Jean produced a magic spray that would ward off monster insects as well as any blood-sucking vampires we'd encounter. The park property skirts the Gulf and we admired the views. Deborah, toting a heavy-duty camera, flushed with anticipation. Her excitement was contagious. This was the Fall Tour, an all-too-brief bloom period for some wildflowers, and the only place in Pinellas some could be seen at all. One of the first spotted was Blazing Star, with its tall lavender spray. Cameras began clicking.

I am no plant identity expert. I spot things, but am clueless as to what I'm looking at, so the questions poured forth: "What's this one, Deborah? How do you spell that, Jean?" I'll take credit only for discovering a small, pinkish-white flower named Palafoxia, and another white flower called Sabatia. Wild flowers have some wild names. Our leaders found Partridge Pea, Seaside Goldenrod, Silkgrass, St. John's Wort, Winged Sumac, Sandhill Milkweed, Sneezeweed, and the timely October Flower. Deborah hunted for Carphephorus, better known as Florida Paint Brush or Vanilla plant, and finally spied a few. She pointed out large clumps of a mystery plant even she couldn't name, and I am as curious as she to know what it is.

Patches of light green ground lichen indicated healthy soil, we learned. Stepping carefully, we avoided trampling on poison ivy, ground orchid leaves, the wide flat leaves of Elephant Foot, or whatever else might be lurking beneath those toadstools. While we focused downward, several eagles circled lazily above. The terrain varied from sand hill, scrub, and xeric (dry) hammock to the wide expanse of Black Rush marsh, aglitter with dragonflies. A tiny orange Phaon Crescent butterfly flitted nearby, as did a larger White Peacock butterfly and invisible nature nymphs. Catbirds snacked on Dahoon holly berries, and we had several sightings of hawks.

Leaving the enchanted restricted area, we drove to the developed park, which has a barrier-free playground, observation tower and, of course, the fresh water spring. Charles Wall owned the property early on, thus the name, Wall Springs. The spring pond (not accessible for bathing and possibly contaminated by chemicals leaching into it from a nearby golf course and water treatment facility) was filled with tilapia, and water sprites. Waterways connecting the spring with the Gulf become brackish. Herons and egrets fished along the banks and a Wood Stork flew in to join them.

Gopher turtles, snakes, rabbits, coyotes and sundry spirits inhabit the park. An ongoing problem is that of a neighbor's marauding pot-bellied pigs invading and damaging the grounds with their rooting. One memorable encounter for me was being able to get as close as I ever had to an armadillo resting on a sunny patch of sand. Unfortunately, the poor armadillo had a deep gash on its back reminiscent of manatees with boat propeller injuries. A car probably hit it. No evil witch's wand could have penetrated that armor. As it retreated into gopher apple ground cover, I hoped for its recovery, as I harbor a particular fondness for those creatures.

The day after Walloween, the sky clouded over, dark with gloom, and the wind moaned like a tethered ghoul. We had escaped the changeling season by a day. You can bet the brooms were flying.

heyjudebagatti@msn.com
NOTES FROM YOUR MG LIBRARY

Books on the Shelves
By ANGELA STRAIN, MG

ORCHIDS

- Beginners Handbook for Orchid Growing; 1962
- Botanical Orchids & How to Grow Them; Kramer; 1998
- Brazil Orchid of the Tropica; Foster; 1945
- Illus. Encyc. Of Orchids; Pridgeon; 1992
- Native Orchids of Florida; Luer; 1972
- Orchids, Flowers of Romance & Mystery; Kramer; 1927
- Orchids, Their Botany & Culture; Hawkes; 1961
- Venezuelan Orchids Illustrated; Dunsterville; 1959
- You Can Grow Orchids; Noble, 1987

Kwanzaa: Dec. 26 - Jan. 1

Founded in 1966 by Dr. Mauland Karenga, Kwanzaa is based on the first harvest celebrations of various African cultures. Its name is derived from the Kiswahili phrase “matunda ya kwanza,” or “the first fruit of the harvest.”

In addition to reaffirming rootedness in African culture and celebrating the bonds between Black people, Dr. Karenga wished to introduce and reinforce the Nguzo Saba, or Seven Principles: Umoja (unity), Kugichagulia (self-determination), Ujima (collective work and responsibility), Ujamaa (cooperative economics), Nia (purpose), Kuumba (creativity), and Imani (faith). Each day of the holiday celebrates one principle.

Hanukkah: 25th day of Kislev (first day)

In 168 B.C. the Syrians seized the Jews' holy Temple, and King Antiochus IV ordered the Jews to worship Greek gods. He decreed that anyone caught practicing Jewish rites would be put to death. In response, the Jews waged the first rebellion in recorded history for religious freedom.

Exactly three years after the temple was defiled, Judah Maccabee and his followers reclaimed, cleaned and rededicated it. When they were ready to light the menorah that was always to be kept burning, they could find only one small flask of oil enough for eight days the amount of time they needed to get more.

To commemorate this miracle, Jews everywhere celebrate Hanukkah (Hebrew for dedication) by lighting menorah candles for eight nights. The celebration begins on the 25th of Kislev.

Christmas: December 25

Christmas has its roots not only in Christianity, but also in traditional winter solstice celebrations. In northern Europe, people brought live evergreens into their homes to remind themselves that the growing season was approaching. On Yule, the shortest day of the year, they lit the Yule log to welcome the sun back into their lives. Other celebrations similarly revolved around fire, the return of light, and revelry in general.

In the fourth century AD, Pope Julius I declared that Christmas would be observed on December 25. His choice of date made it easier for pagan converts to commemorate the birth of their lord without entirely giving up their own traditions.

Today, Christians all over the world regard Christmas as one of the holiest days of the year, celebrating by attending church services, exchanging cards and gifts, and spending time with families.

To all Extension volunteers and staff have a safe and enjoyable Holiday.
Holiday Garden Lights Brighten Season at FBG

More than 425,000 colorful, twinkling lights will transform Florida Botanical Gardens into a seasonal wonderland during the annual Holiday Garden Lights display starting Saturday, Nov. 29, through Sunday, Jan. 4. From 6 to 10 PM each evening, the Gardens will be decked out in a blanket of glittering lights that showcase the beauty of the destination’s plants and landscapes.

Taking a stroll among the lighted candy canes, brightened palm trees and brilliant flower displays can begin a fun family tradition that adds a perfect trimming to every holiday celebration.

This community event is funded by the Florida Botanical Garden Foundations, which is a 501(c) (3) organization. In addition to funding the placement of hundreds of lights and displays, the Foundation is replacing older decorations with newer, energy efficient models, making the Holiday Garden Lights a leading example of environmentally friendly family events.

Give a Holiday Gift to the Community!

The Florida Botanical Gardens Foundation Sponsorship/Donation for Holiday Garden Lights

The Florida Botanical Gardens Foundation is planning this year’s premier Pinellas County holiday event – HOLIDAY GARDEN LIGHTS (Nov. 27-Jan 4.) when the grounds of the Florida Botanical Gardens will be illuminated with thousands of holiday lights. Your family or your company has an opportunity to help the Foundation provide thousands of Tampa Bay Area families and visitors with this magical—and FREE – HOLIDAY EXPERIENCE FOR THE EIGHTH YEAR IN A ROW

Last year 40,000 guests attended.

Can we count on you to help us?

Name __________________________ Phone __________________________

Address __________________________

Check:# __________________________ Amount: $____________________

Credit Card: Visa: _______________ Master _______________ Exp. _______________

We need $25,000 from generous, community-minded families and companies to keep this unique Holiday tradition “glowing” strong and going “greener” this year.

Make your checks payable to:

The Florida Botanical Gardens Foundation
12520 Ulmerton Road
Largo, FL 33774,
Phone:727-582-2100

All donations are tax deductible
IMPORTANT
ANNOUNCEMENTS

MG Advisory Association
MG Update Meeting
Looking Ahead
2009 Costa Rica MG Trip
Volunteer Hours Sign in
Update on the Children's Trail
MG Photo Show
2009 MG Conference in Las Vegas

Recording Your Volunteer Hours

Please Remember to Sign Out!
The computer program for logging volunteer hours is in the volunteer office.
- You must **sign in and sign out** when you are at Extension.
- You can still log your time in the book or use e-mail, but it is preferred that you use the computer sign-in sign-out method.
- With over 200 volunteers at Extension it becomes a considerable burden on the volunteer coordinators to manually enter your hours.

If you have been sending your hours by e-mail, use the form in the log book as a guide and send to: MGEDU@co.pinellas.fl.us. Please direct your questions to coordinator Chuck Scaffidi or an assistant, Susan Baughman or Mary Crowe.

MG Advisory Association, Chuck Scaffidi, Chair
I want to thank all MGAA members for continuing to support suggestions for liquidating our funds.

Next Board Meeting December 8, 10:30am-noon.
Since this may be our last meeting please make every effort to attend.

MG Update Monday, December 8 at 9AM
"Secret Life of Soil" presented by Pam Brown, Pinellas County Urban Horticulture Extension Agent

Looking Ahead: MG Update Thursday, January 8 at 10AM
"All About Worm Castings" presented by Jane Maxwell.

Looking Ahead: MG Update Monday, March 9 at 10AM
Gail Marie H. DeChapman "Landscape Design Workshop"  A new Extension Specialist in Environmental Horticulture at UF in Landscape Design.

Master Gardener Costa Rica Trip 2009
Costa Rica has some of the most diverse wildlife and natural landscapes in the world, ranging from tidal mangrove swamps to sandy beaches, to tropical rainforests to subalpine mountains. Florida Master Gardeners traveled to Costa Rica in 2004; they had such a wonderful experience, they decided to go back.

Date: April 22 through May 3 (12 days/11 nights) Itinerary: [See the full list of activities here](http://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/mastergardener/tours/costa09_2.shtml)

Recording your Volunteer Hours
Chuck Scaffidi, VSP Volunteer Coordinator

As Pam has noted in Pam’s Thoughts in this issue, we are simplifying the assignment list for logging your volunteer hours if you use the log notebook instead of logging in and out on the computer.

Following is a list of assignments that we will be using. There will be questions raised about which assignments you worked in. The Volunteer assistant coordinators and I will help you decide the proper assignment.

The gift shop and 4-H assignments are still under discussion.

Following is the assignment list:

- Help Desk
- Landscape
- Programs and Schools
- Education and Training

Travel time will no longer be counted as volunteer hours.
A new log-in form will be available soon. The form will include the assignments in its header.

I want to emphasize that every effort should be made to sign in and out using the computer. **This is the primary and necessary method for logging your hours. The log book should only be used when the VSP computer is unavailable.**
Highlights from the November 3 Children’s Trail Committee Meeting

Wrap-Up of the Children's Trail Opening held Saturday, November 1, 2008.

News releases were sent, brochures were available through the county library system, and mention was made on the sign on Ulmerton. About 50 children attended, plus parents, which was deemed good without additional marketing of the event. The activities were appropriate and well-received. Volunteers from the Native Plant Society and several Master Gardeners were wonderful. Commissioner Welch did not appear, but a photographer from USF took pictures, as did the St. Petersburg Times and our own Chuck Scaffidi. Mary made an overhead announcement at the Market, which greatly aided attendance at these events.

We budgeted $500 for the Opening. About $100 was spent on the butterflies to release, $60 on fruit for tastings, $50 on pine tree seedlings (there are leftovers which Cindy is dealing with), and $50 on the Flora tattoos. The coloring books were donated. This totals $260, approximately. Gail Rasmussen donated $100 for the butterflies, so our actual expenditures were only $160.

PROBLEMS: Perhaps because of the 4-H Apple Event and the Market Opening, there was too much going on and attendance at our event was impacted. We should strive to coordinate with other entities, but not compete. There was a traffic mess, also, so we must encourage parking at EMS.

LOOKING AHEAD: We need more volunteers, especially greeters, who could also get feedback from the public about the event. We need better signage for our event, as we are competing with the market, etc. We should install the racks for the Trail brochures on each station sign. We should examine the placement of the Flora signs, which are supposed to be line-of-sight, and perhaps make modifications. If it were possible to make a stencil of Flora and paint that on appropriate sidewalks, this might help, as there are concerns about too many signs. It was remarked that we need to make our gardens a Point of Destination!

The idea of having a similar Activity Day at the Children's Trail this coming spring was discussed. Perhaps we can charge for the butterfly release, and arrange a photograph of each child who participates. It would be wonderful to be able to E-vite via an improved data base. If we decide to host another event, we must have more volunteers.

Pat Dieterich has graciously and enthusiastically accepted the role of chair for the Children's Trail. Her first meeting will be the next meeting on Monday, December 8 following the FBG Board meeting at about 10am.

Committee Members: Dianne Wheatley-Giolotti, Mary Campbell, Vivian Haicken, Alyssia Chivers, Betty Lipe, Cindy Peacock, Chuck Scaffidi, Pat Dieterich, Bob Albanese, Andy Bergeron and Bobbie Jones.

Jude Bagatti's "Celebrations" Photo Show

Master Gardener Jude Bagatti will have a solo show of film photography in the Lobby Gallery of St. Pete Little Theater throughout December. From the U.S. and Peru, to Nepal, Ireland and Egypt, her images depict reasons people celebrate, not just major holidays, but little events like sharing a flower or doll or abstract things like nature or heritage.

Her show coincides with the Scrooge play, "A Christmas Carol," in which Jude performs several roles. The Lobby is open Mon.-Fri., 9 to 5, and for evening and matinee performances Dec. 4th thru Dec. 21st at 4025 - 31st St. South, St. Pete - 727-866-1973. Contact Jude at 727-322-6211 or heyjudebagatti@msn.com

International Master Gardener Conference
"New Frontiers" in Horticulture and Gardening -March 22-26, 2009

Spring in the desert is an incredible time. Native plants, flowering in yellow, orange and red, really put on a show. Tours to the Master Gardener Orchard and to the exciting, new Springs Preserve where you can see sustainable, low water concepts at work. The University of Nevada Master Gardener Orchard is an outdoor living laboratory testing different types and varieties of fruit and vegetables. It demonstrates how to grow the best fruit possible, with minimal agricultural chemicals, under our harsh desert climate. The orchard today has over 500 trees, wine and table grapes, and vegetable test plots on a little over an acre.

Registration Deadlines:
■ Early Bird Registration, $260 — ends November 15, 2008
■ Regular Registration, $310 — ends February 15, 2009
■ Late Registration, $350 — if available
You can register on line. Please visit the website for more information : www.unce.unr.edu/imgc.
**Volunteer Opportunities & Events**

For December & January

- **South County**
- **Tampa Bay Home Expo**
- **Compost & Vegetable Beds**

- **Attention South County Master Gardeners!**
  Master Gardener, Phyllis Lawson, has volunteered to coordinate Master Gardener’s giving presentations in South Pinellas County. The location is the St. Petersburg College Library at the Gibbs campus in St. Petersburg. Pam Brown has had inquiries from several of the MGs about presenting classes in South County. This area of the county is underserved and this should be a well-received project. It would be great to have this up and going by January. Please give this some consideration and then let Pam know at 727-582-2112 or pwbrown@pinellascounty.org if you are willing to participate by presenting educational programs.

- **Help Needed at the Tampa Bay Home Expo Extension Exhibit**
  Tropicana Field St. Petersburg on January 23 through 25, 2009.

  Friday, Jan 23, 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. - 2 people
  2:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. - 2 people
  Sat., Jan 24, 10:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. - 2 people
  2:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. - 2 people
  Sun., Jan 25, 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. - 2 people
  2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. - 2 people (last shift will also assist staff with exhibit tear-down)

  Please email Carol Suggs csuggs@pinellascounty.org with times you can help or sign up on the board when you are in the office.

- **Help Needed in Composting and Raised Vegetable Bed Areas!**
  Volunteers are needed to work in the composting and raised vegetable bed demo areas on Tuesday and Friday mornings.
  Contact John Kingsbury 727-569-6409, Pam 727-582-2112 or Carol 727-582-2124 to let them know if you are interested in this volunteer activity. You might get to take home some wonderful compost!
SAFETY NET

By PAM BROWN
Urban Horticulture Extension Agent

Holiday Season Safety

According to the United States Fire Administration (USFA), there are simple life-saving steps you can take to ensure a safe and happy holiday. Here’s a few precautionary tips to follow which can greatly reduce your chances of becoming a holiday fire casualty.

Visit the USFA site for more info: http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/citizens/all_citizens/home_fire_prev/holiday-seasonal/holiday.shtml

- **Maintain Your Holiday Lights**
  Inspect holiday lights each year for frayed wires, bare spots, gaps in the insulation, broken or cracked sockets, and excessive kinking or wear before putting them up. Use only lighting listed by an approved testing laboratory.

- **Do Not Overload Electrical Outlets**
  Do not link more than three light strands, unless the directions indicate it is safe. Connect strings of lights to an extension cord before plugging the cord into the outlet. Make sure to periodically check the wires - they should not be warm to the touch.

- **Avoid Using Lit Candles**
  If you do use them, make sure they are in stable holders and place them where they cannot be easily knocked down. Never leave the house with candles burning.

- **Never Put Lit Candles on a Tree**
  Do not go near a Christmas tree with an open flame - candles, lighters or matches.

By PAM BROWN,
Urban Horticulture Extension Agent

It is the end of another year – I cannot believe how fast this one has gone by. But, as the saying goes: “time flies when you are having fun”. And, this job certainly has its fun moments.

I know that everyone is getting ready for the holidays, but be sure to make some time for this month’s Master Gardener Update on December 8th. I will be presenting “The Secret Life of Soil” - all about the living and inert stuff in soil that makes it such a remarkable growing medium for plants.

It seems like change is our middle name here at Extension, so it may not come as a surprise that there are a couple of changes to the Master Gardener program coming in January.

The first change concerns travel time. Now that the number of volunteer hours necessary to remain certified as a Master Gardener are 35 instead of 50 and there really is no way to report travel time accurately in the VPS computer system, we have decided to not allow travel time as part of the total volunteer hours. Those of you who routinely sign in and out of the computer system have not had travel time included for quite some time. The State MG office wants hours for travel time separate from the volunteer hours and keeping track of this is a bit much.

The second change involves “The Green Leaf” newsletter. Starting in January we will no longer mail the newsletter. This will save on postage and possibly some paper. If you remember, the postage was paid by MGAA and this organization will disband at the end of this year. The newsletter will continue to be e-mailed as a PDF file. For those of you who do not have e-mail, there will be printed copies in the basket on the desk outside of Carol’s office. You can also access it by going to the Extension web-site http://pinellascountyextension.org, find “Volunteer Information” on the left hand side of the page, click on “Master Gardener Program”. This will bring up a new page. Look for “The Green Leaf Newsletter” on the left hand side and click on this link which will bring up another new page. Now look for “go to the current issue” in the middle of the page and click on this link to take you to the newsletter. Or, with a bit more typing you can go directly to http://pinellas.ifas.ufl.edu/master_gardener/green_leaf.shtml and then click on the current issue or any past issue.

I appreciate your understanding as we make these changes.

It is good to see so many of our winter MGs here now. We really miss you while you are away. I also like the cooler weather that you brought with you. We have certainly had some really beautiful days the last couple of weeks.

The Holiday Season is definitely upon us. I do wish each of you wonderful holidays full of family and friends. Both of our daughters will be home for Christmas. It has been a year since we have seen Emily and I am so looking forward to her visit. If you are traveling, please take good care. You are very important to us.

Once again, it has been my sincere pleasure to work with such wonderful volunteers. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

♥ Pam
Mark Your Calendars for March 13, 2009
Celebrate the 4-H Centennial in Pinellas County
By JANET GOLDEN, Distance Education & 4-H Program Leader

2009 will be here before you know it and with that comes the Florida 4-H Centennial Celebration! Did you know that nationally 4-H celebrated 100 years in 2002, but in Florida we reach 100 next year? Pinellas County 4-H would like to celebrate that milestone here locally. The Pinellas County 4-H Foundation is planning a fundraising dinner with a centennial theme on March 13 at 6:30PM at Banquet Masters in Pinellas Park. Tickets will be $50.00 for adults and $25.00 for youth. This will include a buffet meal, guest speaker, and plenty of entertainment. The proceeds will go to the Pinellas County 4-H Foundation to support the operating expenses of the 4-H programs and to pay for youth scholarships. More details along with invitations will be coming, but we wanted to make sure you saved the date now.

Looking Ahead!

SATURDAYS IN JANUARY, 9AM-1PM
- Market in the Park at Extension

MON, DEC 8, 9AM-10:30AM
- MG update
- Secret Life of Soil by Pam Brown

NIGHTLY THRU JANUARY 3, 6-10PM
- Illuminated Gardens at the Florida Botanical Gardens

For details on some of the events listed go to the calendar on the Pinellas County Extension Lawn & Garden website.
Good Work Volunteers!

Reminder

- **MG Update Monday, December 8 at 9AM**
  "Secret Life of Soil" presented by Pam Brown, Pinellas County Urban Horticulture Extension Agent

- **Last MGAA Board Meeting**
  Monday, December 8, 10:30AM - noon. Open to all MGAA members.