

The Marion Gardener

Solutions for a beautiful landscape

July 2012

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Interesting Find in Demonstration Gardens

by Norma Samuel
Extension Agent III,
Horticulture

We recently completed a week of Junior Master Gardener Camp with 19 youth, ages 8 – 14. The last day of the camp was dedicated to insects and diseases. Each camper received an insect net and a sandwich bag and went out to the gardens to collect insects, which we later identified. One person in my group caught a huge black insect that had a bright orange band around one section of the abdomen. It was later identified as the Orange-banded Mydas fly.



Source: <http://www.uky.edu/Ag/CritterFiles/casefile/insects/beetles/hercules/mydas.htm>

Survival Gardening in Marion County

by David Y. Goodman, UF/IFAS Marion County Master Gardener, In-Training

Unemployment is rampant. The government is bankrupt. Foreclosures are everywhere. And one day soon, you may find your local grocery store has closed and shut off your supply of Hot Pockets.

Most of us have never had to grow our own food. Those that have grown their own generally do it as a hobby – or as a way to get a vine-ripened tomato without selling a kidney.

Marion County is not a gardening paradise. Go further south and you can grow tropicals year-round (hello papaya and mango) – further north, and you get less bugs and more options (horseradish, gooseberries, European pears).

However, that's not to say you can't grow food here. You can grow plenty to eat. Most of the Southern US has many native edibles of varying quality: beautyberry, hickory nuts, blackberries, shepherd's needle, Chickasaw plums, mulberries and many more. Our long season allows gardeners multiple harvests as well, provided they can outrun the insect population and beat back the nematodes.

The trick to growing here is generally two-fold: water and organic matter. Droughts must be overcome with proper irrigation, and our sun-beaten sandy (and sometimes clayey) soils benefit greatly from mulching, manure and compost.

It's been said that it takes thousands of square feet to feed a person for a year. In a small lot, this is often impractical – but there are ways to maximize your yield. Long-term planning will allow you to harvest tons of food (literally) from an average yard. The trick? Fruit trees and shrubs, along with edible perennial herbs. One peach tree can easily produce 40-100 lbs of fruit a year. The average yield of a grapefruit tree is 350lbs a season. (1) An 8-year old pecan tree will usually bear 40-50lbs of nuts at maturity (2). Of course, if you plant that one in a 1/10 acre lot, you'll kill your chances of growing sun-loving annuals forever. However, if you create a "guild" by planting a pecan tree, surrounded by a ring of smaller fruit trees, which are then interspersed with smaller fruit-bearing shrubs, you have created a high-density food factory that will out-yield – even taking into consideration some tree over-crowding – any garden and do it with much less work.

MULTI-YEAR CROPS

Good trees to consider include loquats, persimmon, pindo palms, olives, chestnuts, walnuts, pecans, pomegranates and low-chill plums, peaches, pears and apples. Many members of the citrus family will do well but are susceptible to citrus greening and canker.

Shrubs include blueberries, blackberries, pineapple guavas, prickly pear and edible bamboos. A few notable vines could also be added: grapes and passion fruit.

Among perennial plants, the herbs are king. They may not provide much in the way of food, but the spice they add and the medicinal benefits of their consumption make them invaluable to a survival garden. Sage, rosemary, mint, hyssop, lavender and oregano are excellent starting plants.

**Interesting Find in
Demonstration Gardens**

by Norma Samuel

Extension Agent III,
Horticulture

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The mydas fly falls in the order, Diptera, and are very large flies. They are often found in open areas that are bare and hot. We found him hanging out on one of the metal plant signs so it was getting the heat it liked there. At first glance they can be mistaken for wasps, but with closer inspection you will notice that the hind wings are just knobs which are a characteristic of Dipeteras.

They undergo complete metamorphosis which means that each stage of development is different from the others. The maggots are approximately 5cm in length. They burrow into the ground or decaying wood and feed on the grubs, the immature stages of beetles. The adults are not frequently encountered due to their short life span. There is much discrepancy about the feeding habits of the adult. Some believe that they are also predators like the larvae, while others think they feed on nectar. More detailed information can be found at:

[http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/beneficials/beneficial-26_mydas_fly_1_\(Mydas%20clavata\).htm](http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/beneficials/beneficial-26_mydas_fly_1_(Mydas%20clavata).htm)

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EATING YEAR-ROUND

Planning your crop planting to ensure yield over as much of the year as possible is a good idea. However, you're not limited to eating dirt during the winter if your squash crop happens to fail.

Proper management of your harvest is key. We've all heard someone say "I have a ____ tree and it bears all at once... most of them just rot! We can't give enough away!" People that say things like that have lost the ability to reason and will be the first to be eaten in the apocalypse. Preserving is not difficult. It can be done through drying, freezing, canning or fermenting.

The Indians dried fruit and meats to take them through the winter and you can do it too. A dehydrator is an excellent investment – and building a solar dehydrator is also worthwhile in case the electrical grid is rendered inoperative by an EMP strike, fuel shortages, a labor walk-out, abnormal sunspot activity or a giant space octopus that feeds on alternating current.

Freezing generally requires blanching vegetables (to deactivate decay-inducing enzymatic processes) in boiling water. Fruits can just be frozen as they are, with seeding, skinning, pitting, chopping or whatever preparation you prefer done ahead of time.

Visit the National Center for Home Food Production (<http://nchfp.uga.edu/>) for more information of how to can, freeze, pickle, dry, or ferment your garden harvest.

WHAT TO GROW

When considering what to plant in a garden, the first question that is often asked is "well – what do you like?" That's a good start; however, in survival gardening, the first question should probably be "what can you survive on that requires the least input to the highest yield?" If your answer is "okra," you may just want to go ahead and starve.

Sweet potatoes and cassava are two of the best root crops for our area, yielding well even with low care – and they also contain a high caloric load. Sweet potatoes beat cassava on nutrition – and their leaves can also be used as a green. Cassava leaves are edible too, but only after steaming. Otherwise, you'll be ingesting cyanide. The same is true of the roots. Cyanide and survival are generally at odds with each other.

Grains are less useful in the home garden, except as perhaps a cover crop or animal forage. The yield to input/work ratio is poor and the space required makes their cultivation impractical for home-scale agriculture.

Cabbage and other members of the crucifer family are excellent choices, with cabbage being the king thanks to its ability to be turned into sauerkraut.

Winter squash is another good choice. Many of our squashes, such as the "Hubbard" squash, were originally popular because of their ability to keep for six months or more in non-refrigerated environments.

Planning an area for blackberries is also an excellent idea. Thornless cultivars such as Ouachita and Natchez grow well in the hot south and will out-yield many other crops. Children love them. What other recommendation is needed?

Tomatoes are also easy to grow and may actually improve in flavor when canned or dried. Peppers are another member of the solanaceae family that does well in this region.

Beans are another good choice. The "yard-long" or "asparagus" varieties thrive in the heat and will out-yield most other pole cultivars. Bush beans do well also. Peas will grow in the early spring and add

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Valuable nitrogen to the soil as they grow.

Forget about asparagus, celery, rhubarb and head lettuces. You'll be the better for it.

PLANNING

Keep your friends close – and your garden closer. Putting high-maintenance plants in a raised bed at the back end of your yard is a recipe for failure. Keep them where you can immediately be aware of any pest or water issues. Right by the back door is usually perfect, with your compost on the other side of the garden from your house. Doing so allows you to easily discard spent plants and apply compost without enlisting the aid of a wheelbarrow, a grandchild, a pack animal or a catapult. Work smarter, not harder! Make sure a water source is nearby and that you also have vehicle access, if possible, to allow you to bring soil amendments, fertilizers and mulch right to your garden.

Using heavy mulch in your garden will eliminate most weed issues. Gather leaves in fall and winter, along with grass clippings, pine needles, rotten straw or other organic matter and put it alongside your garden space for use as needed. A heavy mulching in fall will keep cool-season weeds from emerging and also allow worms to stay moist and breed in the soil, bringing valuable oxygen and nutrients from the surface into your beds. Cover cropping in winter with peas, lentils and various crucifers also adds organic material and is a cheap way to keep the soil intact – not to mention providing some vegetables for the table when the main harvests are done.

Plant trees as soon as possible. If you're limited on space, stick to smaller varieties. Again, the square-foot yield you'll receive from a mature tree requires little input compared to an annual vegetable bed. Leave space for trees – you'll be glad you did – and remember: the best time to plant a tree was ten years ago.

CONCLUSION

Now is the time to start planning and growing. Do your research and experimentation before you're required to live off your land. And if there's a miraculous turnaround and you never need to go farther than Publix to stay fat and happy – great. You'll at least get some delicious preserves from your fruit trees and will have learned a bit more about food production. Finally... relax. If you can't manage to grow enough vegetables, you'll certainly be able to subsist on the grasshoppers and hornworms attracted by your efforts.

<http://cals.arizona.edu/fps/sites/cals.arizona.edu/fps/files/cotw/Grapefruit.pdf>
<http://ag.arizona.edu/pubs/garden/az1400.pdf>

Landscaping to Protect your Home from a Wildfire

by Norma Samuel, Extension Agent III, Horticulture

The recent news of wildfire destroying over 300 homes in Colorado has been horrific. As gardeners, there are things that you can do to lessen the danger of a wildfire engulfing your home. Create a defensible space of approximately 50 feet around your home where the potential fuel is modified, reduced, or cleared to create a barrier to slow the spread of wildfire toward your home.

Following are some suggestions to create a firewise landscape:

Fire resistant plants: These plants do not ignite readily from flame or other ignition sources. The stems and foliage of plants do not readily contribute to the fuel or fire intensity. According to the website <http://firewise.org>, fire resistant plants have moist, supple leaves; minimal dead wood; water-like sap with no strong odor; and very little sap or resin materials. Examples of fire resistant plants are: ajuga, chives, coreopsis, aloe, cactus, azalea, trumpet vine, coreopsis, iris, daylily, mahonia,

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,

JULY

Florida-Friendly Landscape Challenge

Learn how to make the outdoors the best room of your home and save time and money. Door prizes, free gifts and more!

July 17, 18, 19, 6-9pm

Marion County Extension Auditorium

Cost: \$7 (includes all 3 nights).

Please pre-register by July 13



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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Landscaping to Protect your Home from a Wildfire

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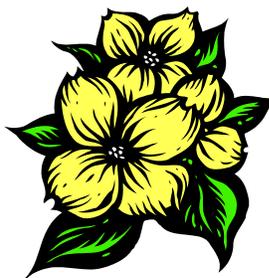
Plants that accumulate a lot of dry material ignite readily and are not fire resistant. Junipers and oakleaf hydrangeas are good examples of plants in the landscape that will ignite readily. I recently taught a session on Fire Resistant Plants at the Firewise Summer Camp being conducted by the Marion County Parks and Recreation Department. Each camper received four plants to burn. The piece of bark from the oakleaf hydrangea was devoured by the flame in a matter of seconds. The juniper burned readily also. Their results were consistent with the prior research that plants with dead material will ignite readily. Magnolia is classified as fire resistant, but the campers found that the mature leaves burn very easily, while the young leaves were much harder to burn due to the high water content.

Plant placement: Place large trees at least 30 feet away from your home. Leaves that fall from trees hanging over the house can accumulate on the roof and in the gutters; thus, serving as a source of fuel during a wildfire. It is recommended that trees close to the house be kept at a level just below the eaves of the house. An ideal defensible space can be created by placing large trees and shrubs in a border on the perimeter of your property with grass closer to the house.

Plant spacing: Always think about the mature size of the plant before installing them in the garden. Dense vegetation, especially those with plants that are not fire resistant can serve as a source of fuel for wildfires.

Plant / landscape maintenance: Maintenance of plants should be ongoing. Prune out dead branches from trees and shrubs as this is a source of fuel. Plants that are characterized as fire resistant can still burn, especially if not properly maintained. Do not allow the mulch in the flower beds to dry out excessively, it will readily ignite.

A firewise landscape is one tool in the battle to prevent your home from being devoured by a wildfire. If building a new home or making renovations consider using fire resistant materials.



What's Bugging You?

by Norma Samuel, Extension Agent III, Horticulture

Find out what local residents are calling in about

I planted a lot of eggplants and I noticed one of the plants that wilted had a white stuff growing at the base. What is it?

Eggplant is one of my favorite vegetables. If well cared for eggplants will produce from late May until the first frost. The symptoms described are typical of a soilborne disease called Southern Blight caused by a fungus, *Sclerotium rolfsii*. The fungus thrives under moist conditions and high temperatures like we've had the last few weeks. The fungal mycelium forms a cottony mass at the soil line of the plant. Infected plants rapidly wilt and die. On close inspection you may notice some very small dark colored structures called sclerotia in the diseased area. These can survive in the soil for extended periods of time and serve as a source of inoculum for the disease in the future.

The best course of action is to pull and burn or bury deeply affected plants. Do not place them in your compost pile. Also do not replant that area with eggplants, tomatoes, or peppers as they are in the same family and will also succumb to the disease. Some excellent pictures of Southern blight disease can be found at:

http://ipm.ifas.ufl.edu/resources/success_stories/T&PGuide/pdfs/Chapter5/Southern_Blight.pdf

UF/IFAS Subscription Management System

The University of Florida IFAS Extension has developed a website called Subscription Management System (SMS). The purpose of SMS is to automate and streamline the process of (1) subscribing to UF/IFAS Extension publications (newsletters, articles, etc) and (2) notifying clientele of Extension events either through emails and or text messaging. We will transition to using SMS for the Marion Gardener newsletter in the near future.

You can access SMS from this link and enroll as a new subscriber to explore some of the capabilities of the system. <http://subscribe.ifas.ufl.edu/>. When you log into the system you can also sign up for newsletters in other program areas such as agriculture, nutrition, finance, etc. or even for newsletters from other counties in the state.

The Gifted Garden

by Anne Lambrecht, UF/IFAS Marion County Master Gardener

It was just a stroke of luck that the Belleview-Santos Elementary School principal and I bumped into Viviana Prieto. We were on our way to a fifth grade classroom to ask the teacher if he would like the Master Gardeners to build a vegetable garden at his classroom. We never made it to the fifth grade classroom. I offered a garden to Ms. Prieto and she accepted right then and there. Three years later we're still growing strong.

Now this garden is where the "smart kids" go part time. They are part of FLAME (Fostering Learning Abilities in Marion Education). FLAME meets on different days according to the





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children's grade levels. The little kids (grades 1-3) and the older kids (grades 4-5) meet separately with Ms. Prieto. The kids are considered "gifted" if they have a high IQ on routine tests.

Tom's scheme was not without purpose: by making a big deal of the older kids, it would entice the younger students to participate more actively in their garden next year. Tom's idea for the fall is to have a "Victory Garden" and the students will learn about food grown in this country during World War II. They will actually grow some of the heirloom vegetables and then cook them up with recipes from that era. And by having an actual lesson plan, the garden next year will be fun, educational and yummy. There's also lots of fodder here for projects: history and geography, the people who lived through the war and grew the food, and the war itself.

The ten graduating fifth graders were given a letter of commendation and an official certificate of accomplishment. The "gardener of the year", the only girl in the group, was presented with a small Golden Shovel that Tom had bought and painted.

During the course of the year some of these kids required a lot of our personal attention in the garden. But the student that received the gardener of the year award could work alone, busying herself by painstakingly planting miniscule seedlings or by playing with the creatures she'd find in the garden: worms, roly-polies, crickets.

Countless Master Gardeners helped with this project: Cheryl Zeyher, Dorothy Dubois, Anna Williams, Jim Jaudon, to name a few. The garden started by tilling, shoveling to loosen the soil, weeding and then more tilling. I had the soil tested: a perfect pH of 7.5 and I learned from my janitor friend, Ernesto, that there had been a garden in that same location many years ago.

The children plant seeds (they've got sort of a green-hot-house), direct plant seedlings, weed, till, run around with the hose, and harvest. One year we cordoned off areas for each student and one little boy spent the whole time gazing at his piece of land. I have found that the hours spent in the garden with the children are as peaceful and rewarding as any time gardening in my own yard. And the kids absolutely love Mr. Tom! And he loves being there too.

During the times that the children weren't gardening, they worked on other gardening projects such as the Imaginary Vegetable Garden and the Seed Packet Info chart. They received a used worm "condominium" and learned about vermiculture from Jim Jaudon. We've seen power points on the butterfly life cycle and the NY Botanical Garden Children's Garden. They've made garden signs. Tom made the group a weather-proof enclosed bulletin board to show the school information about FLAME's garden.

The Master Gardeners are well liked at Belleview-Santos Elementary. We've been there so many years now (going on five!), that the whole student body knows us. They wave hello and stop to chat with us. We feel comfortable and lucky to be there. It may be a "Gifted Garden" but we are the ones who definitely feel gifted.



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