Holiday Lights in the Gardens Display Welcomes Joyful Season to Pinellas County

Sparkling goodwill and cheer will spread across Florida Botanical Gardens this year during the Holiday Lights in the Gardens display beginning Saturday, November 28. This premier Pinellas County celebration is a community tradition that visitors and residents can enjoy every evening through Sunday, January 3, from 6 to 10 p.m. A stroll through the shining Gardens adds a touch of festivity to everyone’s holidays.

The Gardens transform into a holiday wonderland with more than 400,000 twinkling lights, many of which are environmentally-friendly LED lights. Free family-friendly entertainment and music are planned. Food and beverages will be sold. This celebration is free to children under 12, and a minimum donation of $2 per adult is suggested. Just follow the bright glow to free parking.

The Florida Botanical Gardens display Florida’s finest formal gardens, scenic landscapes and natural habitats that unfold across 150 acres in the heart of Pinellas County. More than 25 gardens and display areas showcase flora, fauna and natural resources to delight nature enthusiasts. Some of the gardens offer tropical plants, roses, fruits, herbs, hibiscus, bromeliads and create a Florida friendly footprint.

A Botanical Bounty Store located in the Welcome Center sells gifts with a horticultural flair and is ideal for holiday shopping.

The annual celebration is sponsored by the Florida Botanical Gardens Foundation. To learn more about the celebration or to volunteer to support the holiday event, please call (727) 582-2247.

The above article is a press release which will appear in the news media. This is a FBG Foundation sponsored event and gratefully thank the many Master Gardeners who have volunteered to support this traditional Holiday Lights in the Gardens celebration and are working diligently to make this a success. As you know, we can always use more help, so please consider joining us. Visit me in the MG volunteer office and I can provide the details. Vivian Haicken and I are co-chairing this event. Chuck Scaffidi, FBGF Chair
Plant of the Month in our FBG
By JAMES STEVENSON, Public Education Specialist, FBG

**Callicarpa Americana – Beauty Berry**

Our area of Florida lies at the intersection of the northern temperate (cold/warm season) and southern tropical (dry/wet season) zones. Therefore we are blessed with those plants from each zone that can tolerate a bit of both. This is the time of year when we begin to see which plants from which zone are going through their seasonal changes.

Species whose distribution reaches its southernmost here are beginning to re-arrange their sugars and pigments; some losing leaves, some turning colors before doing so. More southerly species may just be taking a break, and preparing for the dry season. Tropical species may produce flowers and fruits year-round, timing fruiting to take advantage of whatever distribution vector they prefer. Temperate species tend to produce fruits at the end of the season, allowing seed to spend the cold season without germinating, saving that event for spring when temperatures warm. Therefore we have the Autumn Harvest and many temperate species are now laden with fruit.

One group of distributors of seed is the migrating birds. These wonders fly south to over winter in sunnier climes, and depend on a rich assortment of foods along their route. These migrants are beginning to arrive along what is called the Atlantic Flyway—a path taken by many birds from as far north as northern Canada. Some will winter here; some are just stopping-by to fuel up before making a remarkable trans-Gulf journey to Mexico or the Caribbean.

One of our winter residents, the Gray Catbird, will feed on the berries of the American Beautyberry which are in full ripeness now. This easy-to-grow native shrub is a welcomed addition to any Central Florida garden. Beauty berry is extremely tolerant of a wide range of conditions, from poorly-drained to very dry—drought generally just keeps the plants small. In ideal conditions the shrub will grow to a height of 6-8 feet and as wide. For a very tidy plant with loads of arching branches, prune to 8 inches from the ground in late winter. Flowers (thus fruit) will be borne on new growth in profusion.

This plant is in the mint family (Lamiaceae) and its name Callicarpa is derived from the Greek *kalli-* beautiful and *karpos-* fruit. Well-named!

*Editor’s note: Reprinted from November ’07 issue. Take a walk along the pond area, northeast of the Tropical Fruit Garden, and enjoy the Beauty Berry bushes in full color.*
Plant Health Starts With the Soil
By Jane Morse, Extension Agent

Did you know there are more than 70,000 different kinds of soil in the United States? With all these different kinds of soil their respective properties vary widely. How much water or nutrients they hold, their pH and drainage can all be wildly different. Unfortunately for most Florida gardeners our soils are mainly sand. Sand does not hold on to much of anything, so water, nutrients and pollutants flow right through and into our ground water.

Soils can be characterized by their alkalinity (high pH) or acidity (low pH). Most plants prefer soils in the 5.5 to 6.5 pH range, which is slightly acidic. This is also the pH range where most plant nutrients are easily available to plants. When soil pH is either above or below this optimum range plants may start to show nutritional deficiencies (hunger signs) or toxicity symptoms.

Our Florida coastal soils tend to be very alkaline, whereas soils that formed pine flatwoods can be very acidic. Sea shells, marl and limestone are very high in calcium and are the main reason for our coastal soils being so alkaline. Some calcium-rich building materials such as concrete and stucco can also raise the soil pH. Plants grown in alkaline soils are commonly lacking these plant nutrients: iron, manganese, zinc and boron.

To determine your soil pH you can send a sample to a trustworthy lab such as the University of Florida Extension Soil Testing Laboratory (http://soilslab.ifas.ufl.edu). Once you know the pH of your soil you can choose the plants best suited to your soil, or understand why some plants are not growing well. Strongly alkaline soils are generally a greater problem in landscapes and proper plant selection is very important. Acid-loving plants such as azalea, ixora, gardenia and blueberry will never do well in an alkaline soil. There is no way to permanently lower the pH of soils formed from high calcium materials, so proper plant selection is critical for plant health.

The University of Florida Extension Soil Testing Laboratory (ESTL) can also provide a fertility analysis. This test tells you how much phosphorus (P), potassium (K), calcium (Ca) and magnesium (Mg) are in your soil. This report also includes pH, lime and fertilizer recommendations for selected lawn and landscape plants based on your soil sample.

To avoid damage to your landscape plants, always have your soil tested for pH and/or lime requirement before adding lime or sulfur to the soil. If you want to grow plants that are not suited to your soil pH, consider growing them in pots with another soil that has been amended to provide the proper pH.

How to Collect a Soil Sample
1. Identify the area to be sampled. Turf areas, vegetable gardens and ornamental beds should all be sampled separately. Also, any problem areas (such as depressions, rocky areas, etc.) should be sampled separately to avoid contaminating samples from good areas.
2. Using a shovel (or soil probe), remove soil from 10 to 15 locations within the sampling area. Soil should be removed from the top 6 inches. Walk in a zigzag pattern, stopping occasionally to remove soil for the sample.
3. After taking each sub-sample, remove any plant material or mulch and deposit the soil into the plastic bucket. Mix the soil in the bucket to ensure it is well blended.
4. Spread the soil out on a newspaper or paper grocery bag and allow it to dry thoroughly.
5. Once dry, pack approximately 1 pint of soil (fill to the dotted line) into a soil sample bag (available free from your county Extension office). Alternatively, you may pack soil into a zip-top plastic bag.

Soil samples being submitted to the Extension Soil Testing Lab (ESTL) should be accompanied by a completed Landscape & Vegetable Garden Soil Test Information Form (http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/SS187) or you can pick up the form at the Extension Office. The ESTL offers two soil tests for the home lawn, landscape and vegetable garden. Test A ($3) includes soil pH and lime requirement analyses; Test B ($7) adds analysis of phosphorus (P), potassium (K), calcium (Ca), and magnesium (Mg). Include your check or money order for the test you've chosen, along with the form and your soil sample.

If using another soil testing lab, you should contact it first to obtain instructions on how to submit soil samples. Be aware that private laboratories may not use soil tests that are calibrated for our region.
**IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- MG Update Meetings
- MG Classes
- Extension Classes
- Safety Harbor Garden Club
- Estuary Academy
- Neighborhood Gardener
- MG Discounts
- Plant ID Website

**GEUs for MG**

GEUs are awarded to MGs who attend the monthly classes held at our two off-site teaching locations; Palm Harbor Library and West St. Petersburg Community Library. If you attend or assist at these classes, feel free to enter the 2 hours of class time as GEU credit.

**RECORDING YOUR VOLUNTEER HOURS**

Please Remember to Sign Out!
The computer program for logging volunteer hours is outside the volunteer office, near the help desk.

- 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.

When not at Extension email your hours to: cascaffidi@juno.com

Please direct your questions to coordinator Chuck Scaffidi or an assistant, Susan Baughman or Emma Eshbaugh.

**Master Gardener Update Schedule - Mark your Calendar!**

**Thursday, October 8, 9AM**— Dr. Sydney Park Brown via Polycom presents *Perennials*.

**Monday November 9, 9AM**— James Kovaleski presents *Edible Landscaping & Permaculture*.

**Tuesday, December 8, 9AM**— Elizabeth Austin from Crime Prevention Task Force will discuss *Home, Auto, Personal and Identity Theft*.

**North and South County MG Classes**

Admission is free for the following classes, but space is limited. Register online at [www.pinellascountyextension.org](http://www.pinellascountyextension.org) with a click on the “Online Class Registration” button or call 727-582-2100.

**Drought Tolerant Plants** Pam Brown discusses drought tolerant plants in a Florida Friendly landscape. The program is offered on **Wednesday, October 14, at 2 PM and 6:15 PM**. The library is at 2330 Nebraska Ave in Palm Harbor.

**Compost Happens** Nature composts all the time. Dr. John Kingsbury, MG, presents the program on **Wednesday, October 28, at 2 PM at the West St. Petersburg Community Library, 6605 5th Avenue North, St. Pete**.

**Upcoming MG Garden Tours**

**Thursday, November 12** in Oldsmar at Pam Brown’s — details to be announced.

**Wednesday, December 9** in St Petersburg at Phil Stager’s 4184 51st Ave S.

**Tuesday, January 19th**, at Vivian Haicken’s, FBGF Board Member, details to be announced.

**Series of Extension Classes - Mark your Calendar!**

The following classes will be offered at Extension for free to MGs, Volunteers and FBGF members that register. When you attend you must show one of the membership cards. All others pay a nominal fee of $15 to attend. Please see Extension’s on-line calendar page for details and to register.

**Saturday, October 10, 9-11AM** *It’s Not Too Late to Vegetable Garden*

**Thursday, October 15, 11:30AM-12:30PM** *Basics of Climate Change—Webinar*

**Tuesday, October 20, 6:30-8PM** *Rain Harvesting Workshop*

**Saturday, October 24, 10-11AM** *Selecting Florida Friendly Plants for Your Yard—at Brooker Creek*

**Wednesday, November 4, 12:15-12:45PM** *Solution in 30—When Vegetable Gardens Go Bad—Webinar*

**Saturday, November 7, 10AM-12PM** *Compost Happens!*

**4**
A Message from Sandy Huff, MG, and Safety Harbor Garden Club

Since 1991, the Safety Harbor Garden Club has gotten together the third Wednesday of every month to learn, pot, dig, chat, eat, swap, and generally become better guardians of the soil--plus enjoy beautiful yards. At each meeting, we challenge members to bring in an original arrangement. We also collect non-perishable foods for the SH Neighborhood Center. Bring plants and garden items to swap. Membership is $15 a year, or $25 per family. Our 52 members have a great time. Come join us.

The next meeting on October 21 is a field trip to 7 gardens in Old Northeast Neighborhood.
Meet at Safety Harbor Library 101 Second Street North (just across the street from the Safety Harbor Spa) at 8AM, first house at 9AM. For information, call 727-420-6184, or email huffsandy@aol.com.
Editor's note: Thank you to the Safety Harbor Garden Club for their $100 donation towards the Holiday Lights in the Gardens.

Estuary Academy 2009

Registration is now open for the 2009 Estuary Academy, set for Saturday, October 24 from 9AM-3PM at Weedon Island Preserve in St. Petersburg. The Academy's mission is to introduce citizens to the wealth of scientific research being conducted in the Tampa Bay Watershed, and provide hands-on science learning experiences. This year's theme is “A Glimpse Beneath the Surface,” highlighting underwater life and human interactions with this watery world.

The $10 registration fee includes lunch, fabulous speakers, door prizes and a choice of terrific, hands-on workshops. The Academy has something for everyone! Participation is limited to 100 adults and children over 12, and pre-registration is required. An agenda and registration form are now available online at www.tbep.org. Registration payment can be made online through PayPal. If you wish to pay by check, please contact Colleen Gray at (727) 893-2765 or email colleen@tbep.org for instructions.

Benefits to FBGF Membership and Master Gardener Certification

We have identified nursery owners in our communities who are willing to offer a 10% discount to members of the Florida Botanical Gardens and to Master Gardeners. When you make a purchase at these businesses, please present your membership card for the discount. We will continue to contact nurseries in the area to secure additional participants to this program. In addition to Art Stone Orchids, Earthscapes Garden Room, Palm Harbor Nursery & Landscaping and Wilcox Nursery the following are now providing discounts:

Kathy's Korner (10% off Trees)
Nursery Inc. & Tree Farm
6095 Haines Road N., St. Petersburg, FL 33714
Phone: 727-525-9640
Hours: Mon-Sat 9AM to 5PM and Sun 10AM to 4PM

Willow Tree Nursery (10% off all purchases)
4401 49th St. N, St. Petersburg, FL 33709
Phone: 727-522-2594
Hours: Mon-Fri 8AM to 5PM, Sat & Sun from 10AM to 4PM

A complete list of discount nursery is posted in the Volunteer Office.

The Neighborhood Gardener


This month's topics include: Hurricane Landscaping, Plant Identification Learning Module, Plant of the Month: Firebush, Friend of Foe? Friend: Lovebugs.

Vintage Woodstock Photos

Jude Bagatti, MG, and a frequent contributor to our newsletter has several of her photographs, as well as her other paraphernalia from the Woodstock era, on display until Saturday, November 7, at the Florida Museum of Photographic Arts in downtown Tampa. She is very excited about having a vintage photo of her hippie days on exhibit. You can view some of the photos and learn more on the Museum's website: http://www.fmopa.org/

Plant ID Website

A new website allows Master Gardeners to learn to identify 200 plants - fruits, veggies, landscape ornamentals, houseplants and flowers. The website includes color images and descriptions of each plant and a “Test Yourself” option. http://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/mastergardener/outreach/plant_id/
In Search of Guest Speakers to Teach Students
St. Cecelia School in Clearwater is looking for MG speakers to enhance the learning experience related to their recently developed Native Plant Garden. The garden has been a big success and they would like to start composting, worm composting, collecting rain water, and learn more about native plants. If you are interested in talking to the students about any of these topics please contact Carol Suggs, at 727-582-2124.

Great American Teach-In—Speakers Needed
Carol Suggs has speaker requests to fill for the day of the Great American Teach In on Wednesday, November 18. If you are interested in speaking to a school group please contact Carol at 727-582-2124. She will add your name to the list and will match you to an appropriate group.

Take a Walk on the Wild Side
Have you taken a walk through the gardens lately? Sure, it’s warm out there, but a quick stroll along the Children’s Trail reveals lots of surprises. There are several new benches, and the plants are loving our summer rains. The Children’s Trail Committee is seeking woodsmen (or women!) and tree trunks to create pint-sized chair and table sets for little ones. We’d love to add more seating and other features to attract the gardeners of tomorrow. If you wish to contribute, call Chuck Scaffidi at 727-582-2117. And treat yourself to a stroll down the Children’s Trail—all ages welcome!

Florida Master Gardener Continued Training Conference November 2-4, 2009, Hilton Ocala, Ocala
Want to learn the latest gardening news from the IFAS specialists? Pack your weekend bag, and join fellow gardeners from around Florida at the annual Master Gardener Continued Training Conference. Carpooling is available and sharing rooms is possible too.

For more information, check out the web site http://conference.ifas.ufl.edu/gardener/index.html.

The Hilton Ocala is offering participants of the 29th Annual Florida Master Gardener Continued Training Conference, a very special rate of $99.00 per night (plus 8.5% state and local taxes), for up to 4 people in a room. The group rate will be honored three days prior and three days following the conference dates, based on availability.

If we do not occupy a sufficient amount of guest rooms throughout the meeting, we will incur additional costs for meeting room rental charges. Therefore, we encourage all meeting participants to stay in the host hotel. Consequently, guests not staying at the Hilton Ocala during the conference will be charged a $100 facilities fee to cover their portion of meeting room rental charges incurred. [Explanation of Facilities Usage Fee].

Pre-Holiday Sale at Botanical Bounty Gift Shop
Take advantage of our Pre-Holiday Sale, the week of November 16th! We’ve got unique and beautiful gifts for under $10 – the "boutique mystique" without the high prices. We will have new stock in tees, mugs and ornaments, as well as gifts for all your gardening relatives and friends.

The gift shop is a not-for-profit shop with all proceeds remaining right here in our beautiful Florida Botanical Gardens.
Time to Clean Out!
For the Yard Sale of the Year at PTEC!

Bring us your gently used:
- Appliances
- Books
- Clothes
- Electronics
- Garden Stuff
- Home Furnishings
- Jewelry
- Kids’ Stuff
- Sports Stuff

Drop off at PTEC Horticulture Building
901 34th Street South
8:00 - noon, Mon., Tues., Wed. through 10/3; 5-7 p.m. on 10/1 & 10/8
Call 580.9301 or 643.9748 for other arrangements

PTEC Yard Sale
Saturday, October 10
7 a.m. - 2 p.m.
Refreshments and Kids’ Activities Available

Free Slash Pine Trees Given Away by Westenberger Tree Service
First Come, First Served
By JANE MORSE
Extension Agent

In case you missed the MG Update, there were several announcements heralding change.

■ Jean Field requested a part-time position so that she could spend more time with her aging parents. This was granted and she will begin her part-time status on October 1st.

■ To help consolidate services and make sure that all garden volunteers are getting the same message, Bob Albanese will now be in charge of all garden volunteers. I know this may come as a shock and you may miss the leader you have been working with, however, Bob is great to work with and I’m sure you will learn much from him and enjoy working with him.

■ In addition to my full-time job of Commercial Horticulture I have been given the added responsibility of leading the Urban Horticulture/MG program until a new agent is hired. This may be 3 to 5 years away. I will need everyone’s help to keep things running smoothly. My vision is to keep on doing what we’ve been doing as much as possible. Master Gardeners may need to take on more responsibility and help with group activities and such. Committee time!

Effective October 1st all soil samples will be sent to UF in Gainesville (client does the mailing). The soil sample bags and mailing boxes will be located in one of the storage furniture pieces in the help desk area. We will provide clients with the soil sample form, bags and a mailing box. There is also a publication entitled "Soil Sampling and Testing for the Home Landscape or Vegetable Garden" which should also be provided to them.

Remember only UF/IFAS or Pinellas County materials are allowed for general public display (this is a county policy and has to do with legal issues). That means Orchid Society, Native Plant Society, etc. are prohibited for display. Their information may be placed in the Volunteer area only (no general public display).

Things will be changing October 1. We don’t know exactly how things will work and there will be an adjustment time for all of us. Hang in there! We will figure it out and do the best we can. There may be more shuffling of duties as we try to figure out what works the best, so stay tuned.

It has been brought to my attention that some people are sensitive to perfumes and other toiletry essences, so in deference to these people avoid using these products when volunteering in closed areas. Your cooperation will be greatly appreciated.

Just know that we appreciate you very much and need your time and talents more than ever! Change can be a great opportunity for innovation.

Editor’s Note: Mary Campbell announced in the September MG Update, that Jane Morse, Commercial Horticulture Agent, is our new Interim Master Gardener Coordinator for Pinellas County. Most of you already know Jane from her commercial work at Extension. Jane has a Master’s Degree in adult education and her newest large-scale project is the coordination of the new Best Management Practices training for commercial fertilizer applicators. We are proud to have Jane provide her thoughts as Pam Brown did for so many years in the newsletter.

By SANDY HUFF, MG

This article was in the Florida Forest Steward newsletter; written for owners of large tracts of land, including woods. Here is the part that might apply to us suburbanites: "...one of our favorite forest products may be lurking around your back door waiting to light up. Pine straw, pine bark nuggets, and shredded wood (cypress or yard waste) are use for...landscaping. They retain soil moisture, reduce irrigation and erosion, add organic matter to the soil, and enhance aesthetic appeal with no problems.

But laid on the ground next to your wood siding or wood deck they are a potential ignition source for your house from embers from a wildfire, a match, or even a cigarette butt. In dry conditions, pine straw is particularly flammable and produces long flames and high temps that can light other wood and even melt vinyl siding.

Pine bark and shredded wood are harder to ignite, but once started they smolder for long periods with enough heat for the same effects.

Solution? Keep organic mulch 3-5 feet away from wood or vinyl structures. Borders of gravel, cinder rock, or other non-flammable materials should be next to or under flammable exterior features.”

Visit Florida Forest Steward website at http://www.ssrc.ufl.edu/extension/florida_forestry_information/additional_pages/newsletter.html
FIELD NOTES
By JEAN FIELD, Extension Specialist Horticulture

Field Notes

Life’s Tough Decisions

I was vacillating back and forth on whether to reduce my hours to help my elderly parents, mulling over the usual pros and cons of such a change, when suddenly the decision was made for me. One look at the fourteen staples in my father’s head from his fall told me it was time to step back from career to put my family first. I am an only child with no children, so caring for mom and dad rests with me. Many of you have been where I am headed and I thank you for the supportive words you have been sending my way.

This turns out to be a major win-win for Wilma Holley and me. Wilma will not be laid off from the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods position that she enjoys and I will be able to continue working at Extension while caring for the last two members of my immediate family. Such an opportunity as this comes along but once.

Beginning October 1st, my schedule will reduce to Tuesday, Thursday and alternating Mondays, focusing on the diagnostic desk and the horticulture phone line.

None of this would have been possible without the empathy and support of Mary, Andy, Jane and Dale to whom I am most grateful.

2009 October

THURS OCT 8, 9AM
MG Update
Dr. Sydney Park Brown presents Perennials via Polycom

SAT OCT 10, 9-11AM
It’s Not Too late to Vegetable Garden at Extension

WED OCT 14, 2 & 6:15PM
Drought Tolerant Plants at the Palm Harbor Library

TUES OCT 20, 6:30-8PM
Rain Harvesting Workshop at Extension

SAT OCT 24, 10-11AM
Selecting Florida Friendly Plants for Your Yard at Brooker Creek

WED OCT 28, 2-3PM
Compost Happens at West St Pete Comm. Library

Looking Ahead!
SAT NOV 7, 10AM-12PM
Compost Happens at Extension

MON NOV 9, 9AM
MG Update
James Kovaleski presents Edible Landscaping & Permaculture.

MG Plant Clinic at the Palm Harbor Library –Wednesdays from 10AM to 2PM
Master Gardeners offer diagnostic services that include soil testing along with information about identifying plants, treatment for insects and ideas for Florida-friendly landscaping.

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

Reminder—Mark Your Calendar!

- MG Update
  Thursday, October 8 at 9AM
  Dr. Sydney Park Brown presents “Perennials” via Polycom