



August 2012

Table of Contents:



What's Bugging You?

Florida-Friendly Landscaping™
and Native Plants

Snails and Slugs

Upcoming Events

Timely Gardening Tips

Published by Norma Samuel
University of Florida IFAS
Marion County Horticulture Agent

What's Bugging You?

by Norma Samuel, Extension
Agent III, Horticulture

Find out what local
residents are calling in
about

How can I make my figs
sweeter?

Figs prefer hot, dry spring and summer and cool wet winter. The hotter the weather the sweeter the figs will be. Also, the riper the fig, the sweeter it is. The sweetest figs are the ones picked directly from the tree and eaten. I have a fig tree in my garden at home and in order get figs to eat we tend to pick them just as they turn purple. If we wait much longer than that, we stand the chance of competing with the birds and squirrels. Guess who usually wins – surely not the person

Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ and Native Plants

by Marylou Klein, Master Gardener

Always keeping in mind the principle, right plant, right place, it is a good idea to incorporate native plants into your landscape. First of all, there are some indescribably beautiful natives. They come in all shapes and sizes for all landscape situations. Full sun, partial sun, or shade...there is something that will fit the bill. If carefully chosen, they will need little care, including fertilizing and watering. They are pest resistant, yet attract both butterflies and birds, and more importantly, the good guys from the insect diversity we have here. Many attract native pollinators which is becoming more important with the honey bee collapse disorder. Natives will help make your yard healthier, as you need to use fewer chemicals.

I have long been a firebush lover. I have them planted behind my pool where they provide a screen in the summer, sometimes growing to ten feet tall, in partial shade. I can watch the butterflies and hummingbirds stop by while I'm enjoying the pool. In the winter after they have lost their leaves they can be cut back with little damage, but I leave the stalks until early spring after the first frost. I have planted false indigo there and plan to add more next spring. Although it only blooms in the spring, it's lovely fern like leaves add to the greenery all season long. I plan to scatter some seeds in November in hopes of increasing the plant.

Last summer, driving out of Rainbow Springs, I noticed a clump of tall plants with bell-like flowers, beardtongue. I found out that it was from the *penstemon* family and was able to purchase several plants from a local native plant provider. Since then I have purchased seed that I will both scatter in November and also try in pots. I have also found some pale pink plants locally. These have done well in an area that gets hot afternoon sun. They are as pretty and garden like as any hybrid you could find, but like our hot humid summers without wilting away to fungus. Blue curls is a shrubby plant that blooms with tiny blue flowers that look like curls in late August through fall. Tiny pollinators just love it, but so do larger bees. I saw one branch just collapsing under the weight of a determined bee.

What's Bugging You?

by Norma Samuel, Extension Agent III, Horticulture
(continued from Page 1)

nurturing the plant all year long.

It is said that fruits tend to be larger and sweeter if the mature branching are pruned back by a third after fruiting.



Florida-Friendly Landscaping and Native Plants

by Marylou Klein, Master Gardener

(continued from Page 1)

The Friends of the Dunnellon Library sponsored a Florida-Friendly garden in the parking lot under some pines, and have also used some lovely natives. Right now *Mimosa strigillosa* (powder puff), a native groundcover, has been blossoming and spreading to cover a sunny area, while the native oak leaf hydrangea is growing in a more shaded area resting after its glorious spring time bloom. It will continue to add interest as the leaves turn to red, and finally the seed heads continue to add variety during the winter after they have lost their leaves.

If you are interested in adding natives, use the website of the Florida Native Plant Society to help you. Another excellent site is the Florida Wildflower Foundation website. It not only has descriptions and planting information, but also sells seeds for a minimal price. Both the UF/IFAS Marion County Master Gardener Plant Clinic and the FYN Committee, as well as your local library have wonderful books to get you started. Look for authors such as Gil Nelson, Walter Kingsley Taylor and Carl Huegel. If you are looking for a rationale to plant natives, read *Bringing Nature Home* by entomologist Doug Tallamy. He will scare you into adding natives, and you will feel good about it.



Snails and Slugs

by Anne Lambrecht, Master Gardener

Truly disgusting, slimy, and yucky, snails and slugs are just about the same creature. Snails have a hard shell on their back while slugs do not. They are of the family Gastropoda which means “stomach foot”. Snails and slugs like to live where it’s warm and wet. There are land snails and aquatic snails. The vast majority of gastropods are aquatic. The big oval-shaped slugs with the blackish stripe we see in our gardens are called the Florida leatherleaf, *Leidyula floridana*.

Snails have two sets of tentacles. The set that is more visible and larger has eyes and the other, lower set are feelers. Their mouths are located downward so that food can be taken from the surface being traveled over. Most snails have thousands of microscopic tooth-like structures located on a ribbon-like tongue called a radula. The radula works like a file, ripping the food into small pieces. Snails and slugs have an airhole on top of their body.

Both snails and slugs move with a gliding motion by means of a long flat muscular organ called a foot. It sends wave after wave of small contractions forward from the back of its foot toward the front. Mucus, constantly secreted by glands in the foot, facilitates movement and leaves a silverlike slimy trail. This mucus prevents moisture in the animals’ bodies from being soaked up by the dry terrain being traveled across. Also, it protects their fleshy underparts from sharp objects. Snails and slugs can actually glide across the sharpest razor blade without cutting themselves.

The big danger in the lives of snails and slugs is drying out. Sometimes gardeners sprinkle them with salt. Salt causes moisture to leave their bodies and they shrivel up fast. Personally, I think this is a cruel way to get rid of a slug. What I do is just cut them in half with my clippers and only if there is an usually high infestation of them. If they’ve been nibbling/devouring my plants, then it’s clipper time.

When dry weather comes, snails and slugs bury themselves in the soil or some other well protected spot. Snails plug up their shell holes with mucus and slugs secrete a sort of mucousy cocoon for themselves. Then through the dry spell they remain in a state of suspended animation during which time their body processes slow to a point almost like death. However, there’s enough life in them to become active again once enough rain comes to dissolve the mucous and soak into their bodies. That’s why in the spring, when you’re digging, you will come across them. Mucous also comes in handy when a predator such as a toad snatches up a slug.

Items below are available for purchase at the UF/IFAS Marion County Extension Service. Please come to see these environmentally-friendly products.

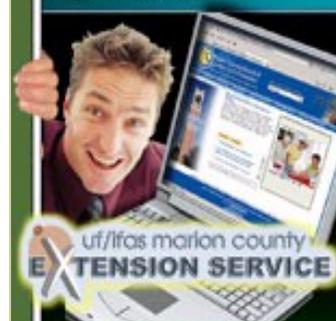
MICRO-IRRIGATION:

- Eco-friendly
- Plants love it
- Saves time & money



Got Questions?

What does 4-H have to offer my child? When is the best time to prune crepe myrtles? How can I make money off 10 acres of land? What is the difference between type 1 and type 2 diabetes?



We Have Answers

**UPCOMING LECTURES/
EVENTS:**

Educational seminars and events are presented by UF/IFAS Extension Agents and or Master Gardeners.

Unless otherwise indicated, to pre-register, please call 671-8400 or e-mail Donna.Redner@marioncountyfl.org

Vegetable Garden Expo

Series of educational sessions and Vendor booths on growing Vegetables, fruits and herbs
September 8, 9:00 am—1:00 pm
Marion County Extension
No Charge

Gardening for Hummingbirds and Butterflies Workshop and Garden Tour

Learn how to attract these beauties to your garden
September 14, 9:30am—noon
Marion County Extension Auditorium
No Charge
Please preregister by Sept. 9

Gardening for Dummies

Tips for the novice gardener and residents new to Marion County to garden successfully
September 24—28, 6:00 pm—8:30 pm
Marion County Extension Auditorium
Cost: \$25 per person / \$40 per couple
Please preregister by Sept. 14

Snails and Slugs

by Anne Lambrecht, Master Gardener

(continued from page 3)



The slug has so much mucous, that after the toad chews a few times it finds its mouth clogged with the sticky, gooey slime.

Most land snails are nocturnal, which is why when you check your garden you cannot ever see any creatures making holes in your plants, but you know something has to be. I know a lady who goes out at night armed with flashlight and bucket of soapy water to pick them off her flowers.

Most snails and slugs possess both male and female parts and each is capable of self-fertilization, although cross fertilization is normal. Adults deposit eggs which are slimy and almost a pearl-like whitish color.

To control a harsh infestation, remove anything snails may hide under such as: boards, bags, brush and debris. Dense vegetation, deep mulch, and frequent irrigation favor slugs. Consequently, minimizing irrigation (especially overhead sprinkling) or planting drought tolerant plants may reduce slug problems. Here's another trick: place a board on the ground near damaged plants. Elevate the board with four stones placed under the corners. The snails will take shelter under the board and then can be destroyed by dropping into a jar filled with water and a little rubbing alcohol. Some birds, especially ducks, will feed on snails and slugs.

Barriers of diatomaceous earth, sand, ashes or eggshells provide only temporary control. With a beer trap the goal is to trap and drown snails and slugs in a shallow dish with beer placed slightly below grade so that the lip of the dish is even with the soil. However, this does not provide reliable control and why waste good beer.

Commercial slug and snail baits are available at the big box stores and are used by scattering bait around vegetation that is to be protected. The bait is effective, but quite toxic to pets and birds and other garden creatures.

All this stuff puts a different light on Escargo, the French delicacy appetizer. Yet, snails and slugs are a great source of protein and many people the world over eat snails and slugs to sustain themselves. They even have canned slugs in Oregon! I bought a couple when we were there and plan to serve them to the Husband.

For more than you ever wanted to know about slugs:

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/in891>

Timely Gardening Tips for Marion County

by David Y. Goodman

UF/IFAS Marion County Master Gardener, In-Training

In March and April, everything greens up and starts popping from the ground... then through June we hopefully harvest the results of our garden-planting efforts. And then there's July, which basically kills off the remnants of our formerly-proud patches of greens and beans.

But – all is not lost! August is here. And while it's still ragingly hot, it's also the start of the fall garden season. Yes, oh blessed inhabitants of the sunshine state, we get to garden twice. Though some plants have a rough time starting in the heat of August, as the days cool, growth picks up... until frost or cold slows things down again. It's time to put in some more green beans, maybe a little sweet corn, get your brassicas (cabbage, collards) started in trays, find those packages of beet seeds and throw some more compost on your raised beds.

August is the time to get some last fertilizing in on your citrus trees. Much later than this and you risk stimulating a flush of new growth... right as frosts begin to loom.

One delicious native starts ripening this month – the passion fruit. Though often grown for its amazing blooms, the plant also sports delicious egg-sized fruits which explode with incredible tropical flavor. The plant is also host to two famous species of butterfly – the zebra longwing and the gulf fritillary. To ID their caterpillars is simple – zebra longwing larva look like shiny white enamel with black spines in rings around their bodies. The gulf fritillary caterpillars look similar, except their bodies are bright orange. (And, butterfly enthusiasts – please forgive me – I sometimes pick them off because I really want fruit more than butterflies. Caterpillars wreak incredible havoc on passion vines!) If you don't currently grow passion flower vines, I highly recommend them. They're native, they have amazing flowers, they produce food, and they host butterflies. How cool is that?

As your spring garden gets cleaned out in preparation for your fall garden, this is also a good time to make a nice new compost heap. Our yards can be an incredible source of raw material for this richest of fertilizers. I've driven through Ocala many times and seen neat piles of leaves, pine needles, yard debris and even grass clippings by the side of the road. Don't do that! Look at your piece of land as a repository of nutrients. Plants grow on the surface, drawing up various minerals through their roots and building their stems, leaves, flowers and fruit with those raw materials, along with carbon dioxide and sunlight. When you chop things down and throw them away, you're literally throwing away your yard's fertility. With our already sandy soils, it's easy to rapidly deplete your patch of Marion County. Instead, get creative with your composting as summer and fall clean up commences.

Make leaf piles in corners, bury sticks and logs as in-ground water reservoirs for future plantings, and compost everything you can get your hands on. I've been known to snag leaves and clippings from neighbors... and even stop for pine needles to place around my blueberries. By doing so, I can improve my yard and keep organic matter from the waste stream. Think in terms of readily available organic resources and you'll be on your way to a healthier yard and garden. Even mulching with leaves and grass clippings can slowly add nutrients around the base of your plants while keeping the soil cool and keeping water in. Win-win-win!

Have a wonderful rest of the month – and may God bless you with brilliant green thumbs.



For those of you born in August—your birthday flower is the Gladiolus, which means remembrance.



UF UNIVERSITY of
FLORIDA
IFAS Extension

Foundation for the Gator Nation
An Equal Opportunity Institution