

# The Master Gardening Bench



The Manatee County Master Gardener Newsletter

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All articles are researched utilizing UF/IFAS Extension and/or other educational sources unless otherwise noted.



## Who is a Master Gardener? Is it You? Master Gardener Training Begins August 8th!

By Amy Stripe, Master Gardener 2008

First and foremost, a Master Gardener is a community volunteer.

Volunteerism is at the heart of all we do as Manatee County Extension Master Gardeners. Our activities range from advising homeowners about Florida-Friendly landscape design to diagnosing problems in their yards; from giving gardening-related presentations to clubs and organizations to bringing vegetable cultivation directly to our local communities; from maintaining a demonstration garden to providing outreach at local venues and events.

Originating in 1973, the Master Gardener program is a cooperative effort on the part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, local county governments, and Land Grant colleges (in Florida it is the University of Florida) to bring scientifically-based horticultural information to residents.

You need not be a born green thumb to make yourself a valuable member of our Master Gardener team nor an expert on Florida gardening, since we will train you in a wide variety of Florida-specific horticultural topics! You also do not need to be a physical powerhouse (we

have many Master Gardeners with physical challenges) as there are plenty of "desk" tasks for which we need volunteers, including administration, computer work, and researching and writing articles for our award-winning newsletter.

Training begins August 8th and runs every Wednesday through November 21 for a fee of \$200 (this is to pay for training materials and books you get to keep.) It is a quite intensive, but hugely an engaging experience.

As a first step, attend the orientation presentation held in learn about the training requirements, hour commitments, and the many ways you can contribute to our program as Master Gardener volunteers.

Orientation is June 20, 10:00 A.M. to 12:00 noon.

Register at

<https://mastergardenermeetandgreet.eventbrite.com>

Or, request an information packet and application form by calling (941) 722-4524 or visiting the Extension office, 1303 17th St. W., Palmetto, Florida 34221.

We hope you'll join our team.

*Apply for the Master Gardener Training ~ Get A Good Thing Growing!*



## What's This? Sand Vetch (*Vicia acutifolia*)

By Nancy Porter, Master Gardener 2014



© Shirley Denton



<http://www.shirleydenton.com/plants>



<http://rrec-onu.ifas.ufl.edu/>

Walking through your yard, admiring your flowers you might not notice this delicate little vine, however, if you are working in your garden pulling weeds, you just might. It is so frail looking, albeit a bit sticky, with tiny flowers, you might not even bother plucking it out, and this could be a good thing.

This fragile-looking perennial vine grows in damp soils and thrives in the spring but doesn't hold up to the heat, so it goes away during our summer months. It can be found throughout Florida except in the Keys. Relatives of sand vetch have been used as food for livestock and planted to improve the soil. Vetch is a member of the Fabaceae, the pea family which provides food for humans.

Sand vetch, also known as four-leaf vetch, has a couple of positive attributes. It is a low growing native that is salt tolerant. If you want to use it as a ground cover, it just might work for you but remember it disappears in the summer. It is also a butterfly attractor.

The dainty flowers grow in little clusters and range from dark blue to almost white. It is a host for the barred yellow butterfly, so an asset for the butterfly gardener. So, if you are feeling magnanimous, and don't mind the fact that sand vetch might be a tad bit aggressive, just leave it. It will eventually die back and won't be seen again until spring.

## presenters



### Book Speakers Now for Your Group or Club Master Gardeners are Expert Presenters!

Interested in a talk on a gardening-related topic? Landscaping tips for a Florida-friendly yard, gardening for butterflies and other pollinators, container or vegetable or herb gardening? Nuisance wildlife, growing orchids, pruning tips?

Your Manatee County Agriculture Extension Service can help! Our Extension Master Gardener volunteers are available to give presentations to gardening clubs, homeowners' associations, and community organizations of all kinds. The service is free. Call 941-722-4524, extension 1816 Kathy Oliver.

We do ask for a one-month lead-time and groups are limited to two engagements per year. Select your topic and we will try to accommodate your needs! If you want suggestions, call Kathy and ask what might be a suitable topic for your group.





# Flowering Gingers

By John Dawson, Master Gardener 2007



Turmeric



Butterfly Ginger



Dancing Ladies



Shell Ginger

When asked to recommend a flowering plant for shade that has color and a bit of flair, I normally suggest flowering gingers. I have grown the store-bought ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) for many years but it doesn't flower, although the leaves provide a pleasing tropical look.

Then I tried my luck with turmeric (*Curcuma longa*), another member of the over 1,400 species in the ginger family (*Zingiberaceae*). Turmeric makes a lovely house plant and has a tropical look, but unlike ginger, it will normally flower after its second year. The flowers are lovely and will last for several weeks. Although gingers will grow in shade, they may not flower properly unless given some sun, preferably morning sunshine.

Gingers do well in our area because our climate and weather mimic most of their natural environments. They like our sandy soil and actively grow during our hot rainy season and become dormant (die back) during our cooler dry winters. Even the dried-up stalks will retain a gingery smell. I keep some in containers, as a precaution, to bring them indoors whenever there is an expected freeze. Those that are left in the ground, I just cover with mulch. Since our ground never freezes, they are not harmed. They usually begin to sprout back up in April.

I have yet to find any pest damage on any of my gingers, even weevils and grasshoppers leave them alone. Make sure to plant in a well-drained area or container; if left too long in standing water, the rhizomes (underground shoots) may rot. You will want to fertilize them with a balanced fertilizer once a month during their active growing period. Newly planted gingers may not flower the first year, and if they do not flower the year after, move them into more light.

A friend gave me some butterfly ginger (*Hedychium coronarium*), which happens to be the national flower of Cuba, where my wife is from. It grows about four to five feet tall, is quite cold tolerant, and puts out lovely white flowers that smell like honeysuckle or jasmine. It also comes in yellow and orange flowers. These gingers grow

rapidly in the ground and will spread widely via rhizomes if not contained, which is why I grow a lot of my gingers in large containers. Gingers can be easily divided by cutting through the rhizomes and replanting elsewhere.

I like to grow things that are a bit odd or unusual, and that is why I grow pine cone ginger (*Zingiber zerumbet*). I grow this one in the ground, where it tends to bunch instead of run away. This ginger grows about three feet tall and produces a scarlet pine-cone shaped bract which eventually develops a few tiny yellow flowers. If you gently squeeze the bract, you will see a clear gel-like fluid seep out that has a ginger smell. This perfumed liquid can be used as a hair shampoo and conditioner, which is why it is also called shampoo ginger.

A ginger that I keep among my orchids is dancing ladies (*Globba wintii*). It only grows about 15 inches tall, prefers mostly shade, and puts out purple/white flowers dangling on a leaf stem. The flowers look like they are dancing when the wind blows. Shell gingers (*Alpina zerumbet*) also put out leaf stems with numerous colorful flowers resembling sea shell shapes. These are the most cold tolerant and drought hardy of all the gingers and will spread rapidly if not contained.

Before buying a flowering ginger, be sure you check on its mature size and growth habit. Some can grow over ten feet tall, while others may become invasive in your landscape if planted in the ground. Flowering gingers are easy to come by and easy to grow, so grow and share some with your gardening pals.

For more information visit:  
<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/mv067>



# Spice Up Your Life: The Scoville Scale

By Amy Stripe, Master Gardener 2009

In the early 1900's, American pharmacist Wilbur Scoville created a way to gauge the culinary heat levels of different chili peppers. Today, it is called "the Scoville Scale." The hotter the chili, the higher the number on the scale. Capsaicin is the "active ingredient" that brings the burn and increases the number on the scale.

At the mild end is the bell pepper, rated at 0 Scoville units. On the extreme, scorching end are the Scotch bonnet (an innocuous small yellow pepper popular in Peru) rated 80,000 to 300,000, along with the famously super-hot Habanero pepper.

On the milder end of Scoville are the peperocini and cherry peppers (100-500 units.) Ancho is still on the milder side at 1,000-1,500; Poblano, a notch above at 1,500-2,500. Jalapeno is 2,500-5,000. By this time, you're feeling the heat.

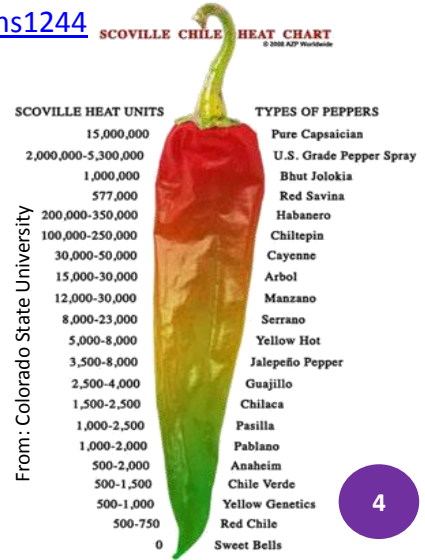
Delicious - yet with pain and sweat involved - are de arbol and Serrano peppers in the 10,000 to 30,000 ranges. By the time you are dealing with Cayenne and Tabasco, you are reaching 50,000 to 80,000 Scoville units.

SPICY

There are many peppers in between all of these cited above. All peppers (Capsicums) are native to the Americas, as are related plants in their Solinaceae family that includes tomatoes and potatoes.

For more information on growing these peppers in Florida, visit: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/hs1244>

From: uf.ifas.edu



From: Colorado State University





# Learn to Live with Alligators

Photo and Text by Joy Derksen, Master Gardener 2004

Alligators, direct descendants of the dinosaurs, have been successfully living in Florida for a very long time. They were here well before people arrived. They got their English name from the Spanish word for lizard, *el lagarto*. Alligators are found in all parts of Florida where there is fresh or brackish water and food sources. They have also been known to travel in salt water.

Alligators are top predators— in the wild they eat fish, turtles, raccoons, birds, snakes, and other alligators. They have adapted to our intrusion on their territory by adding livestock, dogs, cats, and even people to their menu. An adult male can reach 14 feet in length and can weigh 1,000 pounds. They definitely outmatch us!

Why do we keep them around? Alligators play an important role in the ecology of Florida. They keep species in balance (our waters would probably be overrun with snapping turtles without them!) and create water holes needed by wildlife during droughts.

We can live around alligators if we follow some easy rules.

1. Never feed an alligator because it gets used to people as a food source (and, also, because you can get a \$500 fine and 60 days in jail!) Alligators will take a "hand" out if offered and will also go for the arm. An Everglades tourist airboat captain lost his arm feeding an alligator last year. Alligators usually feed between dusk and dawn—be especially alert near water at those times.
2. Keep pets on a leash and away from water. Keep an eye on small children near the water, too. An alligator that will grab a calf, can easily manage a child.
3. Swim in designated areas only.

4. Don't get close to an alligator in the water or on land. They can swim faster than you and they can run very quickly on land for short bursts.
5. Don't mess with baby alligators. Mother alligators will come quickly when hearing distress calls from their babies. If you see babies, there is almost always a mature (6 foot or bigger) alligator somewhere nearby. Even a baby alligator bite can cause a serious infection from the bacteria in their mouths; the victim will need antibiotics.

Despite following all the rules, you may encounter an alligator that is aggressive or which turns up in a place it shouldn't be. Alligators have ended up on front porches, in swimming pools, in homes via doggie doors, sheltered under cars at the grocery store— all while they are moving from one area to another. They are particularly active in this regard during mating season in May and June.

Alligators that threaten people, pets, or property will need to be removed by a professional. The state of Florida allows professional trappers to collect these animals. Call the Nuisance Alligator Hotline at 866-FWCGATOR (866-392-4286) to arrange for a trapper. Nuisance alligators are not relocated; they are killed and sold for meat and/or hides.

Enjoy alligators; they are part of what makes Florida a special place to live. Point them out to visitors. Take photographs. But follow the rules to keep both you and them safe.

For more information:

Contact the experts at Florida Fish and Wildlife,

<http://myfwc.com/gators>, or

Alligator brochure:

<http://myfwc.com/media/152524/alligator-brochure.pdf>.



Photo: Eli Samrat, Antkey, USDA APHIS ITP, Bugwood.org



*Plagiolepis alluaudi*

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UF/IFAS

Chouvenc/Scheffrahn/Warner

# Jet Set Invasive: The Little Yellow Ant

By Rob Hinz, Master Gardener 2016

“Jet set” refers to wealthy individuals who travel the world to find places that provide the best of everything. South Florida has a warm moist climate with lush vegetation that is conducive for many invasive species. The newly discovered little yellow ant (*Plagiolepis alluaudi*) is one of these species and a jet setter.

Dr. Thomas Chouvenc, University of Florida/IFAS Assistant Professor of Urban Entomology, discovered this ant foraging in his Ft. Lauderdale home in 2017. The little yellow ant is originally from Madagascar and could have arrived by boat, inside plant stems or on exotic pets.

The small invader by itself is hard to see. By the time you see it, it has formed super colonies with several queens that interact from nests located outdoors. The good news: this ant does not bite or sting people and has

forced another invasive ant, the big-headed ant (*Pheidole megacephala*), out of little yellow ant territory.

The bad news is that these foraging ants could possibly affect agriculture by guarding the sucking larvae of aphids, scale insects, and mealy bugs that damage plants. It is unclear how devastating and damaging this could be. They invade homes, are a general nuisance, and are difficult to exterminate. Baiting does work to some degree. These ants are here permanently, according to Dr. Chouvenc, and will likely spread from South Florida to our area of the state. More research is being done on this invasive newcomer.

For more information, visit:

<http://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/news/2017/10/19/uf-researcher-identifies-new-invasive-ant-florida/>  
or [www.youtube.com/watch?v=2x7zxS2cT1U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2x7zxS2cT1U).



Photo from UF/IFAS



# Be Safe in Your Garden: 10 Easy Rules

By Joy Derksen, Master Gardener 2004

Photo from: <http://unsplash.com>

Keep safe and healthy while gardening this spring and summer. While gardening is good exercise, gets us Vitamin D, offers stress relief, beautifies our lives, and provides nutritious fruits and vegetables, we also need to be mindful of our personal safety.

1. Get a tetanus booster because tetanus bacteria live in our soil and dust. The bacteria enter through scrapes, cuts and punctures of the skin. You need a booster shot every 10 years. Gardeners are at risk for tetanus because we use sharp tools and can break our skin on plant material. Gardeners over 50 are the most likely to get tetanus because we haven't had a booster shot in years!
2. Dress to protect yourself from the sun, insects, and pesticides. Wear a broad-brimmed hat, long sleeved shirt and sunscreen to prevent sunburn and possible skin cancers. Wear sunglasses to protect your eyes from plant material and sun damage. Use gloves to keep your hands from getting cut, and to protect them from insect bites and irritant plant saps, seeds, and leaves.
3. Use DEET to repel disease-carrying insects like mosquitoes and ticks.
4. Take care of your tools. Keep them clean. Follow power tool safety instructions.
5. Read and carefully follow the directions (it's the law!) on the various chemicals you use. Keep the chemicals out of reach of children and pets.
6. Watch the heat. Take rest breaks in the shade and drink water to replace lost fluids even if you don't feel thirsty. Medications, age, chronic diseases, and high humidity can make a gardener more prone to heat related problems. A good rule of thumb is to pause every 20 minutes to have a drink of water and rest in the shade.
7. Keep a cell phone or landline handset with you while out in the garden so you can summon help if you fall, have chest pain, or injure yourself. This is especially important if you live alone or if nobody is home when you're working. Walkie-talkies are also useful (and fun!) if you and a partner are working in separate areas of the yard.
8. If you do get injured make sure you wash any injury well with soap and water. And, if you haven't done so already (see #1), get that tetanus booster!
9. If you suffer from plant allergies, wear disposable surgical facemasks (available at drug stores) to help reduce the pollens you might inhale. Notorious allergens include ragweed, grass, and oak pollens.
10. Always carry a topical antihistimine (such as Benedryl) in your pocket. If you are stung by ants, bees, or experience a reaction to a plant toxin, this will help reduce symptoms on the spot.

## Garden Safety





# June

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Photo credit: Kathy Warner, UF/IFAS



Date	Time	Event
1 <sup>st</sup> Saturday	10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.	<b>Ask a Master Gardener</b> – Island Library – 5701 Marina Drive, Holmes Beach. Visit the Extension Master Gardener information table and get answers to your gardening questions.
2 <sup>nd</sup> & 4 <sup>th</sup> Saturday	10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.	<b>Ask a Master Gardener</b> – Rocky Bluff Library – 6750 US Highway 301 N., Ellenton. Visit the Extension Master Gardener information table and get answers to your gardening questions.
2 <sup>nd</sup> Saturday	10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.	<b>Ask a Master Gardener</b> – South Manatee Library – 6081 26 <sup>th</sup> Street West, Bradenton. Visit the Extension Master Gardener information table and get answers to your gardening questions.
Wednesday June 20	10:00 a.m.-Noon	<b>Master Gardener Volunteer Training Program Meet and Greet/Orientation</b> - What does it take to become a Master Gardener? It takes special gardeners who want to expand their gardening knowledge and share it with the community. Come and learn about this University of Florida volunteer program to extend horticulture outreach into our community. Open to Manatee County residents only. The next Master Gardener Volunteer Training class begins on August 8, 2018. Register online at <a href="https://master_gardener_meet_and_greet.eventbrite.com">https://master_gardener_meet_and_greet.eventbrite.com</a> for the meet and greet or call the Extension Master Gardeners (941) 722-4524. <b>We've Got a Good Thing Growing!</b>
Saturday June 23	10:30 a.m.-Noon	<b>Landscaping to Attract Wildlife</b> - You can increase the amount of birds, pollinators, bats, and other beneficial wildlife that visit your own backyard! Workshop topics include the plants, landscaping strategies, and other helpful tips to provide for and protect the animals who share our increasingly crowded spaces. \$5 administrative fee. Register on-line at <a href="https://attract_wildlife.eventbrite.com">https://attract_wildlife.eventbrite.com</a> or call the Extension Master Gardeners (941) 722-4524.
Saturday June 30	10:00 a.m.-Noon	<b>Horticultural Photography</b> - Take great flower and garden photographs! Master Gardener/Photographer Niki Muller will cover simple ways to improve your camera skills. Using examples of her own work and that of students, she will discuss lighting, framing, and other techniques for photography in the great outdoors. \$5 administrative fee. Register on-line at <a href="https://hort_photography.eventbrite.com">https://hort_photography.eventbrite.com</a> or call the Extension Master Gardeners (941) 722-4524.



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This spring's lovebugs (*Plecia neartica*) displaying reproductive prowess: mating on the wing whilst assisting pollination on a native wild lime tree (*Zanthoxylum fagara*.) Lovebugs do have some redeeming features after all: adults pollinate, immatures aid in decomposition of dead plant material, and serve as food for ground feeders. Visit <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/mg068> for more information.



Photo by Nancy Hammer, Manatee County Master Gardener