

**THE MANATEE COUNTY MASTER GARDENER E-NEWSLETTER**

**SEPTEMBER 2022 - VOLUME 21 - ISSUE 8**

# Plants for Fall Color

By Nancy Hammer, Master Gardener Volunteer



Firespike  
Photo: Forest & Kim Starr

Beautyberry  
Photo: UF/IFAS

Bougainvillea  
Photo: Forest & Kim Starr

Goldenrod  
Photo: Forest & Kim Starr

Firebush  
Photo: Forest & Kim Starr

Muhly Grass  
Photo: UF/IFAS

After the heat and humidity of our Florida summer, we will look forward to venturing out of air-conditioned homes to see what is blooming in our landscapes. Looking to expand your palette? Here are some fall bloomer suggestions including shrubs, trees, groundcovers, ornamental grasses, vines, perennials, and annuals.

Muhly grass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*) is a native clumping ornamental grass that is a showstopper in fall when it produces fluffy pink to purple flower stalks that can reach up to 5 feet high. It is truly a harbinger of autumn in Florida, especially when gently swaying in a cool breeze. It is a Master Gardener Volunteer favorite.

Skyblue clustervine (*Jacquemontia cuspidatum*) is a delicate-looking vine that produces true blue flowers in fall and winter which attract pollinators. It can grow up a trellis or as a groundcover. You will most likely find this at a native plant nursery. (See "Under Utilized Native Plants for your Florida Landscape," The Garden Bench newsletter, September 2019.)

Firespike (*Odontonema strictum*) is an herbaceous perennial that grows 4-6 feet tall with either purple or red 3-inch flower spikes which are very attractive to hummingbirds and butterflies. A hard freeze may take it down if grown in zone 9, but it will regrow in the spring.

Bougainvillea (*Bougainvillea* spp.) is a vining shrub that is available in a variety of colors. Striking bracts appear for weeks at a time beginning in October. (See The Garden Bench, April 2020.)

Forked bluecurls (*Trichostema dichotomum*) is an annual, self-seeding, native groundcover that produces distinctive blue/purple flowers through fall. Look for it at native plant nurseries.

Jatropha (*Jatropha integerrima*) is a popular small, multi-trunked evergreen tree that produces pink or red flowers in upright clusters nearly year-round and will attract hummingbirds and butterflies.

Brazilian red cloak (*Megaskepasma erythrochlamys*) has an impressive botanical name and outsized blooms to match! Huge red flower bracts will turn your head from late fall through early summer. This evergreen, semi-woody perennial - a native of Venezuela - may quickly grow to 6-8 feet.

Firebush (*Hamelia patens*) is a native, semi-woody shrub that blooms until the first frost with spiky orange/red flowers which are attractive to butterflies and hummingbirds. In winter, birds will descend on its black berries. The leaves turn a brilliant red in fall, adding to its autumn appeal. (See "Food for Thought, Part 2," The Garden Bench, October 2020.)

Beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) is a small native shrub that dazzles with shiny purple fruits called drupes which encircle the stems in fall after the leaves have dropped. Be sure to appreciate it before the birds arrive to devour the fruits. (See "Food for Thought," The Garden Bench, September 2020.)

Goldenrods (*Solidago* spp.) are aptly named native wildflowers that shine in autumn. They provide nectar for pollinators and food for birds. Several species can be found at native plant nurseries. (See "Golden Blooms for Fall," The Garden Bench, October 2019.)

Swamp or narrow-leaf sunflower (*Helianthus angustifolius*) is another sunny wildflower that glows in fall. Growing to 3-5 feet, it thrives in moist areas. (See "What's This? A Native Fall Winner," The Garden Bench September 2020.)

There are many other plants that put on a show in autumn including white caladium, coleus, beach sunflower, lion's tail, spotted beebalm, blazing star, pentas, and more. Additional shrubs include sweet almond bush and plumbago. For fall color in trees, consider hollies and red maples.

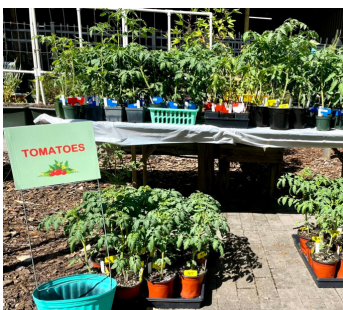
Annuals for fall include geranium, alyssum, wax begonia, impatiens, Marguerite daisy, pansy, lobelia, petunia, verbena, dianthus, and nasturtium.

Search "The Garden Bench Newsletter-UF/IFAS Extension" for back issues. Also search 'AskIFAS', and the plant name for additional information.

## Annual Master Gardener Volunteer Plant Fair!

Mark your calendar: October 1st, from 8:00 to 1:00 P.M. at the UF/IFAS Manatee County Extension Service office (1303 17th St. W., Palmetto.) Annuals, perennials, vegetables and herbs, trees, natives and wildflowers are all priced to sell.

Register here: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/2022-master-gardener-volunteer-plant-fair-tickets-394329228337>



Plant Fair 2021 - Tomatoes  
Photo: K Granberg



Plant Fair 2021 - Wagon  
Photo: K Granberg



Plant Fair 2021 - Natives  
Photo: K Granberg



# Slimy Slug Season



By Jennifer Tonge-Martin, Master Gardener Volunteer

The wet season is when the family *Gastropoda* (latin for “stomachfoot”) comes out to play, and what a mess they create! The Giant African land snail (GALS) is making all the headlines but are not in Manatee County (as of this writing!). We have lots of other snails and slugs that gardeners must deal with. Snails at least have cute shells, but slugs have no such redeeming features.



GALS  
Photo: UF/IFAS



Slug-ugh!  
Photo: Lyle Buss, UF/IFAS



Asian Tramp Snail  
Photo: Lyle Buss, UF/IFAS

Slugs can be described as snails without shells: they are all stomach and slime-producing foot. They live where it is moist and dark, like under mulch or in loose garden soil. They feed (voraciously!) at night, so you may only know they are there by the ragged holes in your leaves and the slime trails they leave as they travel. It is not unusual to have a bedding plant in the evening (like a nice, juicy begonia) that is completely gone by morning!

Slugs and snails are omnivorous, so almost nothing is safe from their attack. Many are also hermaphroditic; depending on the species, they reproduce asexually or sexually. They can reproduce within a month of hatching and live for a year or more. As if that is not enough, some carry disease-causing organisms, such as viruses and fungi that infect plants. The GALS carries the deadly rat lungworm disease, that infects humans, pets, and wildlife.

Unless you are interested in studying these unlovable creatures, you probably only want to know how to get rid of them. Natural enemies are few, though ducks, moles, and shrews will feed on them. Some snails will eat other snails and have been used to control GALS in Miami-Dade County, but their potential invasiveness prevents widespread use.

Handpicking (ugh!) and drowning slugs in soapy water helps if you are nocturnal. Since they hide extremely well during the day, they can easily escape notice. Traps can be fashioned from boards, rocks and other flat objects that slugs and snails can hide under, then we lift and destroy what has moved in. Commercial traps (like the popular “beer trap”) are widely available. They all rely on daily scouting to be effective. Conversely, removing heavy layers of mulch, piles of rubbish and leaves, and other garden debris prevents slugs from taking up residence there.

When the slug and snail populations explode, chemical control is needed. The safest effective bait is iron phosphate, a product harmless to pets, plants, and people. Metaldehyde and carbamate baits are also available, but are poisonous to pets and wildlife, so not recommended for home use by UF/IFAS. Less effective according to the scientists, but safe, are boric acid products, cinnamon oil (in a product called “Snail and Slug Away”), and diatomaceous earth. Metal barriers such as copper edging or aluminum foil have been used but not found to be reliably effective. Sulfur and copper fungicides provide incidental control as slugs and snails will stop feeding on plants sprayed with these products.

More information:

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/IN891> “Territorial Slugs of Florida”

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/IN904> “Giant African Land Snail in Florida”

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/IN305> “Tree Snails of Florida”

<https://bit.ly/3QPri5b> for latest information on GALS in Florida

# Ask a Master Gardener

By Karen Holleran, Master Gardener Volunteer



*Stemmatomerinx acircula*  
Photo: Resident Submission

Dear MGV,

Can you tell me what has infected my grasses? There is what appears to be a whitish coating on them. If it needs treatment, what would you recommend I use?

Dear reader,

There is no common name for this “fuzzy pest” on your ornamental fakahatchee grass. It is a Florida native mealy bug, *Stemmatomerinx acircula*, and its main hosts are also native: fakahatchee (*Tripsacum* spp.) and muhly (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*) grasses. We recommend you prune the grass back and to remove most of the pest problem and then treat with horticultural oil.



Master Gardener Volunteer Karen Holleran answers your email questions. Send questions and/or photos for identification or for diagnosis of residential gardening problems to [ManteeMG@gmail.com](mailto:ManteeMG@gmail.com). Or call us at 941-722-4524 weekdays from 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. and press 1 to speak to the Master Gardener Diagnostic Plant Clinic.

## What's This?: Garden Circles

By Sally Herb, Master Gardener Volunteer



Cuts on a Rose Bush  
Photo: S Herb

Those precision-cut circles often seen on soft, thin leaves in your garden are caused by an amazing bee. Female leafcutter bees (Megachilidae) cut circular discs from leaves to use as nesting material where they lay eggs and their young develop. The missing circles do not harm the plant (well, maybe aesthetically).

There are about 63 species of leafcutter bees in Florida. They are the size of a honeybee and typically solitary and non-aggressive. While most bees collect pollen on their legs, leafcutter bees store pollen on their abdomen. This makes them excellent pollinators, often used commercially for alfalfa and blueberries.

If you're seeing "circles," don't worry. You've managed to attract a super pollinator!

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/IN619>  
[Planetbee.org/planet-bee-blog//native-bee-series-leafcutting-bees](https://planetbee.org/planet-bee-blog//native-bee-series-leafcutting-bees)



University of Florida

Leafcutter Bee



# FLORIDA FERNS



By Maureen Hirthler, Master Gardener Volunteer

With an average of 237 sunny days per year, Florida has earned the nickname "The Sunshine State." But our landscapes have damp, shady places, too: front entrances, tree understories, landscape beds with northern exposures, and others.

But what can we plant that will grow well and provide some interest and texture in those areas? Consider using Florida native ferns in both containers and beds. Ferns have an ancient ancestry and have no flowers or seeds. They are evergreen and can be delicate or bold in appearance. Their leaves (fronds) unfold from a tight spiral called a fiddlehead. One of the most joyful parts of growing ferns is watching the new fronds open.

Florida native ferns are well-adapted to our area and need little care. They look lovely indoors in pots too. Here are a few that can add interest and beauty to your shady spots.

The Florida sword fern or Boston fern (*Nephrolepis exaltata*) is a dependable fern with long, pale, arching leaves that look wonderful in pots or used as a ground cover. There is also a giant sword fern (*Nephrolepis biserrata*) if you have room. An invasive sword fern (*Nephrolepis cordifolia*) is often sold as a Boston fern, so be sure to check the botanical name when you buy.

The southern wood fern (*Dryopteris ludoviciana*) with shiny, leathery, bright green upright fronds makes an excellent ground cover.

*Woodwardia areolate*, the chain fern, prefers moist areas like water gardens but does well in shade gardens too.

The maidenhair fern (*Adiantum* spp.) has light gray-green, delicate foliage and smooth black stems. Plant in masses or as ground cover to add a relaxed look to your garden.

*Osmunda cinnamomea*, the cinnamon fern, is ideal for wet areas but can also work in a consistently moist shade garden. The frond stems resemble cinnamon sticks.

The lady fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*) offers lacy light-green fronds that grow into attractive clumps.

Leather fern (*Acrostichum andaeifolium*) loves wet spots in the yard. It is a tall stunner, growing to 8 feet. The underside is leather colored in maturity, ergo its common name.

Many ferns sold in garden centers are not ferns, like the popular asparagus fern which is also invasive. Purchasing ferns from a native plant nursery is the best way to ensure you're getting the correct plant.



Maidenhair Fern  
Photo: Forest and Kim Starr



Sword Fern (*Nephrolepis exaltata*)  
Photo: Forest and Kim Starr



Native Chain Fern  
Photo: University of Florida

For fern information, visit <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/entity/topic/ferns>



# Ethnobotany of the Cabbage Palm

By Amy Stripe, Master Gardener Volunteer



Cabbage Palm

Photo: Forest and Kim Starr



Cabbage Palm

Photo: Forest and Kim Starr

Ethnobotany is the crossroads of people, plants, and culture, where plants become useful to people in a number of ways, be it for food, medicine, tools, or shelter. Even religion can be present. Our venerable cabbage palm (*Sabal palmetto*) and potentially other native *Sabal* species served (and still serve) a wide range of useful purposes.

With breechcloths and woven shawls, the Calusa people were the earliest users of cabbage palm fronds as recorded by Europeans around 1575. Interestingly, artifacts from northern tribes such as the Winnebago and Iroquois contained cabbage palm fibers in carrying straps in areas well beyond the tree's known native ranges. Even in the modern era, fronds are being used by Native Americans for traditional roof thatching, rope, cordage and cable, and baskets.

The trunks (technically stems) served a host of distinct functions from house poles to paddles to arrows. Fruits were dried and ground into flour for bread or made into syrup. There is some documentation that fruits were mixed with a certain (unknown) grass to treat food poisoning.

Cabbage palm byproducts were utilized in much of the Caribbean and southeastern United States where it is native. Today, perhaps the most commonly known use of this palm is "heart of palm," an edible delicacy that is the terminal bud (or growing point) of the tree. We know this was eaten by the time of the first Spanish visitors to Florida, but it is unclear whether indigenous people were consuming this part of the palm.

On Saturday, September 3rd at 1:00 P.M., join Extension Program Assistant Kathy Oliver and me at South Manatee Library (2601 26th St., Bradenton). We will be giving a short talk on crafts you can make from cabbage palms fronds and the most important things you can do to ensure the health of any palm in your landscape.

For in-depth information on Florida ethnobotany, visit:

<https://bit.ly/3K32QzN>

# Nativars and Pollinators - Good, Bad, or Indifferent

By Norma Kisida, Master Gardener Volunteer

Proliferation of cultivars of native plants by the nursery trade has made them widely available and raised concerns over whether these nativars support wildlife in the same way as straight natives.

A *cultivar* (literally “cultivated variety”) is a plant selected for certain characteristics such as size, leaf or bloom color, bloom shape, disease resistance, or other traits, and it can be derived from ornamental as well as native plants. Most cultivars are produced by cloning from plant cuttings and are genetically identical. *Nativar* is a term created in 2008 to describe a cultivar of a native plant versus a non-native plant. In this country, native plants are those that were present before Europeans arrived. These are the plants that pollinators and other animals depend on as they have evolved together over millions of years.



*Asclepias tuberosa* 'Hello Yellow'

Photo: Missouri Botanical Garden

Although research is being done on some nativars, the question of whether nativars support wildlife in the same way as straight natives is mostly unknown. Doug Tallamy is a professor of entomology at the University of Delaware who has worked for decades studying the importance of native plants to wildlife. The results of his research are variable. For instance, nativars with purple leaves are not as attractive to caterpillars as the native species with green leaves. Double blooming flowers keep pollinators from accessing the nectar and pollen. Changing the flower color may affect how pollinators are attracted to the plant, while larger blooms and plant size may not have a detrimental effect. Some nativars may be beneficial to wildlife by offering more or larger fruit or a longer bloom period.

Another issue is that cloned species lack the genetic variability that allows native plants to adapt and survive in a changing environment. Some nativars have been bred to be seedless and therefore are useless to seed-eating wildlife.

Once these cultivars of native plants are out in the world there is no going back if the effects are detrimental. If you are gardening for wildlife, you can't go wrong with straight native species. Nativars are usually noted by a flashy name added to the genus and species such as the *Asclepias tuberosa* 'Hello Yellow' in the photo above. You can also do your own research by observing what plants pollinators are drawn to at the nursery or in your own garden.

For more, visit:

“Native vs. “nativar” - do cultivars of native plants have the same benefits?”

<https://extension.illinois.edu/blogs/garden-scoop/2019-12-28-native-vs-nativar-do-cultivars-native-plants-have-same-benefits>

## SEPTEMBER CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Date	Time	Event
Saturday 9/3/22	1:00PM	<b>Wonderful World of Palms</b> Palms have long been a part of Florida history, but they are often misunderstood when it comes to care in the landscape. Learn the unique features of these plants with Master Gardener Volunteer Amy Stripe and Extension Program Assistant Kathy Oliver. This program will include palm identification, nutritional needs, and pruning, as well as a look at historical uses. We will finish up with a palm weaving activity - creating fun, ornamental palm leaf boondoggles. At the South Manatee Library. No registration required.
Thursday 9/8/22	11:30AM	<b>Talk Plants with Me: Ask a Horticulture Agent</b> Submit your questions to our Horticulture Agent for live Q&A. We will talk about hot topics in the plant world and may have a few guests join us along the way. <a href="https://www.eventbrite.com/e/talk-plants-with-me-tickets-391234883067">https://www.eventbrite.com/e/talk-plants-with-me-tickets-391234883067</a>
Thursday 9/15/22	9:30AM	<b>Gardening with Mushrooms</b> Join UF/IFAS Extension Manatee County for a conversation about using mushrooms to enhance your gardens. Not always nefarious, fungi in the garden can be used to help build soil, process compost and support plant health. <a href="https://www.eventbrite.com/e/gardening-with-mushrooms-tickets-368619901047">https://www.eventbrite.com/e/gardening-with-mushrooms-tickets-368619901047</a>
Friday 9/16/22	10:30AM	<b>Snakes of Southwest Florida</b> Want to find out more about these interesting and often misunderstood reptiles? You'll learn which ones you're most likely to see in your SW Florida yard and how to distinguish between venomous and non-venomous snakes. <a href="https://www.eventbrite.com/e/snakes-of-southwest-florida-tickets-368604946317">https://www.eventbrite.com/e/snakes-of-southwest-florida-tickets-368604946317</a>
Tuesday 9/27/22	9:00AM	<b>All About Trees: Community Tree Care</b> Join us for a crash course in trees. We will cover selection and planting, maintenance, pruning and long term care considerations. Specifically targeted for individuals with responsibility for tree care in their communities. <a href="https://www.eventbrite.com/e/all-about-trees-community-tree-care-tickets-400840894907">https://www.eventbrite.com/e/all-about-trees-community-tree-care-tickets-400840894907</a>

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### Manatee County Master Gardener Volunteer Plant Clinics

Location	Address	Day(s)	Time
Crowder Bros. Ace Hardware	5409 Manatee Ave W., Bradenton	Third Saturdays	9AM - 12PM
Central Library	1301 1st St. W., Bradenton	Third Saturdays	11:30AM - 2:30PM
Lakewood Ranch Farmers Market	Waterside Place, 7500 Island Cove Terrace, Sarasota	First Sundays	10AM - 2PM
Robinson Preserve	840 99th St. N.W., Bradenton (South entrance, near pavilions)	Fourth Sundays	9AM - 12PM

Location	Address	Day(s)	Time
Rocky Bluff Library	6750 US Hwy 301 N., Ellenton	Second and Fourth Saturdays	10AM - 1PM
St. George's Episcopal Church	912 63rd Ave. W., Bradenton	First and Third Thursdays	9AM - 12PM
UF/IFAS Extension Manatee County Tel. 941-722-4524 <a href="mailto:manateemg@gmail.com">manateemg@gmail.com</a>	1303 17th St. W., Palmetto	Every weekday except Wednesdays	9AM - 4PM