What’s that Blooming Tree?

By Jane Morse, UF/IFAS Extension Agent, Pinellas County

Have you seen it? It has beautiful large pink flowers, and set against our fall blue skies it is very striking. It is the floss silk tree (Chorisia speciosa). It is a native of Brazil and Argentina, but will grow in hardiness zones 9b to 11. Pinellas County is in zone 9b where the plant needs to be protected from cold when young.

This tree can reach 50 feet in height and can be just as wide, so it isn’t a good choice for a small standard size house lot. It needs lots of growing space. It has rapid growth on good soil. It is deciduous (loses its leaves part of the year) with upright and rounded wide-spreading branches. It needs to be planted in full sun on reasonably fertile and well-drained soil. It has no salt tolerance – sorry if you live on the beach and want this tree.

This tree is prickly as it has stout, conical spines on the bark. This would be a real “ouch” if you happened to run into this tree. The bark slowly turns gray with age and the spines may be lost.

The beauty is in the flowers which range in color from white to lavender with pink as the predominant color. Some flowers have white centers and dark streaks. The flowers are large at 5 inches wide and are borne in short clusters. It blooms in the fall when the tree is bare of leaves which makes the flowers really stand out since there are no leaves to hide them. An amazing fact about this tree is that the flowers have such a variety of shapes and colors that neighbors have been known to argue about which one of their trees was a true floss silk, when in fact they both were.

This tree can be propagated by seed (although these are only occasionally produced in Florida), or grafting. Grafted trees are preferred as they bloom earlier and at a smaller size. Two grafted varieties are “Majestic Beauty” and “Los Angeles Beautiful”.

This tree can be used as a specimen or novelty tree. It doesn’t have any major problems other than it can be messy and it has large surface roots. Only plant this tree if you have adequate space for it to grow. The Florida Botanical Gardens has three specimens that you can come and admire in the fall.
Fall Can Be Hard On Plants

By Jane Morse, UF/IFAS Extension Agent, Pinellas County

The wet days of summer are gone and the dry season is now upon us. Plants that were continually wet all summer may have lost some of their root system due to lack of oxygen. Now as the weather dries they have less of a root system to gather precious water. We can help plants thrive with proper watering, both during the wet and dry season. Selecting plants for the site conditions is the best, low maintenance way to go.

Hopefully you turned off your irrigation system during the wet summer. As long as plants are getting rain every few days during the summer, or if the soil is staying saturated, there is no need to apply water. As the soil starts to dry out and the rain frequency slows down we need to pay close attention to our plants. Many plants will start to wilt under drought stress, but they can also wilt if they have a rotted root system from too much water. It is important to check the soil moisture. Pull away the mulch and test the soil with your finger. Poke down about 2 or 3 inches and see if you feel any moisture. If it is dry all the way down then you probably need to apply water, especially if the plant is wilting.

It is best to water early in the morning to avoid disease development. When plants are watered late in the day they will stay wet for a much longer time period and this allows fungal diseases to infect them. If you can water at 6 AM that is much better than 6 PM. It is also best to water deeply and infrequently, rather than shallowly and frequently. Watering deeply allows the root system to go deeper in the soil and allows the plant to become more drought-tolerant. It is usually best to apply ½ to ¾ inch of water and then wait for symptoms of wilt before watering again. This will promote a deeper root system and a healthier plant. Use a rain gauge to know how much water has already been supplied by rainfall.

Plant beds should be on a different irrigation zone than lawn areas because they usually need to be watered less often than grass. Installing drip irrigation to plant bed areas is easy and can save water too. Check all irrigation systems at least once a month and repair any leaks or broken heads. Irrigation heads should spray from head to head for proper coverage. Make sure that driveways and sidewalks aren’t getting watered (they don’t need it). Fall is a great time to apply mulch. It works both as a weed preventer and a water conservor. Just be sure to keep it away from the plant base as it should not cover the root ball area. Mulch can prevent water from getting to the plant roots if it covers the root ball.

Make your grass more drought-tolerant by raising the mower height. Standard St. Augustine varieties, like Floratam, Palmetto or Bitterblue, should be mowed at 4 inches. Dwarf St. Augustine varieties, like Sapphire, Seville or Captiva, should be mowed at 2.5 inches.

If you are looking at all the growth that took place during the summer and wanting to hack it back – don’t. This is the wrong time of year to prune most plants. Spring flowering shrubs, like azalea, should be pruned in late spring. Plants that flower on this year’s growth (Hibiscus, rose, crape myrtle) should be pruned while dormant or just before the spring growth spurt. Shade trees should be pruned during dormancy (winter) or just after a growth flush. Most evergreens (podocarpus, holly, ligustrum) can be lightly pruned anytime. A rule of thumb is to leave at least 2/3 of the plant intact.

For answers to your gardening questions, please contact your local Extension office at 727-582-2100. Their Lawn and Garden Help Desk via phone is available Monday, Tuesday and Thursday from 9 AM to noon and 1 PM to 4 PM. Walk-in help is available Monday through Friday from 8 AM to 5 PM. You can also ask your question via computer at http://AskExtension.org, or see the Extension website at http://PinellasCountyExtension.org for more information.
Transitioning to the Florida Climate November Yard Tour

By Christy Herig, Volunteer

Cat Stillwagon graciously hosted the November yard tour. Cat and her husband moved down to the property from New Jersey about 6 years ago. Like many who relocate to our subtropical climate, Cat went through a transition period. The first year was spent cleaning up, and cutting back overgrowth. The second year focused on recreating her northeast/mid-atlantic garden – with hydrangeas’ still present as a NJ hold out. The third year she accepted freebies. Now settled with experience in Florida gardens, Cat has populated the garden with favorites, which includes a variety of orchids and birds nest ferns. Gloriosa lilies grow up between her front windows. A trellised stephanotis vine near her front door is a reminder of her wedding bouquet and several gardeners noted the strong local florist’s market for stephanotis.

Discussion during the tour included the quandary of reclaimed water usage. We all know it is important for community sustainability and water conservation. However, because it is not recommended for edibles that are not peeled it is difficult to integrate herbs and vegetables into landscape. Cat is most bothered by the fact that roses and orchids do not thrive on reclaimed water. The Pinellas county website recommends drip irrigation for azaleas, Chinese privet, gardenias, roses, geraniums, and orchids. For information on plants that do thrive, check the Reclaimed Water Frequently Asked Questions.

The Stillwagon yard is a spacious Seminole property and Cat has made efficient use of the space. Scattered through the garden and creatively incorporated into the landscape are avocado, papaya and a variety of citrus, even an old Florida sour orange with two inch thorns. A small strip of property between the pool enclosure and the fence has been filled with orchids and shade loving tropicals, providing a feeling of lush growth around the pool without the stains and filtration problems often experienced by plant-loving pool owners.

During the tour Cat pointed out future plans for her landscaping. These include incorporating a great deal more of her lawn into her garden beds and developing a rain garden. Her plans for the rain garden are mainly driven by information available through the extension service such as Plant a Rain Garden for our Watershed. (Cat Stillwagon is center front in navy teeshirt)
FBG Foundation Update
Holiday Lights Sparkle

By CHUCK SCAFFIDI, FBG Foundation President

On Nov. 21, friends of the Florida Botanical Gardens Foundation were treated to a sneak preview of this year’s Holiday Lights and an unveiling of our new wedding garden mosaic art work “Aquatic Reflections” complete with live music, an elegant spread, flowing wine, and words of welcome from our friend Pinellas County Commissioner Karen Seel.

The annual festivities opened to the public the day after Thanksgiving and will run until Jan. 1.

Among the over 200 enjoying the beautiful evening weather as well as the 500,000 environmentally-friendly lights (installed by Luminous Décor) - were sponsors, Foundation members, Master Gardeners and other garden volunteers, Holiday Lights volunteers, and members of the FBG staff who work closely with the Foundation to make our Gardens a year-round delight. By their sponsorship, volunteerism, membership, and partnership with the gardens they have become our lifeline. This allows the Foundation to continue to assist the Parks and Recreation Department in maintaining this beautiful campus.

The party planner-in-chief was Terri Zeigler. Keyboardist Mark Techler and bass player Richard Jimenez contributed the beautiful background music. The tables of goodies were provided at a nice discount by Orange Blossom, the County’s catering contractor, and thanks go to Total Wine for a discount on the liquid refreshments.

Turning on the Holiday Lights takes a village, as they say. At the very least, many of our hard-working FBGF members. So many to thank! But I singled out two husband and wife teams and two county employees. They are pictured on the following page, middle of 2nd row, county employees Jason Vickers and Bob Funari, volunteers Richard and Kathleen Harder, and Richard and Terry Berube.

The second reason for this preview was the unveiling of the wedding garden mosaic corners. It has received much media coverage, including several local TV stories, magazines and newsprint. My co-chair for the holiday lights Erhan Ozey and artist Heather Anderson were acknowledged for their extraordinary efforts. See the top left photo.

The one to thank for this beautiful art work is volunteer Heather Anderson who presented this idea to the foundation. After many months of glass cutting by an all-volunteer group (some of them in top right photo), the hundreds of panels were ready to be installed. Critical to the long life of the mosaic design was the construction and installation of the panels. Throughout the hot summer months our board member, Erhan Ozey, took charge and with the hiring of Coastal Ceramic Tile Company we were able to finish the project to show-case it for this event. If you see Heather and Erhan I’m sure they will greatly appreciate your thanks for this outstanding work of art.

Barbara Goss, (third row far right) was also thanked for her amazing lineup of entertainers and also for her spearheading of our first fine arts event May 6, 2012. We have 5 art centers who have signed up: Dunedin Art Center, Florida Craftsmen, Morean Arts Center Chihuly Collection, and Leepa- Rattner Museum of Art. Recently I had a visit from the Tampa Museum of Art who may join the event. They were interested in how to improve the landscaping on their museum grounds and left loaded with ideas after seeing our gardens and are anxious to partner with us.

I was followed by County Commissioner Karen Seel who is a Clearwater native and truly loves Pinellas County. She is a strong believer in volunteerism, Karen has served on many local Boards and has participated in numerous community projects and fundraisers. Karen has been a great supporter of Pinewood Cultural Park and the Holiday Lights, and she even volunteers with us every year. We were happy to have Karen give her inspiring talk as we celebrated the beginning of the holiday season. She is in the bottom row photos. Notice in the last two pictures Karen has her hand raised and then attempts to pat her back. She asked the attendees to follow her in this motion for them to pat them selves on the back for all the great work that everyone is accomplishing in making the Florida Botanical gardens a highly recognized garden.

The dazzling lights will be illuminating the Gardens from 5:30 to 9:30 each night through Jan. 1 with a variety of vendors and entertainers adding to the festivities. The Plant and Gift Sale will be from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Dec. 11 The popular Dog Parade is Saturday, Dec. 31. The Botanical Bounty Gift Shop will be open every night. Greeters are still needed for some evenings; contact Chuck at cscaffidi@co.pinellas.fl.us
The Florida Botanical Gardens Foundation will be hosting their second annual Gift and Plant Sale on Sunday, December 11, 2011 from 10:00AM to 4:00PM in the formal gardens of the Florida Botanical Gardens.

Over 45 vendors will be on site selling a wide variety of both gifts and plants. It’s a great way to find that special gift for the holidays or just adding to your personal collection. Offered for sale are horticultural and garden related items such as bird feeders, flags, garden crafts, garden art, garden tools, pots, planters, stepping stones and wind chimes; gifts such as alpaca clothing and accessories, candles, nature themed ceramics, Christmas ornaments, clothing, confections, dinnerware, gourmet food, hand woven baskets, handmade soap, herbs, original paintings, spices, rubs, jewelry, pet treats, purses, vinegars/oils, and wreaths decorated with shells; and plants such as African violets, annual, perennials, roses, geraniums, bromeliads, butterfly plants, cacti, succulents, Florida natives, ground covers, orchids, ornamental grasses, roses, shrubs, tropical plants, vines, dragonfly plants, irises, herbs and wildflowers.

Shoppers can access the sale at either of the following entrances: 12520 Ulmerton Road or 12221 Walsingham Road. This is no charge to attend this event.

Have You Been in the Gift Shop Lately?

In a scant 300 square feet, the gift shop has a plethora of ways to bring your love of gardening into your home. Whether it is the well known book selection (children’s, reference, cook, photography), tools, toys, jewelry, skin care products or curios, the opportunities to share your botanical passion with your friends and loved ones is boundless.

Stacey Zidi, the part-time FBG employee and full time soccer Mom, is responsible for the management of the gift shop. In the short three weeks of my volunteer experience, I recognize an aesthetic talent in both the selection and arrangements of the shop. The assortment is both unique and reasonably priced. The collection ranges from stocking stuffers to Secret Santa priced gifts to that special gift for that special someone. Plus you are supporting FBG! Remember the FBG gift shop for your Christmas shopping needs!

Florida Botanical Gardens Gift Shop Looking for Volunteers

Duties include sales transactions, customer assistance, interacting with visitors as a “goodwill ambassador” for the Gardens and enjoying being friendly. No previous sales experience required. This is a low stress opportunity in a beautiful place with wonderful people. You must be reliable. Please consider joining us. We are a not-for-profit shop with all proceeds going back into the Gardens.

The shop is open from 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. Monday - Friday. The daily 7 hours are divided into two shifts, morning: from 10 until 1:30 and afternoon: 1:30 until 5. We look for a commitment of one shift per week during the year.

During our annual Holiday Lights event in the Gardens, evenings from November 25th through January 1st, we will also be open in the evening from 5 p.m. – 9:30 p.m. as separate shifts. We usually ask our current team of volunteers to pick 2-3 evening shifts to help us during the course of the event.

Please contact shop manager, Stacey Zidi, at 727-582-2251 to fill out an application and schedule and interview.
Lobby Gets New Makeover and is Decorated for the Holiday Lights

The new lobby Koi pond was constructed by Pinellas County Parks with advisory support and donations from Curry’s Koi and Ponds through the collaborative efforts of the FBG Foundation. Plants by County Extension.

FBGF Lobby decoration team: Pat Dietrich, Sue Hamill, Emma Eshbaugh and Kathleen Harder
We're Tweeting Up a Storm

To see what our followers are saying, click on the Twitter icon and follow a couple of simple steps. It's fun, and a great way to keep up with Gardens news between Green Leaves.

Maybe we can even get a botanical conversation going. Share gardening tips. Ask gardening questions. Tell us how wonderful the Gardens are looking. (All "attaboys" gratefully accepted.)

Facebook Fans Share Their Gorgeous Garden Photos

When you visit the Gardens and take fabulous photos of our trees, flowers, herbs, tropical fruits, butterflies, birds and maybe even an alligator, please share them on our Facebook page. We’re getting more and more fans all the time and if you haven't signed up, it’s easy to do. Use the link above and click on the f connect symbol. Become a fan today so that you can view visitor photos and comments. You can also share your experience at the gardens on the “Wall.”

Keep an eye out for your “Best Shots” in future issues.

Thanks Sherry Noon!
Love the gardens so much we finally joined. Thanks to all that keep it so beautiful!
Sherry and David noon.

Thanks Chip Weiner!–A place to heal in the gardens
Volunteer Opportunities and Announcements

- **Perkins Elementary**—Recently awarded a grant for their garden. They would love a visit or two from a Master Gardener to give them advice on how to expand and improve their current garden. They are located at the intersection of 18th Avenue South and 22nd Street South in St. Petersburg.

- **Freedom Square Independent Living**—Hosting a spring Eco-Fair in Seminole for its residents and employees on April 17, 2012. They would love to have a couple of Master Gardeners staff a table at their event to share information on things like container gardening, Florida-Friendly landscaping, water conservation, and more.

Education

- **MG Update**—The Dec. MG Update will be a field trip to tour the Tomato Breeding Program at the UF Gulf Coast Research and Education Center in Balm. This is where the ‘Tasti-Lee’ tomato was bred. That will be on Thursday, December 8th.

- **Short promo video all about Pinellas County Extension**—Access it through the MG VMS system in the Newsletters/Documents section. About a minute long, so check it out! Also, if you are giving a presentation you can play this as an opening to showcase all that Extension has to offer the community.

- **Earn Continuing Education Credits**—For more upcoming Extension classes please register at: [http://pinellas.ifas.ufl.edu/calendar.shtml](http://pinellas.ifas.ufl.edu/calendar.shtml)—MGs can earn up to four continuing education credits Modules at: [http://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/mastergardener/outreach/plant_id/index.shtml](http://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/mastergardener/outreach/plant_id/index.shtml)

- **Palm Harbor Library MG Class Series**—Classes are offered on the second Thursday of the month from 2-3:30 p.m. and from 6:15-7:45 p.m. at the Palm Harbor Library, 2330 Nebraska Avenue. To register, go to [http://pinellas.ifas.ufl.edu/](http://pinellas.ifas.ufl.edu/), click on the Take Action “Register for a program tab” and then click “Extension Service.” You may also call 727 582-2100. Taking holiday break.

- **St Petersburg Community Library MG Class Series**—Classes offered free at the main branch of the St. Pete Library located at 3745 Ninth Avenue N. To register, go to [http://pinellas.ifas.ufl.edu/](http://pinellas.ifas.ufl.edu/) Click on the Take Action “Register for a program tab” and then click “Extension Service.” You may also call 727 582-2100.

- **Extension Classes**: Visit Extension’s on-line calendar for a list of classes that are being offered free to MGs, volunteers and FBGF members with a membership card. All others pay a nominal fee. You can register on-line.

- **“Planting Pinellas” blog** Check it out at: [http://plantingpinellas.blogspot.com/](http://plantingpinellas.blogspot.com/)
Did you know that there are live Christmas tree farms here in Florida? Buying a Florida tree supports local farmers and can provide you and your family a more traditional holiday experience. Christmas tree farms are “green” too- they provide green space preservation that also consumes carbon dioxide and releases oxygen into the environment. Many farms even have areas where you can choose and cut your own live tree. Not only will you create memories, but your fresh cut tree will last longer than one cut weeks before and shipped long distances. To find one near you please visit the Florida Christmas Tree Association website at: http://www.flchristmastrees.com/Farms/Index.htm.

The types of trees grown in Florida are different than those available on your typical Christmas tree lot full of northern varieties. The most common trees grown in Florida on Christmas tree farms are: Red Cedar, Virginia Pine, Sand Pine, Spruce Pine, Arizona Cypress and Leyland Cypress. I can tell you from personal experience that the sand pine makes a great traditional looking Christmas tree that will last long after Christmas is over. They smell great too! When your celebrations are done and the decorations put away, please remember to recycle your tree: http://www.pinellascounty.org/utilities/press/pr-2010-12-23.html.

Another “green” choice for Christmas trees are living trees that you can plant in your landscape after the tinsel and ornaments have all been taken down. One example is a small rosemary tree for tabletops. For more info on their care, click here: http://brevard.ifas.ufl.edu/Forms%20and%20Publications/PDF/Rosemary%20Christmas%20Trees.pdf.

If you are interested in something larger that can be planted in your landscape after the holidays, you might consider one of the species listed above that are grown on Christmas tree farms. Be sure that you have the appropriate growing conditions and ample space for the mature size of the tree you choose. Once the holidays are over you can plant the tree in your yard, and this is a great time to do so because January is the best time of the year to plant trees in Florida. Be sure to purchase your tree from a nursery. Do not dig up a wild tree as it is likely that transplant shock will kill the tree. They are also not as likely to have that traditional Christmas tree shape most people are looking for. While the tree is inside you need to keep the soil moist to ensure that the tree keeps growing.

For even more information about Christmas trees, both living and artificial, please visit: http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/hot_topics/families_and_consumers/christmas_trees.html#living.

Happy Holidays!

THERESA BADUREK, Urban Horticulture Extension Agent
Contact me at 727-582-2109 or tbadurek@pinellascounty.org
Thanks to Local Nurseries, FBGF Members, MGs Can Save $$ When Beautifying Yards

One of the benefits of Foundation membership and being a certified Master Gardener is getting a 10 percent discount at several local nurseries. Just present your FBGF membership or MG card. We will continue to contact nurseries in the area to secure additional participants. Support our friends at:

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<th>Nursery Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Art Stone Orchids</td>
<td>3611 Tyrone Blvd, St. Petersburg</td>
<td>727-345-6733</td>
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<tr>
<td>Country Club Nursery</td>
<td>9850 Starkey Road, Largo,</td>
<td>727-397-4438</td>
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<tr>
<td>DragonFly Garden</td>
<td>730 Broadway, Dunedin</td>
<td>727-734-4900</td>
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<tr>
<td>Esperanza’s Garden Center</td>
<td>6001 Haines Road, St. Petersburg</td>
<td>727-742-8499</td>
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<td>Kathy’s Korner Nursery &amp; Tree Farm</td>
<td>6095 Haines Road North, St. Petersburg</td>
<td>727-525-9640</td>
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<tr>
<td>Earthscapes Garden Room</td>
<td>816 Alt. 19 N, Palm Harbor</td>
<td>727-786-4859</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jene’s Tropicals</td>
<td>6831 Central Ave., St. Petersburg</td>
<td>727-344-1668</td>
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<tr>
<td>Palm Harbor Nursery &amp; Landscaping</td>
<td>450 Riviere Road, Palm Harbor</td>
<td>727-784-2992</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seminole Nurseries</td>
<td>6230 102nd Ave. N, Pinellas Park</td>
<td>727 545-9619</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summerwood Gardens, Inc.</td>
<td>1171 Tarpon Springs Rd, Odessa</td>
<td>813-920-2153</td>
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<tr>
<td>Twigs and Leaves</td>
<td>2131 Central Ave., St. Petersburg</td>
<td>727-822-5400</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wilcox Nursery</td>
<td>12501 Indian Rocks Road, Largo</td>
<td>727-595-2073</td>
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<tr>
<td>Willow Tree Nursery</td>
<td>4401 49th St. N, St. Petersburg</td>
<td>727-522-2594</td>
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Click on ![Twitter](https://twitter.com) to get map directions and hours of operation.
2011 November Dates to Remember
Thank You, Volunteers!!

- MG update-field trip Thursday Dec. 8

MG Plant Clinic at the Palm Harbor Library –Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Master Gardeners offer diagnostic services 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:
http://www.pinellascounty.org/scripts/publish/webevent.pl?