

MG Volunteer in the Spotlight



Class of 1994 Robert Abben

Note: A veteran Master Gardener will be introduced to our readers with a look at his or her personal background and the contributions made to IFAS programs. Through these articles we will explore the 23-year history of Master Gardener activities and how Extension has been enriched by their efforts.

By Jack Moss, MG

When asked to talk about his early years in Racine Wisconsin, Robert pondered for a moment, slowly broke into his inimitable grin and replied, "I can only describe that period as a musical adventure."

Robert showed an early interest in Boy Scouts and advanced to eagle scout in high school. With a strong interest in music he joined the drum and bugle corps and was soon elevated to drum major. In 1937 he was recognized as the national champion baton twirler from William Horlick high school.

Following graduation in 1940, Robert decided to escape the northern climate and seek his fortune in the south. He bid farewell to his high school sweetheart Dorothy and arrived in Norfolk Virginia. He promptly joined the Navy. Dorothy followed forthwith and wedding bells chimed. Three days later, Robert was ordered to report for duty. Dorothy bid him farewell and

returned to Racine, not to see her newlywed husband for over three years.

Robert served with distinction aboard the destroyer USS Martin, completing thirty- nine months of continuous duty in the pacific theatre of operations. He received the following citations: seven Battle Stars, two Presidential Unit Citations, and twelve Service Medals.

During on board duty, he was able to attend classes taught by ship officers certified to teach at the college level. Upon discharge, he was accepted at Duke University and completed his B.A. Degree in business administration.

Robert elected to stay in the naval reserves for twenty - two years, being recalled for Korea-Cuban missile crisis, the Berlin build up, and Vietnam. He was discharged as senior chief petty officer, navigation and communications.

Robert and Dorothy settled in St. Petersburg in 1946 achieving a life long dream to live in the placid sunny south.

Robert joined Decca records as the regional promotional representative calling on radio stations and guiding recording artists in personal appearances. He later joined the new TV station WSUN selling TV time. This was followed by an upward move to WTSP Channel 10. He remained with Channel 10 nineteen years, was promoted to sales manager and retired in 1987.

Reflecting on his 31 years in broadcasting, Robert recalled the early years. "I would hang around the stations when I was twelve, doing small stuff and running errands. I was the gofer." In 1980 he was inducted into the Pioneers In Broadcasting Hall Of Fame.

Returning to the Boy Scout organization as a leader, he was named District Commissioner and received the prestigious Silver Beaver award from the Pinellas area council.

With his love of music, Robert continued his work with high school bands in the Tampa Bay

area. His expertise led him to judge marching band contests in the southeast. This twenty-year career included his appointment as vice president and chief judge of the all-American Judging Association.

Robert takes great pride talking about his class mates. "1994 is the most successful class to date," he claims. "we have the largest number of ten year veteran MGs." "We have posted more volunteer hours and have received more MG honors than any other class!"

Robert advises new Master Gardeners "you can achieve the maximum benefit of the MG program by thinking "diversity." After you complete your hundred hours, try new things, try different projects, and work with different people. Always think in terms of learning new things. "That's diversity."



Friday Crew Field Trip

By ANGELA STRAIN, MG

If the greenhouse and shade house seemed quiet on Friday, June 17 it was not because we were all on strike but rather that we were all on an outing to visit Florida Native Orchids nursery in St. Petersburg.

Our hosts, Bud Spence, owner and "Florida Native" and MG Sue Edwards greeted us at the gates eager to show their operation to our group of about 20. After a short program during which Bud brought us up to date on the history of the Nursery and educated us with orchid facts we were allowed to wander through the 3 greenhouses and the new lab where he is "flasking" new plants from seed in a sterile environment. He explained the yellow and pink

tag system, which is a unique system that allows their customers the opportunity to order the orchid of choice.

Thanks to Bud and Sue and to Michael Pettay, Extension Horticulturist, who was the designated driver for the group. We had a great time and appreciate the opportunity to expand our knowledge of the beautiful, irresistible orchid. If you want information about Florida Native Orchids please visit their website at:

[http://www.floridanativeorchids.com./](http://www.floridanativeorchids.com/)

By SUE EDWARDS, MG

Bud Spence, charming and very knowledgeable owner of his orchid nursery for over forty years, and I, really enjoyed co-hosting a visit from my fellow Master Gardeners on Friday, June 17th, for them to see his colorful orchid collection firsthand. For some of the non-orchid growers among the group, it was their first chance to see the many native and non-native orchid species and hybrids, as well as other tropical plants, desert roses, cacti and succulents he grows for sale to the public. He also makes his own hybrids, and many got to see the lab where the orchid babies grow in an involved, time-consuming process.

The approximately twenty MG attendees, with horticulturist Michael Pettay, seated themselves at Florida Native Orchids, in a circle of chairs under the large trees, while Bud and I talked about orchids in general, and answered questions. After that, we let everyone loose to roam the several greenhouses, packed with sweet-smelling orchid blossoms and other botanical treasures. Many chose to purchase a plant or two, to enjoy at home. Bud graciously sent everyone home with a free Billbergia bromeliad plant.

After a group photo, we drove a short distance and enjoyed a cool, refreshing beverage and healthy lunch at Stone Soup Cafe in St. Petersburg.

Thanks to Angela Strain for organizing the field trip and I am sure we can agree a good time was had by ALL!



Garden Tips



Tracing the roots of plants popular in Florida

By YVONNE SWANSON, MG

Africa influences just about every aspect of American culture, including the arts, literature, science and technology, religion, fashion and food. Even when it comes to horticulture, African influence has significantly shaped the landscape – particularly in Florida where the conditions are ideal for growing a wide variety of plants that originate from the tropical and subtropical regions of the African continent.

When you're selecting a plant at the garden center, you probably don't think about its native habitat – unless you're buying an African violet (*Saintpaulia ionantha*) house plant, African bush-daisy (*Gamolepis chrysanthemoides*) or African iris (*Dietes vegeta*). Because plant identification tags rarely provide such information, you'd have to scour gardening books or other resources to find a plant's place of origin.

Some of our most common tropical plants originate from Africa, such as the striking bird of paradise (*Strelitzia reginae*), which blooms throughout the year with showy orange and blue flowers that resemble a bird's beak and head plumage. Planted in full sun to part shade, this tropical specimen from South Africa grows up to 5 feet tall and 4 feet wide. Its much larger relative, the giant white bird of paradise (*Strelitzia nicolai*), can reach 30 feet and 10-foot around. It prefers the same light, but produces larger 10 to 12- inch white flowers in the summer and fall once the plant is a few years old. Because of its upright growth habit, it can be planted in smaller gardens for an almost instant tropical look. It's also a popular indoor plant.

Many palms hail from Africa, including the multi-trunked Senegal date palm (*Phoenix reclinata*), which needs plenty of room to grow. It reaches about 30 feet high by 20 feet wide, although it can be contained in a large planter. If lack of space is a problem, many palms can be successfully grown outdoors in large pots.

The exotic island of Madagascar, located off the eastern tip of South Africa in the Indian Ocean, is home to several palms popular in Florida gardens, among them the multi-stemmed butterfly or areca palm (*Dypsis lutescens*), silvery blue bismarck palm (*Bismarkia nobilis*) and the triangle palm (*Neodypsis decaryi*), which fans out into a distinctive triangular shape. The more unusual teddy bear palm (*Neodypsis lastelliana*) has its own distinct look with a trunk that is green, white and red at the crown. All of these palms can be grown in full sun to part shade.

Traveler's tree (*Ravenala madagascariensis*) resembles a palm, but it's an evergreen tropical tree also native to Madagascar. It is sometimes mistaken for the giant white bird of paradise because of its similar upright evergreen foliage.

There are plenty of other plants from Madagascar – numerous varieties of dracaena, screw pine (*Pandanus utilis*), queen sago (*Cycas rumphii*) and crown of thorns (*Euphorbia splendens*), just to name a few, and it's no wonder, says Candy Arnold, lead worker at Sunken Gardens in St. Petersburg. The remote island – the world's fourth largest – has thick - lasting flaming glorybower heart-shaped blooms in deep crimson and white. They brighten any garden trellis in sun and shade. Flaming glorybower (*Clerodendrum splendens*) is another striking evergreen vine, but with dense clusters of tube-shaped blossoms in scarlet or white. Unlike the Bleeding heart, which is non-invasive, glorybower can become difficult to tame.

Snake plant (*Sansevieria trifasciata*), commonly called "Mother-in-law's tongue", comes from the Eastern Cape of South Africa. This spiky tropical with green, variegated and yellow striped leaves requires little care. It takes full sun to shade and is drought/salt tolerant and resists pests.

Even aloe (*Aloe spp.*), a medicinal plant used to treat burns, originates from the volcanic Cape Verde islands located 400 miles off the coast of western Africa. Aloe is another low-maintenance plant that's tolerant of drought and salt, plus it's pest resistant. Break open aloe's thick leaf to use its inner gel on burns.

You can find most of these plants at local garden centers and specialty nurseries, and most local botanical gardens have specimens on display. It's often helpful to see a plant at mature size before you include it in your home landscape, especially the palms.

It's no surprise that Florida gardeners are turning to native plants. They require little to no extra water or fertilizer compared to most exotics, save money and don't pollute surface water with chemicals that run off into streams and creeks. They're also the best choice for attracting native wildlife, including birds and butterflies.

The Florida Native Plant Society offers information, resources and links at www.fnps.org. The local chapter meets monthly in Clearwater. Call (727) 544-7341 for more information. You can also search for documents on native plants at the University of Florida's Electronic Data Information Source (<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>).

There are some helpful books with color photos of plants that you might want to add to your own library or recommend to others. Horticulturists at the Pinellas County Extension frequently consult *A Gardener's Guide to Florida's Native Plants* (Rufino Osorio, University Press of Florida, 2001, \$24.95) and *Native Florida Plants: Low-Maintenance Landscaping and Gardening* (Robert G. Haehle and Joan Brookwell, Gulf Publishing Co., 2004, \$18.94).

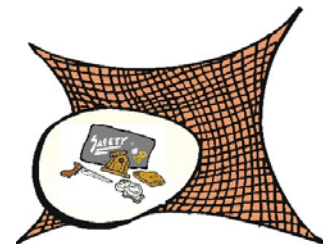
It's best to be an educated consumer when shopping for native plants, urges Extension's Dale Armstrong, coordinator of the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods program, which promotes the use of native plants. Make a list of plant material before you shop, and find a nursery that specializes in Florida natives, such as Wilcox Nursery in Largo (727-393-8110), which is a member of the Association of Florida Native Nurseries (www.afnn.org). A good source

for books and supplies for backyard birding and butterfly gardening is Nature's Focus in Seminole (727-393-8110) and Tarpon Springs (727-453-6959).

Another good source for plants is the low-cost nursery at Pinellas Technical Education Center (727-893-2500, ext. 1101) in St. Petersburg, where horticulture students grow and maintain native Florida plants.

Safety Nets

By PAM BROWN
Horticulture Agent



Although gardens can be a source of pleasure, relaxation and exercise, unfortunately, there is the potential for nasty accidents.

Many of the following points might sound like common sense, but it is incredible how many people end up in hospital because they have not taken basic safety precautions in the garden.

Why accidents happen

- Taking shortcuts
- Ignoring potential risks
- Inadequate planning and preparation
- Lack of skill or training to ensure that the job is done safely
- And, of course, bad luck; being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Making your garden safer

- You can help to avoid accidents by following some simple guidelines:
- Design a garden so that it reduces the need for high maintenance and lifting.
- Use surfaces that provide a good grip underfoot.
- Do not leave sharp tools lying around.
- Electrical equipment should never be used in wet weather.
- Lock away chemicals such as weed killers and insecticides. Just because they have the words 'organic' or 'bio' on them, does not make them safe for children to touch.
- Wear safety equipment - such as goggles, hats, gloves and steel toe shoes - when

using machinery. Tuck in loose items of clothing.

- If you are in the least bit unsure about the safety of tackling a job, call in professionals.

Source BBC Gardening



By **CHUCK SCAFFIDI, MG**

Have you noticed someone from the Horticulture staff wandering around the FBG during lunch looking like a professional photographer? Well its Wilma Holley, Dale Armstrong's FY&N program assistant with camera and lenses in hand (not digital) capturing our growing gardens and wildlife. Her collection of photos is outstanding, including the 11 new baby alligators.

If you have noticed, the St Petersburg times shows a photo each day in the classified section picked from photo buffs in the area. Each month in the newsletter I am going to include a couple of her best photos so we all can enjoy the best. Wilma will also be happy to let you look at her collection.



Pipevine Swallowtail
On Plumbago shrub



"Fallen Bloom"
Shaving Brush Tree
Pseudobombax ellipticum

Important Announcements!



■ It's here and working.

You now have the ability to send your volunteer hours by e-mail.

The e-mail address is: MGEDU@co.pinellas.fl.us. Please be specific when doing this – include individual dates and hours worked just like you would in the logbook. MG Jan Curtin will be recording these hours that are sent in by this method.

■ Pinellas County Extension & Florida Botanical Gardens

We need help in collecting all publicity related to the Extension and FBG Gardens. Please clip any articles you see that mention us in any way, including weddings and outside events. Please place the clippings in the basket that is in the **break room**.

Please include the name of the publication and date published.

■ MG Participation in Events

MGs participating in special events should get prior approval and a check voucher from the MG Advisory committee if they are going to expend money for any event and expect reimbursement. Please follow this procedure.

See **Chuck Scaffidi** (582-2117) if you have questions about this procedure. MG members manage the advisory account.



Volunteers Needed!!!

For Volunteer Opportunities:

Please see or call **Carol Suggs** to volunteer for events (582-2124) or the contact person in the help wanted ad.

■ Tour Guides Needed

Tour guide season is between September and May.

Please make your interest known to **Tom Roberts** or **Sue Richardson**; visit them or call

582-2242 to make an appointment. They will brief you on what is required of a tour guide and sign you up to shadow tours. Also, you may assist during a tour to get experience - **sign up!!**

■ Help Needed!

Help needed for one Wednesday afternoon (3 – 5:30 p.m.) children’s program in September, October or November to present a lesson on how to plant and care for tomatoes or some other easy to grow vegetable. This is a group of children gathering for Wacky Wednesday and their plan is to encourage good eating. Please contact **Deborah Schechner** at **488-4796** or **paxsez1@tampabay.rr.com**.
St. Josephs Church, 2102 22nd Avenue South
St. Petersburg

■ IFAS Award of Excellence for Master Gardener Projects

By **CHUCK SCAFFIDI, MG**

The advisory committee will continue to assist MG startup projects and identify projects that have state award potential.

We are in dire need of the following MG skills: creative writers, editors, reviewers, graphic artists and others willing to help meet the 2005 project deadline. Please see me or call **582-2117** if you are interested or you feel you are working on a project we should consider.

Although UPARC was not a 1st place winner in the **International MG Search for Excellence program** the award committee has requested us to provide a poster depicting the UPARC MG project. The poster will be displayed at the MG conference in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada July 24-27. I have literature about the conference in our volunteer office for anyone interested in attending.

Seven states in the USA were winners including an entry from Florida.



Celebrate the Fourth of July

Volunteer Opportunities and Events for July

■ MG Advanced Training

July 8th at 12 N in Auditorium A

This month Jean Field will be presenting “Incorporating Wildflowers and Native Plants into Your Landscape”. Please plan to be here!



★ **SAVE THE DATE** - *GardenFest III* is set for **Saturday, November 19th, 2005!**

MGs are needed to teach various classes that include plant propagation, plant care, rain barrel, micro-irrigation, composting, butterfly gardening, hypertufa, and many others. We are also looking for people to teach holiday crafts using plant materials. Others are wanted to assist with duties related to the running of GardenFest.

If you are interested, please contact **Ruth Davies** at **sunflower1368@juno.com** or phone **399-0352**. The next organizational meeting will be on **Tuesday, Aug. 2**, at noon in the conference room.

★ MG Plant Sale Meetings

By **CHUCK SCAFFIDI, MG**

A reminder to all, the plant sale meetings are the last Friday of the month and all are welcome to attend. **Next meeting is July 29 @ 10:00 am in auditorium C.**

Plant sale pricing.

At the plant sale meeting on **June 24** a concern was raised about pricing plants for sale.

MGs who propagate plants may not always agree with how the plants are priced.

To resolve this, a plant pricing committee led by Michael Petay was formed to consider how to establish fair prices.

The committee will develop a pricing methodology that will maximize our profits.

A ground rule that has already been established is that those who bring plants for sale or propagation must consider them as being donated to the plant sale committee.

If you are concerned about how plants are priced join the committee and present your thoughts and help with developing the pricing methodology.

Please contact Michael Petay at 582-2599 if you are interested.

The **Articles of Incorporation** for our MGAA account was completed and notarized. We have applied to the IRS for 503C tax-exempt status. A companion By-Laws document is required and we have a rough copy that will be available in the volunteer office for review and comments. Any questions about either documents or how and why MGAA was organized please see me.

The Plant Sales require an extraordinary amount of MG hours to make this a special and successful event. Your continued support is encouraged and we would like a goal of having the most MGs involved. This is a very rewarding learning experience personally. Knowing that plant sale profits benefit Master Gardener programs from education to supporting charitable organizations is an added bonus.

Get involved!!! Start by coming to our plant sale meetings and/or talk to the plant sale team leaders.

**25th Annual
FLORIDA MASTER GARDENER
CONTINUED TRAINING
CONFERENCE**

October 24-26, 2005

**University of Florida
J. Wayne Reitz Union
Gainesville, Florida**

<http://conference.ifas.ufl.edu/gardener/index.html#site>
e for more information



Things are finally slowing down after a very hectic spring. Hopefully, we can take a bit of a breather before the next MG training begins in August.

By the time you get this newsletter, I will be in Chicago attending the American Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta conference. I am looking forward to bringing back ideas for us to use in our programs here.

We have accepted 42 students in the upcoming MG training program that starts on August 10. If you are interested in sitting in on any of the training sessions as a refresher, the schedule will be posted on the bulletin boards in the back hall and the MG break area.

We are definitely in the heat of summer. Remember to protect yourself if you are spending any time outside.

Sunscreen, bug repellent, hat, and water to drink are a must. Remember, I have bug repellent and sunscreen in my office if you forget to bring it with you.



At the last Plant Sale Committee meeting it was suggested that we hold the meetings in conjunction with the MG update on the 8th of each month. I think that this might open the committee to greater participation. Please let me know if you have any reasons that this should not be done. I am collecting thoughts about this for the next month or so.

I know that I say this a lot – but each of you are so very important to our mission and we certainly appreciate everything that you do for us. Thank you!

♥ Pam



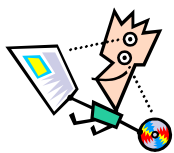
By CHUCK SCAFFIDI, MG

“Thriving through gardening”, was a feature article written by MG Yvonne Swanson in the June 28 St. Petersburg Times Seniority insert. Interviewed in the article is Doris Whitetaker a Pinellas County master gardener since 1990. If you have not read this very interesting story I have a copy in the Volunteer office. Pay particular attention to Doris’s (who is 85) reason for longevity.



I know it’s hard to see Doris in these photos. She is part of the Thursday crew laboring to beautify the Extension front entrance. To prove it, in the inset photo you will find Doris next to Spencer Curtis. She was interviewed by the Times on this day.

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 about **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, Editor  *The Green Leaf*

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

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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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The enclosed material is provided as one of the many services relating to the educational programs offered by this agency. Our statewide network of faculty is prepared to provide current information on food, agriculture, marine and natural resource science, energy, nutrition, family and 4-H youth, and related fields. We will be happy to help you with additional information upon request.

Pamela W. Brown

Pamela W. Brown
Extension Agent II, Environmental Horticulture

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