Apopka Appeals to Master Gardeners

By Pat Dieterich, MG

Fifty-plus master gardeners and staff members spent Wednesday, December 6 on a whirlwind tour of Apopka, Florida, located north and west of Orlando. Apopka was once a major citrus-growing region. Climate changes and hard freezes in the 1950’s forced growers to take a long look at the success rate of their operations. Since they already had agri-business basics such as labor, transportation, and chemical supply established, many began to supplement their citrus operations with growing foliage plants. Today, Apopka proudly declares itself the “Indoor Plant Capital of the World!”

Our first stop was Agri-Starts, Inc., where guides Ty and Ashley led tours of the tissue culture operation. A microscopic portion of meristematic tissue, similar to stem cell tissue in humans, is taken from plants sent from all over the world, placed in gel medium and carefully monitored. When shoots develop, they are removed and repotted. It takes about a year to produce a flat of cloned plants. The plants are shipped elsewhere to be raised. Agri-Starts averages 350 to 400 kinds of plants at any time. Their biggest concern is contamination. They have many procedures to ensure sterile conditions.

Mike Roberts greeted us at our second stop, Florida Cactus, Inc. This facility, begun in 1959, receives cactus and succulent starts from Canada, and raises them until they are large enough to be sold to retail stores and florists. Most of the species they raise are native to the U.S. He explained that most cacti have thorns, but not all, and that they are ideal to grow in Florida in well-drained soil, where they enjoy a year-round growing season. When cacti are exposed to freezing temperatures, the water within freezes and expands, and if large fissures develop, the plant will never recover. Armed with site maps, he turned us loose to shop!

We happy, but hungry, Master Gardeners then drove to the University of Florida IFAS Research Center in Apopka, a five-year-old facility where horticulture, agriculture, and pharmaceutical courses are taught. We were warmly greeted by director Diane Mealo, and as we wolfed down our lunches, Dr. Beeson explained his fascinating research concerning watering plants. We learned the considerable benefits of regular watering during the “flush growth” period from January to May, as well as intriguing water conservation results when placing plants close together and creating a “canopy” effect. He also reported remarkable growth success planting small seedlings in 3-gallon pots, as opposed to planting in small pots and regularly upgrading.

Satiated and enriched, the MG’s continued to the Deroose greenhouse. This four-year-old facility boasts state-of-the-art equipment and techniques in its 10 acre greenhouse. Deroose receives micro
cuttings from their parent-company tissue lab in Belgium, mostly bromeliads, and after growing them for 3 to 4 months, the plants are shipped to California and south Florida. There they will be grown for another year and a half until they are ready for sale. High overhead, workers were culling from an enormous crop of pitcher plants, while at ground level we saw huge machines, referred to as “robots”, that filled pots prior to manual potting. The plants are raised in large tables, easily moved and flooded, which is the preferred method of watering. The facility collects rainwater from the roof, and pumps it underground into silos holding half a million gallons. The water is then used to flood the plant tables, and the excess is gathered via gutters and recycled. They employ 85 people year round in their very clean greenhouse, and raise variegated ficus and aquatic plants besides bromeliads.

The final stop on the Master Gardener odyssey was Location 8 of the Hermann Englemann company, which boasts 9 locations in the Apopka area. Guides Nat and Peter explained that two years ago, after Hurricane Jeanne caused extensive damage, a decision was made to totally rebuild. Automation was installed wherever possible in an on-going effort to create efficiencies and keep costs low. Englemann is the supplier of the “Angel” plants that we know from our favorite box stores. Their goal is tight, compact plants. They raise 15 common plants, but 140 types in all, and are constantly seeking the unique. We learned more about the “ebb and flow” watering system and plant tables, which are more efficient than mist systems, and most important for foliage plant growers, keep the leaves dry and thereby discourage disease. The water is constantly filtered and exposed to ultraviolet sterilization to kill bacteria and fungus. Location 8 raises 55 varieties of ivy and other plants. Each of Englemann’s sites houses 30,000 plants, 4 to 6 weeks in the beds followed by 10 to 12 weeks hanging in the air. One location has 250,000 hanging baskets!

Awed by the magnitude of these operations, and enriched by all the sights and education, weary MG’s made their way back to the bus for the trip back to Largo, extremely grateful to Patsy Schamber and Chuck Scaffidi for all their efforts. But wait—weren’t those perfectly decent (and free!) plants doomed to destruction? Be certain to ask about the day’s final adventure—suffice it to say it’s not only the homeless who dive into dumpsters!
The Nine O’clock Plant

By ROBERT MARX, MG

Common names of plants are often confusing, frequently will vary by geographical location, and so it is that from a true mountain man here in western Virginia, I first heard of the nine o’clock plant. An old woman living back in the mountains told my friend about this amazing plant whose flowers opened at exactly 9:00 PM each evening and closed before noon the next day. All my textbooks made no mention of a nine o’clock plant but without actually seeing the plant, it seemed to be Oenothera, generally known as Evening Primrose. I found no definitive answer until my friend obtained some seeds from the woman and shared them with me.

Planting the seeds last spring resulted in several attractive plants about three feet tall, ultimately producing yellow tubular buds one and one-half inches long.

Sure enough, almost to the minute at 9:00 PM, the first bud began to burst open, not smoothly but in an almost violent motion. The entire plant seemed to shudder. Then the bright yellow petals opened in a smoother manner, all this spectacular action in only a minute or so. Other buds quickly followed.

As the summer days shortened, the obvious phototropism activity gradually moved back to about 8:30 PM so nine o’clock plant is not entirely accurate. But, close enough.

The beautiful yellow flowers and the foliage verified the plants are indeed Evening Primrose. There are several species but this is the only one having seven stamens (most have 4 or 8), should you care to look up the entire scientific name. I did, but neglectfully left it in Virginia. Not many textbooks go to that extreme in identifying the species.

I brought seeds to Florida, believing some MG’s might like to try them. If successful, the flowers will delight you and your neighbors.

Please see Bob Abben for seeds.

Visits to Botanical Gardens

By GAIL ROBERTSON, MG

One of the many benefits of retirement is to travel leisurely rather than on a fixed schedule. Bruce and I have discovered the joy of visiting Botanical Gardens on our way to and from other destinations as well as planning trips to visit only Botanical Gardens.

Some of the highlights of the last few years are:

Located in Florida:
Morikami Museum and Japanese Gardens, Delray Beach

This garden is a place to stroll, relax, and meditate. The art exhibitions, formal gardens, a tropical bonsai collection and koi-filled ponds provide much interest. This park honors a Japanese farming settlement of the early 1900’s while celebrating the living culture of Japan.

Mounts Botanical Gardens, West Palm Beach

Hurricanes Jeanne and Wilma destroyed much of these gardens in 2005. While on the rebound, thanks to two Master Gardeners (we were told other Master Gardeners are still restoring their own properties), it is an excellent example of what happens to the understory when trees are removed. Much of this garden is tropical and in a few years should again be the beauty it once was.

Tropical Ranch Gardens, Stuart

This smaller garden is the work of two Martin County Master Gardeners. It includes a design of well tended tropical plants, a wedding chapel, a greenhouse, a garden of Champion Trees, a “Wine and Cheese Garden Wall” constructed of wine bottles, as well as the country effects of a cow and chickens.

Heathcote Botanical Gardens, Fort Pierce

This is a small-very beautiful garden tended by one paid employee. It is tropical in nature and features a Reflection Garden, a Japanese Garden, Herb Garden, a Bonsai Collection, and a rainforest display.

McKee Botanical Gardens, Vero Beach

Water lilies and lotus flowers are specialties at this garden which was established in 1922 to preserve an 80-acre tropical hammock. Some damage from the 2004 hurricanes was visible in 2005 but still worth a visit. A Garden Café offers light foods at a reasonable cost.

Sugar Mill Botanical Gardens, Port Orange

This garden is tucked away in a residential area. This historical site features sugar mill machinery from
an earlier era as well as several life size dinosaurs made of concrete left over from the years it was an amusement park. Paths wind through gardens featuring a magnolia collection, herbs, huge clumps of gingers, as well as other tropics (many of which are labeled). A trail takes visitors through a wooded section filled with birds. A huge Confederate oak tree is the centerpiece of this garden.  

**Ormond Memorial Art Museum and Gardens, Ormond Beach**  
This 4-acre garden is in the heart of the city. It is lush and tropical, and is a maze of pathways leading down below street level and up again. Fish ponds and egrets add to the ambiance.  

**Kanapaha Botanical Gardens, Gainesville**  
This is a 62-acre garden with luscious tropical plants, a rock garden, an herb garden, a butterfly garden, a hardwood forest, bamboo, vinery, and a water garden which demonstrates the use of reclaimed water. Many of the plants are labeled.  

**Located in Georgia:**  
**Atlanta Botanical Garden, Atlanta**  
This is a tropical wonder in the midst of a large metropolis. It features, among other highlights, a main garden, children’s garden, a conservatory, rock garden, woodland shade garden, a camellia garden, and a hardwood forest, to name just a few.  

**Callaway Gardens, Pine Mountain**  
This large site (14,000 acres) nestled in the foothills of the Appalachians deserves an overnight stay. A visit in December offers holiday lights; in springtime, azaleas and tulips are among the plants in bloom; in the fall, the trees are a blaze of color; and in summer, the FSU circus is present as are native flowering plants. Miles of scenic woodland drives and paths are available for driving, walking, and biking.  

**Massee Lane Gardens, Fort Valley**  
This small garden is on the way to Callaway Gardens if traveling via I 75. It is the home of the American Camellia Society. A visit at any time of the year provides food for the senses but a visit in February or March provides a show of color, while a visit in June showcases daylilies.  

**The State Botanical Garden of Georgia, Athens**  
This 313-acre preserve features nature trails, gardens, and a three story tropical conservatory.  

**Georgia Southern Botanical Garden, Statesboro**  
This is a relatively small garden with a lot to offer. There is an arboretum, native plant garden, heritage garden, camellia collection, butterfly garden, and a children’s vegetable garden among others.  

**Bamboo Farm and Coastal Gardens, Savannah**  
This historic plant collection began more than 100 years ago and showcases over 200 varieties of shade and sun-loving bamboos.  

**Guido Gardens, Metter**  
This is a well cared for meditative garden, complete with a prayer chapel, babbling brooks, and fountains.  

And perhaps one of the most beautiful gardens is the jewel we have here at FBG. Have you looked at it with “new eyes” recently to realize the gem we have in our own back yard?  

For resources in our travels, we have used AAA Tour Books, Internet and the brochure listing botanical gardens with reciprocal admission that is given with FBG membership.  

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**An Adventure at Cypress Gardens**

By CHUCK SCAFFIDI, MG  
Adding to Gail’s list above is a visit to Cypress Gardens, Winter Haven, Fl. The gardens and shows are as enjoyable as they were 60 years ago. Our MG traveling group, Donna Zacharczyk, Carol Pilsbury, Jack Moss, Charley Iserman, me, and Joanne Drake (pictured here) enjoyed a full day of seeing the ice and water shows and endless gardens. Plants galore, old and new, and much entertainment.  

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Skin Safety Tips
By PAM BROWN, Horticulture Agent

Look for and recognize the signs of skin cancer - consult your doctor immediately if you have any concerns - some signs are:

- A skin growth that increases in size;
- A mole or birth mark that increases in size or thickness or changes in any way including color or outline;
- A mole or spot that itches, hurts, bleeds or scabs;
- A sore that does not heal, lasts for more than a month or reopens after healing up.

I Need Your Help to Keep Our Gardens Growing

We need your membership in The Florida Botanical Gardens. You can get into other gardens free or at discounted prices, and that alone pays for your FBG membership. Discounts are offered at most gift shops. Membership offers prior notice and invitations to special FBG events. FBG membership makes a good gift for friends or family. FBG membership allows early admittance to the MG plant sales. Individual membership is $30; Family is $50; a supporting garden friend is $250. If you'd like a leaf on the tree with your name on it, $1,000 will help grow the gardens.

See me or stop in at Botanical Bounty.

Attention Master Gardeners!!

Anyone interested in fulfilling their Volunteer hour requirements should speak to Stacey Zidi about volunteering at the Botanical Bounty gift shop.

The shop is open Tuesday-Saturday from 10am-5pm. Each day is split into two 3 ½ hour shifts, mornings (from 10-1:30pm) or afternoons (from 1:30-5pm). I'm looking for a minimum commitment of one shift a week. No previous retail experience is necessary.

Call 582-2251 or szidi@pinellascounty.org
**Important Announcements!**

VSP5, the new county computer program for logging volunteer hours is now in operation. You must log your hours here the day you volunteer. Those that can not be here when they volunteer may log hours on a standard form so your hours can be entered by an assistant Volunteer Coordinator. If you have been sending your hours by e-mail, use the form as a guide. Send to: MGEDU@co.pinellas.fl.us.

Training is on-going and we will provide forms in the volunteer office. Remember travel & GEU time must be entered twice. See Chuck Scaffidi or an assistant (Cathy Nelson, Mary Crowe or Adrienne Andrews).

**MG Advisory Association**

By CHUCK SCAFFIDI, MG

The MGAA documents are available for all MGAA members on request. We have detailed how MGAA operates and is organized, as well as defined the duties of committees.

The next MGAA meeting is Monday January 8, after the up-date training. Bring your lunch. Magnolia Room.

I will be sending out an agenda to the members soon. Opinions and suggestions from all members are always welcome.

A nomination committee is preparing a list of candidates for board member election. We would like to fill the expired board member slots and elect new ones. The newly elected board will then elect officers and the MGAA chair will then appoint committee chairs.

All members can vote-so please attend!!

**Message From Compost Happens**

Save all green cuttings, etc. from around the Extension and put them in the containers in the composting area. Compost made from them will be sold to benefit the MG fund.

Please no weed seeds, nut grass, torpedo grass, etc.

**Plant Sale News**

By LINDA CULHANE, MG

Happy New Year to all !!!

Only 3 months until the March Plant Sale. The time is sure flying by. We have purchased several flats of plants from Cherokee Cuttings (pink and green sweet potato, pink/green oyster plant, green/white variegated alternanthera, orange alternanthera, and a few alyssum) and 1 ½ flats of new iris from our trip to Apopka. We were also able to bring back a few Andrew Crotons, a new variety of oxalis, and hanging pots of ficus. At this date most of the repotting has been completed, which was a monumental job.

Which brings me to another subject, if you know of any extra gallon pots, please bring them to the extension. We are in desperate need of them.

Many of you are, I hope, helping us out for the plant sale with growing at home, for which we are very grateful. There are several plants that we do NOT need more of. They include: sweet potato vine, coleus, hibiscus, plumbago, plumeria, devil’s trumpet, or angel’s trumpet.

Plants we are seeking for the sale include Water plants (with exception of horsetail reed, and giant papyrus), and bougainvillea. Tropicals we need include heliconia, any gingers, and anthurium. Ferns (holly, boston-noninvasive, leather, turkey foot), milkweed (not giant), and house plants would be welcome.

We will be gathering the Second Thyme Around items, so make the New Year Resolutions stick…. You know the one about cleaning out that garage. We have the possibility of harvesting plants and such at one of the mobile home parks that is closing just after the first of the year. If this comes in, I will put the word out calling for assistance in gathering items we could use.

A signup list has been posted on the bulletin board at the extension. You are invited to sign up, if you need an explanation as to the responsibilities of the job, contact me. We have such a great team for our projects, and the plant sale is only one of them. Thanks for all your work and dedication. See you

By CHUCK SCAFFIDI, MG

I have been working on a suggestion from MG Marie Singer, and have Pam’s permission, to assemble a team to participate in the Thursday Largo Market. This could serve as a trial for a future venture called Green Market at Extension recently discussed with Pam & Mary Campbell. Please contact me if you are interested and I will explain the details.
Volunteer Opportunities and Events for January–March

For Volunteer Opportunities:
Please see Carol Suggs 582-2124 or csuggs@pinellascounty.org to volunteer for events, or the contact person in the help wanted ad. You may also sign up on the sheets on the back hall bulletin board. Activities are really fun and informative.

Master Gardener Update
Training on the 8th of January

Metro Crime Prevention: Talk about personal crime and theft. Monday 10:00am to 11:15am Magnolia Room

Looking ahead:
1. Thursday, February 8. Volunteer Appreciation luncheon.

Lawn and Garden Help Desk
January 11 - 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Brooker Creek Environmental Education Center – We need one MG to help Cindy Peacock, Good opportunity for north county MGs.

Florida Style Gardening Series
January 18, 25, February 1, 8, 15 – 5:30 to 8 p.m.
Boyd Hill Nature Park, Lake Maggiore Environmental Education Center in St. Petersburg – we need one or two MGs to manage registration, surveys and help hand out materials.

Pruning Techniques
January 20 – 10 a.m. to 11:30 p.m.
Pinellas County Extension – we need one or two MGs to help with registration and survey.

Home Expo
January 26 – 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. (10 – 2 & 2 – 6)
January 27 -10 a.m. to 7 p.m. (10 – 2:30 & 2:30 – 7)
January 28 – 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

(10 – 2 & 2 – 6 ) MGs to help take down the booth) Tropicana Field – we need two MGs for each shift. Badges and parking passes will be provided for each volunteer.

Compost Happens
January 27 – 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
Pinellas County Extension – we need several MGs to help with surveys and logistics of this popular workshop.

Rain Barrel Workshop
February 17 – 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.
Pinellas County Extension – we need several MGs to help with the logistics of this popular workshop.

Compost Happens
March 10 – 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
Pinellas County Extension – we need several MGs to help with surveys and logistics of this popular workshop.

Rain Barrel Workshop
March 24 – 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.
Rain Barrel Painting demonstration workshop
March 24 – 10:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
Pinellas County Extension – we need several MGs to help with the logistics for both of these activities.

Master Gardener Plant Sale
Set-up – March 28, 29, 30 – 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Sale day – March 31 – 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
We need many MGs to help with all aspects of this sale. Plan to attend the Plant Sale meetings on the last Friday of each month for more information.

Heritage Village Garden – they would like a couple of Master Gardeners to help train the docents who will be tending this garden. If you are interested in helping with this, please contact Paige Noel at Heritage Village, phone 582-2123 or e-mail pnoel@pinellascounty.org.

Presenters for Educational Programs at Area Libraries – Several MGs who would like to schedule educational presentations for the public at area libraries. Please see Pam if you are willing. She will help you prepare a presentation or you can choose one from the 175 or so that are already done. You may need to do some research to come up with the material for a script if you choose one of the completed PowerPoint presentations.
Volunteers are so important to our organization and as Master Gardeners you are extra special.

I have had some requests about putting more of the volunteer opportunities in the newsletter and advertising them further in advance. Please take time to read through the list of opportunities in this month’s newsletter. I have listed everything that I have so far for the first quarter of 2007. Notice that the Home Show is now in January instead of March. We need help all three days (Jan. 26-28). For the Sunday afternoon shift it would be very helpful if we could have a couple of MGs who can help break down our display at the end of the show.

This is a bit short for this month as vacation is calling to me.

Thank you for everything that each of you do to help with our mission here at Extension. You are the best!

♥ Pam

Congratulations are in order!

The Master Gardener Class of 2006 has successfully completed their training. A record number of nine students completed their 100 hours prior to the class ending, and were presented with their MG name tags and certificates. You were a great class! We look forward to seeing your smiling faces around Extension and the Florida Botanical Gardens as you continue your volunteering.

As I go to press, the following MGs have competed their 100 hours:

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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Extension Agent II
Production Editor: Chuck Scaffidi, Master Gardener
727-582-2117
Please send articles to Pam Brown or e-mail directly to Chuck cascaffidi@juno.com or Pam at pwbrown@co.pinellas.fl.us

The newsletter is available on the Internet at http://www.flbg.org/
Click on “Master Gardener Program”, click on “MG Newsletter”
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ATTENTION!!
Monday January 8:
MG up-date 10am,
followed by MGAA meeting:
Magnolia Room-Bring your lunch
1pm Tour Guide Workshop

Good Work Pinellas County Master Gardener Volunteers !!!