The pumpkin has always been associated with the fall. Whether it’s a trip to the pumpkin patch, carving a pumpkin, roasting the seeds, or eating warm pumpkin pie, this member of the gourd family makes itself known. The unique shape of this gourd and its various colors have quite a history in North America.

When the early settlers arrived, they found the Native Americans growing pumpkins for various reasons. They wove pumpkin strips into mats. In order to cook it, they added a variety of tasty spices to the scooped out pulp and seeds. They would then put the pulp back into the pumpkin and cook it over hot ashes. The settlers would eventually alter this recipe into pumpkin pie.

The settlers took notice of the growing techniques used by the Native Americans. One technique the settlers adopted was placing fish remains under the mound of dirt before planting the seeds. The fish would decompose and act as a great organic fertilizer. The Native Americans also taught the settlers to grow pumpkins in unison with corn and beans. Americans continue to grow pumpkins today for food and Halloween decorations.

Nutritionists would classify this garden giant as a vegetable due to its rich sources of potassium and Vitamin A. However, I still think of this crop as the well known dessert, pumpkin pie. The question of fruit or vegetable is up in the air, but the pumpkin belongs to Cucurbita family which includes cucumbers and other squashes. Imagine carving a Jack-o-Lantern out of a cucumber or tasting a cucumber pie. I don’t think either would go over well.

Today the pumpkin comes in many different sizes, shapes, and now even colors. There are also seeds available now to grow giant pumpkins, which could easily weigh 200 pounds or more. The largest known pumpkin on record weighed a mere 1,502 pounds in 2006.* Imagine a small child picking one of those out at the pumpkin patch.

The pumpkin plays a huge role in storytelling and entertainment. Take for instance the pumpkin carriage which Cinderella rides in to and from the ball, or the headless horseman’s pumpkin head. I guess you could say the headless horseman, though scary, is not much more than a vegetable.

In 1966, Charles Shultz introduced us to his cartoon of *It’s the Great Pumpkin Charlie Brown.* Yes, each year I still try to catch the 42 year old cartoon. It just wouldn’t be Halloween without that ‘block head’ and poor Linus awaiting the arrival of *The Great Pumpkin.*
The Green 'Zine
Safe Attractive Mosquito Control

Smack, swat, ouch, itchy, and scratchy are all words that come to mind when I think of mosquitoes. There are different types of wildlife that consume a large amount of mosquitoes each night. For some wildlife, these pesky, nippy, biting nuisances could very well be a staple food product. However, that really doesn’t make me appreciate the mosquito.

The sound of a slapping hand onto skin becomes almost normal, especially during the rainy season. Let’s face it mosquitoes and mosquito control have their very own marketable items such as repellents, bug light zappers, and the anti-itch creams, gels, and roll on sticks. From candles to foggers, everyone seems to have their own way to try to control the mosquito population in their yard.

The University of Florida/ IFAS and the Florida Medical Entomology Laboratory have their very own website dedicated to mosquitoes. It is an eye appealing, user friendly website. Their site is very informative and has many different links to other sites such as “Fun with Mosquitoes.” Do you think any of the specialized entomologists thought as kids, “I want to grow up and work with mosquitoes.” I hope not.

You can also find a teacher’s guide on the link which includes mosquito fun facts. One fun fact is ‘eggs laid during the rainy season can even survive periods of drought. These eggs will hatch when covered with water.’* You can find some of these great fun filled facts at http://Mosquito.ifas.ufl.edu/mosquito Ecology.htm or the CDCs website: http://www.cdc.gov/NCIDOD/DVBID/arbor/neato.htm. These websites do have some good information if you have an interest in the blood suckers.

One recommended control method is to empty containers that hold water, especially after it rains. You can also keep some goldfish or minnows in your pond. Small fish love to eat mosquito larvae. The Tampa Tribune recently published a short article on mosquitoes and plants that can help deter the pests. You can add plants around your house, such as ‘geraniums, lemon thyme, marigolds, tansies, citrosa plants, basil, rosemary, and sassafras.’* I will be adding lots of basil and marigolds around the yard to see if these plants repel the annoying insects.

By Holly Tuxbury, Master Gardener, FMN

Sources: Tampa Tribune “The Neighborhood’s Abuzz” and the UF and CDC sites mentioned above.

Five Tips for Living Green: Give Them a Try

- See if your power company will conduct a home inspection and tell you how to cut down on electricity. It can save money.
- Plant a bee garden using native plants. Encourage the pollinators to visit your yard.
- The Live Monarch Foundation will send out free milkweed seeds. They want at least one milkweed plant in each yard. Asclepias Curassavica has a red and orange blooming flower which is your typical milkweed.
- Convince neighbors to take part in planting a neighborhood butterfly / pollinator garden. It’s great for the environment, aesthetically pleasing, and you can get to know your neighbors. Go with native plants.
- Discourage your workplace or community centers from using Styrofoam cups. Have them bring their own mugs. No mugs, no chugs!

By Holly Tuxbury, Master Gardener, FMN
**The History of the Pumpkin**

In Florida, you should begin to grow pumpkins in the spring to be ready to harvest by fall. The term ‘naked seed’ is used quite a bit in regards to growing pumpkins. Basically, the pumpkin seed is not encompassed by a hard shell which makes it germination easier. According to the University of Florida/IFAS, since naked seeds are used, the seed will need to be treated with a fungicide. Plant your seed approximately 1” deep in a mound of organic material. Place your mounds approximately two to three feet apart as the vines will sprawl with a mind of their own. Don’t forget to add a lot of rich organic material to amend your soil. If you do not see insects pollinating your pumpkin flowers, you may have to pollinate them by hand.

If you grow a huge giant pumpkin, take some thought into entering the annual Pumpkin Regatta in Nova Scotia. The giant pumpkins are hollowed out and yes, put in the water and taken for a spin around the lake. Don’t go up expecting an easy win, as this is serious business for some. Many of the gargantuan pumpkins weigh between 1,000 and 2,000 pounds. Yes, they do float if you don’t topple over. Now that you’ve been given many different ideas about pumpkins and how to grow them, maybe we will see you at the races next year.

By Holly Tuxbury, Master Gardener, Florida Master Naturalist


---

**Fall Is Finally Here - What to Do?**

Now that fall has finally arrived and the temperatures are getting cooler, we are more apt to go out and work in our gardens. We should all start thinking about winter freezes and how we can prepare. Go to the local thrift stores to buy sheets, blankets, and any other large sections of fabric to cover your sensitive plants on those cold winter nights. Remember not to let the fabric touch the plant, but you have to enclose the plant completely to the ground.

Let’s get out there and start weeding those beds and garden plots. If you have a tiller, till in some organic materials to help add nutrients during the growing season. You may need to incorporate some slow release fertilizer to accommodate your plants. However, remember that too much fertilizer is not always better.

If you have a shady area in your yard that is calling out for color, try planting bromeliads. They come in all shapes and sizes and have gorgeous blooms, which will catch the attention of your neighbors. Did you know a pineapple is considered a bromeliad?

If you like the sunflower look, and want to go native, the Jerusalem artichoke sunflower is a sure way to add that burst of yellow and green in your garden. This sunflower is a perennial so it will come back next year. They also make great cut flowers.

Vines make excellent screens for unsightly areas of the yard. Maybe you’d like to put up some lattice and let vines climb to cover up a rain barrel. If planting near your air conditioning unit, make sure you leave plenty of room for good airflow. You don’t want your stunning plants to overcome your AC unit.

Ornamental grasses are great showy bloomers this time of year. A great choice is Gulf Muhly grass, which has a pinkish purple sheen to its bloom. Plant them in mass for an eye popping display.

For a quick container garden, punch drainage holes into a plastic trick or treat pumpkin or a black cauldron and fill them with potting soil. Add mums and marigolds.

By Holly Tuxbury, Master Gardener
Eastem Lubber Grasshoppers

Many Sumter County residents are concerned about grasshoppers right now. There are many different species of grasshoppers, but the Eastern lubber grasshopper frequents our area this time of year. The adult Eastern lubber grasshopper is a yellow to orange color and has black markings on its hind legs and abdomen. When this grasshopper is young, its body is black with a yellow stripe down its back. The adults can reach 3 to 4 inches in length and they move around by jumping and crawling.

Because this grasshopper mainly crawls, you can simply hand pick them off your plants and place them in a bucket of soapy water. If there are large numbers of grasshoppers feeding on your plants, you can treat them with an insecticide. However, Eastern lubber grasshopper are hard to control. They have very thick, waxy skin called an exoskeleton. This thick exoskeleton makes it hard for the insecticides to penetrate and kill the grasshopper. It is best to try to control this insect when they are young, before their skin gets tough.

Insecticides recommended for lubber control on ornamental plants are cyhalothrin, carbaryl, permethrin, esfenvalerate and bifenthrin. These listed insecticides are not the product name, but the active ingredient. You will find the active ingredient in fine print on the front of the product’s label. When treating for this insect, you will need to coat the actual grasshopper with the pesticide. Pesticide residues left on plants may have little to no effect on this tough insect.

A weedy drainage ditch makes a great habitat for lubber grasshoppers. Simply keeping areas mowed will help reduce the numbers. For more information on the Eastern lubber grasshopper please visit http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/in132, the source for this article.

Grasshoppers go through an incomplete metamorphosis, meaning that the young look like the adults. However, their colors can vary greatly depending on their life stages and location.

By Brooke Burn, Urban Horticulture Agent

Pictures from the University of Florida

Did you know that the Eastern lubber grasshopper can make hissing noises? Insects breath through holes on the sides of their bodies called spiracles. When the Eastern lubber grasshopper feels threatened it pushes air out of the holes, which results in the hissing sound.

The Sumter Gardener
What’s Going On Around Here? Local Gardening Activities

- **FYN Classes**: October 23, 2008 - Planting for Winter Color, November 13, 2008 - Deck the Halls, December 11, 2008 - Growing Herbs and Vegetables. For more information please call 352-753-0124. All classes are held at 1 - 2pm at the Oxford Community Building 4027 County Road 106, Oxford, FL.

- **On Saturday, October 25th** at the Laurel Manor Recreation Center, the second annual **Environmental Expo** will held. There will be a lot of environmental vendors and clubs represented through out the day. Mingle with the crowds and get some great literature about gardening and what we can do for our environment.

- **On Saturday, November 8th** from 10:00a.m. to 1:00p.m. “**Government Day**” will be held at the Laurel Manor Recreation Center. There will be a Florida Yards and Neighborhoods booth as well as a Sumter County Master Gardener booth.

- **Each year at the Sumter County Fair**, the Master Gardeners hold a **Horticulture Show**. This year the fair is starting in mid February. The minimal requirements to enter a plant is that you must own and have taken care of the plant for at least 90 days prior to the first day of the Horticulture Show. Your plants must be insect, fungus, and disease free. More information will be coming soon, but start primping your plants for “**Best in Show**”

- In **January** look for the new **Sumter County Master Gardener Class** to begin. For more information and to be added to the waiting list please call 352-793-2728.

---

**Why Does the Wren Build So Many Nests?**

Carolina Wrens often builds multiple nests and not in the most unusual places. In order to attract his mate, the male Carolina wren will build several nests through out an area. This way the female can choose the best looking nest.

These nests cause problems when you are working around your hanging plants or even just walking in a carport or near over hangs. I have found nests in empty flower pots, my favorite hanging plant, roll up outdoor blinds, and underneath a rag in the garage.

Pay attention through breeding season, if they pick your hanging plant, stop watering it. Welcome the wren to your yard. It is a great little bird with a huge birdonality!

By H. Tuxbury, Master Gardener, Florida Master Naturalist
Plant Match Maker: Am I the Palm for You?

We’ve all heard about Match.com or other online match makers. Wouldn’t it be great to find our perfect plant match? A healthy thriving plant can sometimes provide us with a world of happy thoughts.

Florida is known for their numerous palm trees, but I bet I’m the best pick for your small space.

My Profile: Pindo Palm (Butia capitata)

**Description:** I like to be called “Pindo”, though I’m sometimes referred to as the Jelly Palm. That is because every summer I bring forth large, showy flowers that turn into clusters of small (date-size), orange-yellow, juicy, edible fruits. These fruits can be made into jams or jellies. (However, my owner tells me that it would be better if I produced all of my fruit at the same time, instead of throughout the summer. My fruits’ seed is large and there’s very little flesh for just one batch!).

Some people don’t think I’m a pretty palm, but my owner loves my graceful, long, curving blue-gray fronds, and even dresses me up by planting impatiens or pansies in my many leaf bases! I am so tough that I survived the onslaught of flying shingles in the February ’07 tornado and have hosted nests of mourning doves. I will grow slowly to a height of 15 to 25 feet with a spread of 10 to 15 feet and require very little pruning.

**Likes:** I am extremely easy-going. I can tolerate full sun, partial sun or partial shade. I can also handle any kind of well-drained soil. I am very drought tolerant and my roots are not a problem. I am resistant to pests and diseases and am moderately salt-tolerant. I like living in Central Florida, but am very cold hardy and have been known to survive as far north as the Carolinas and West Virginia (although my official hardiness zones are 8b-11).

**Dislikes:** I don’t like to be planted closer than 10 feet from a walkway or patio, since my fruit can be messy if allowed to drop. If soil pH is too high, I might experience some micronutrient deficiencies (usually Manganese and Iron).

**You:** My perfect match is someone who wants an easy-care, worry-free, unique specimen palm that is suited for smaller spaces. My owner should be one who would love to have a blue-gray or silver accent in their landscape. Be willing to deal with putting the seed pod clusters or fruit into your yard waste each summer.

*By Pat Provance, Master Gardener*

**Sources:** Document ENH264, revised Dec. 1006 [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu) [other resources included “Gardening in a Minute” and “Some Palms Provide ‘Blue’ Color in the Landscape” by Ralph Mitchell, Charlotte County Extension Service]*

![Pindo Palm in a corner landscape. Photo provided by Pat Provance, Master Gardener.](image)
Trout Lake Nature Center: An Educational Oasis

Trout Lake Nature Center is not only a great place to get away from the city, but it is a wonderful educational tool for Central Florida schools and residents. The Nature Center has two buildings on site which are filled with preserved specimens of Florida’s native animals and birds. If you have never seen a Florida Panther, you can stand about two feet away from one and never flinch. Insects such as beetles, and grasshoppers, can be found in the main building. If you like butterflies, you should check out their exhibit of butterflies and moths. It is quite a display of color.

Trout Lake Nature Center is equipped to guide children of all ages through the woods and down to the lake in order to teach lessons about wildlife. The lessons are in conjunction with specific educational material the children would learn in a classroom. All activities and lesson plans that the staff and docents teach are not only fun, but they grab the child’s attention and leave the child with a new outlook on wildlife. A short jaunt through the woods allows kids and visitors the chance to check out native plants and the differences between an upland and wetland habitat.

Once you have hiked and walked down the boardwalk, you will come to a great overlook of Trout Lake. As you walk along the boardwalk your guide will tell you that, ‘when you start to see the mucky areas, those are usually the highways of the alligators.’ Since sunlight cannot penetrate the boardwalk, no vegetation grows underneath it. This provides an easy access to and from the lake for wildlife. One of the goals of the center is to teach visitors about the food chain, ecosystems, and how just one element, if removed, could disrupt the entire habitat.

Trout Lake is open to the public. The physical address is 520 West County Road 44. For directions, hours, and further information please call 352-357-7536.

The Sumter County Master Gardeners attended a Naturalist Field Day on September 9th and had a great time. Just don’t forget mosquito spray and your camera. Be patient and you will find multitudes of wildlife activity taking place around you. You can also visit their website at http://www.troutlakenature.org/.

By Holly Tuxbury, Master Gardener, Florida Master Naturalist

Quick Tips for Your Garden

* Make sure you inspect your plants on a weekly basis for pest problems or signs of disease.
* Keep at least two to three inches of good quality mulch in your flower beds and around your trees. Never allow the mulch to touch the trunk or base of your plants, as this may increase problems associated with pests and root rot. Mulch will help keep your soil cool in the hot season and warm in the cool season.
* Keep that compost flowing. Leaves will be dropping soon, so add them to your pile for later use as good organic matter in the garden.

By Holly Tuxbury, Master Gardener, Florida Master Naturalist
SOIL TESTING

**Soil pH Tests**: Test the pH of your soil for a $2 fee. A nutritional analysis from the University of Florida is available for a fee of $7. For instructions on how to bring in your soil sample please call 352-793-2728 or 352-753-0124. Thank you.

http://sumter.ifas.ufl.edu

Plant Clinics are held in Bushnell each Wednesday from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and in the Villages the 1st and 3rd Monday of each month. For more information please call: 352-793-2728 or 352-753-0124.

For gardening information:
www.solutionsforyourlife.com

This issue was written by Master Gardeners Holly Tuxbury, Pat Provance, and Urban Horticulture Agent Brooke Burn. This issue was approved for distribution on October 17, 2008.