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Published by Norma Samuel  
University of Florida IFAS  
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**Timely Gardening Tips  
for MARION COUNTY**  
by Master Gardener, Jo Leyte-Vidal

July is “cruise the garden time”. Cruising means; walking around looking for evidence of disease or insect damage which develops with increased humidity, and lush plant growth. These are ideal conditions for the development of fungus, mold, mildew, and aphids. Sanitation in the garden is the first line of defense. Pick up all spent blossoms or leaves, eliminate weeds, lay fresh mulch, spray with insecticidal soap. These practices eliminate a large number of problems. Watch oleanders and azaleas for caterpillars that can strip branches overnight. Hand picking or knocking them into a container of soapy water is quick and chemical free. If you are squeamish,

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## Sunflowers – Happy Harbingers of Summer

by Anne Lambrecht, UF/IFAS Marion County Master Gardener

There is magic in growing sunflowers. If you have ever grown sunflowers, then you know what I mean. They are so easy to grow and with so many kinds to choose from, it’s just pure happiness!

Sunflowers are a true American native, one of the very few food crops to originate in North America. Known botanically as *Helianthus annuus* which means Sun (Helios) Annual (Annuus), the name is believed to have originated from the connection of the plant to the sun, both in looks and behavior. At a glance, a sunflower does look like the sun: a round circle with bright yellow fiery beams coming out all around, just like a child would draw a sun in a picture. But what’s really cool is that the sunflower actually tracks the sun’s position in the sky. Their heads point east toward the sunrise in the morning. During the day, motor cells in the sunflower’s stem tilt the flower bud to try to receive the maximum amount of sunlight. By evening, the sunflower’s head is pointing west, towards sunset. Overnight, the sunflower will reset to its original eastward position and wait for the morning. I like to think that this is the work of the fairies, but it is called heliotropism. Other flowers do this, too, like daffodils, buttercups and many flowers growing in cold areas.

There are sixty species of sunflower that come in all sizes and colors from burgundy, ruby red to orange, peach, apricot, bright yellow to fiery bi-colors. The sunflower resembles one huge flower, but did you know that a single sunflower head has hundreds of tiny florets? The yellow petals are actually protective leaves that cover the center of the head while it is growing. The brown center of the sunflower is composed of a mass of hundreds of flowers all growing individually and from where each sunflower seed will originate. The seeds on some have dizzying geometric shapes. Sunflowers need 6 - 8 hours of sun daily. That’s no problem for us here in north central Florida. Sunflowers like to eat and drink. The more fertilizer and water you give them, the bigger they get.

For refreshment, feed them:

1. Sheep, poultry, cow or horse manure.
2. Fish emulsion, fish meal or real fish buried (remember the Indians and Pilgrims?)
3. An inch thick layer of cheap dog food nuggets.

Now, who has all this stuff except maybe the cheap dog food? I suggest you use a soluble fertilizer if you need a quick boost or any slow-release fertilizer for feeding all summer long. Another option is to add composted material to beef up the soil a little. Dig it in and plant your seeds 1” deep and about 18” apart. Make sure the soil is in a well drained area.

Water deeply, right after planting them and then weekly until the summer rains kick in. Sunflowers may be planted year round but they don’t like the frost. The best time to plant is March and April but you can plant right now for fall color.

Feed again when plants are 3’ tall. Bug and fungus problems are rare. Protect the seeds from birds with onion bags and save some seeds for planting next year.



### Timely Gardening Tips for MARION COUNTY

by Master Gardener, Jo Leyte-Vidal  
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use Thuricide, a non-toxic pesticide. Cruising is also a good time to dead-head and pinch back blooming plants.

A group of first grade students at a local elementary school made a pledge as they stood by their new Butterfly Garden. It is relevant to all of us and should be remembered:

I am part of the Circle of Life  
I will not waste water  
I will try to recycle  
I will respect all creatures  
I am a MEMBER OF THE EARTH

## Sunflowers – Happy Harbingers of Summer

by Anne Lambrecht, UF/IFAS Marion County Master Gardener  
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For giants, choose Sunzilla, Russian Mammoth, Skyscraper or Grey Stripe. Other varieties are called Sunny Smile, Velvet Queen, and Teddy Bear. There are hundreds of varieties. Some are grown for their shoots and sprouts. Some are grown for living bird feeders, some for their oil.

The seeds that are hybridized will have no pollen. No pollen? Whatever shall our bees do? These are ornamental and are made for the floral industry (we don't want pollen on our tablecloth)! For floral arrangements choose multicolored, multi-headed types like Autumn Sunset, Jewel Box, and Vanilla Ice. I got some medium sized multi-stemmed seeds this year called Strawberry Blonde, and woo-woo, are they nice looking petite flowers with red and yellow petals and black centers.

The sunflower seed provides food, was ground into flours for making breads and soups, and the ground seeds were also boiled to extract the oil. This oil was used for cooking, to soften leather, as a salve and as a hair conditioner.

Other cultivars include the native beach sunflower, the aggressive Bolivian sunflower, a multitude of native sunflowers, and "Sunchokes" or Jerusalem artichokes.

Recommended sources for unusual and original sunflower seeds are Johnny's Select Seeds, Seed Savers Exchange, Thompson & Morgan and Renee's Garden Seeds.

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### What's Bugging You? by Urban Horticulture Agent, Norma Samuel

Find out what local residents are calling in about

What is this insect in my garden with an unusual hind leg?

That, my friend, is the leaf-footed bug, *Leptoglossus* sp. There are nine known species in Florida. They are true bugs and belong to the order Hemiptera. They have piercing-sucking mouthparts and suck the juices from their host. They are about one inch in length and can be easily identified by the flattened area on the hind legs, hence the name. They feed on a variety of plants. One summer I had many of them on my sunflower plants, but I found they were quite tolerant to them. I just picked them off and crushed them. For more information on this insect visit: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/in229>.



Adult leaf-footed bug

Source: John Capinera, University of Florida

**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?

uf/ifas marion county  
**EXTENSION SERVICE**

**We Have Answers**

# Life Cycles

Kathleen Patterson, FYN Program Coordinator



Just as we begin life as a twinkle in our parents' eye, the butterfly molts and changes from egg to caterpillar to larvae, to butterfly and the cycle begins again. I am always amazed when I walk through my yard to find all the stages of a butterfly's life for all but a short time during the cold winter months. This year is no exception and may perhaps be the best year of all for the butterflies that live in my landscape.

Many of the butterflies are well known including the monarch butterfly that migrates south for the winter and returns again in early spring after having flown over one-thousand miles. During the mild winters I have seen plenty of butterflies that remain in our area looking for that special flower nectar used to sustain life. Some butterflies are harder to recognize and require a good field guide for identification.

Several such publications exist for butterfly identification. My favorite reference materials for the flutter-bys include "Florida Butterflies and their Caterpillars", a field guide produced by Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation. This laminated tri-fold has information on over fifty varieties of butterflies that call Florida home. The "Florida Fabulous" series of books have an excellent book that has wonderful photographs as well as other important information that pertains to butterfly gardening. Many other publications exist but these are my two favorites. The field guide can be purchased for \$10.00 through my office (FYN) while the Florida Fabulous books are available at most book stores.

But what happens next? What came first, the chicken or the egg? In this case, the butterfly finds a host plant where she can deposit her eggs and the cycle begins again. The eggs usually are placed on the underside of the host plant leaves, making them hard to spot for us and for the birds or insects that might like to enjoy them as a light snack. As the eggs hatch, tiny caterpillars appear. Some so small you wouldn't see them, again hiding on the underside of the leaf. Each butterfly has a specific host plant that is required for the caterpillar to eat.

Some host plants include Willow for the Viceroy; Passion Vine for the Gulf Fritillary, Julia and Zebra Longwing. Milkweed for the Monarch, Mistletoe (yes there is a use for that nasty plant) for the great Purple Hairstreak and Cassia for the Cloudless Sulphurs. Giant Swallowtails enjoy wild Lime and the herb dill. Oaks are used as host plants and so are citrus trees. Do these caterpillars do permanent damage? No, they do not. Can we co-exist with these wonderful creatures? Yes we can. Can you identify the caterpillars in your landscape? If not, read on; and if you can you still might be interested.



Passion Vine

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



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



**Eco-Friendly MULCH**  
AVAILABLE HERE...



**Cost-Saving, Eco-Friendly Rain Barrels FOR SALE!**




## UPCOMING LECTURES/EVENTS:

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

### JULY

#### The Florida-Friendly Landscape Challenge

July 12 & 14, 2011

6:00pm-9:00pm

Marion County Extension Auditorium

\$5.00 per person

Please Pre-register by July 5

#### 2011 Upcoming Events

Mark your calendars for our upcoming events:

#### Fall Vegetable Garden Expo

September 10, 2011

9:00am-1:00pm

#### Gardening for Dummies

September 19-23, 2011

6:00pm-8:30pm

#### Fall Gathering

October 8, 2011

8:00am-12:00pm



## Life Cycles

Kathleen Patterson, FYN Program Coordinator

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"Butterflies are the epitome of freedom in nature...but much less attention has been paid to butterfly caterpillars" states Thomas Emmel, Director of McGuire Center for Lepidoptera Research at The University of Florida butterfly house located in Gainesville, Florida. This statement can be found in the forward of the book *Florida Butterfly Caterpillars and their Host Plants* released in May 2005 by authors Marc Minno, Jerry Butler and Donald Hall. Emmel also states "... this expertly written book is a bountiful basket of information that not only describes Florida caterpillars and compares them with those of similar species, but also gives the known host plants, and the natural history, including the number of seasonal broods and other valuable information". Having met Dr. Emmel a number of times and enjoying his knowledge of the butterfly world, I would have to agree that this is a **must have** book for any butterfly gardener.

When designing my new butterfly area I knew that I must provide the necessary plants for all stages of the butterfly; from egg to caterpillar to larvae to butterfly. Scattered throughout the bed are various herbs including dill, fennel, parsley and thyme, paw paw, citrus trees, passionflower vines and a large selection of nectar plants. The butterfly deposits the eggs on the plants that the caterpillars will eat (host plants) making it easy for them to find food. Just yesterday on a single milkweed I found eleven monarch caterpillars demolishing the plant. Gone were the leaves, and all that was left were the bright orange flowers. Soon new leaves will appear and the cycle will begin again.

So what if they eat a few leaves off the citrus tree? The tree will generate other leaves and who besides you will notice a few missing leaves? Am I afraid of a few bad bugs including the aphids that love the milkweed? No chemicals for my yard, instead you will find many ladybugs eating those nasty little devils along with a plethora of other beneficial insects that enjoy the chemical free environment. Perhaps I do a bit more than most other people but I have been known to relocate caterpillars that have eaten a plant to the ground but still need additional food before they become a pupae.

I've got to hurry outside to check out the other caterpillar I just spotted climbing the wall outside the back porch...it's a monarch caterpillar and I also found a chrysalis on the overhang. Flutter-bye's and dragonflies are two of my favorite things!

