Like ants, honey bees are a complex working society which is often over looked. Over the past several years, we have heard about the decline of the honey bee and their colonies. We depend on honey bees for approximately eighty percent of all pollination. It’s no wonder that bee keepers and scientists alike are concerned about the decline. Avid gardeners also talk amongst each other about the bee population or lack of in their own garden.

If you have seen “Bee Movie” with Jerry Seinfeld, you may feel some guilt about enjoying the sweet taste of honey. During the summer months, a typical bee colony can consist of approximately 50,000 to 70,000 honey bees. Each of these bees has its own job to do. A hive consists of three types of honey bees. The Worker bees are all females and like their name, they do most of the work. The male bees, called Drones, are of little use to a hive except for breeding purposes. Last and certainly not least is the Queen.

A Queen can live for several years as she is pampered and well protected by the rest of her hive. A queen starts out her life like any other worker bee larvae with the exception that ‘nursing’ bees feed this larvae a highly fertile and nourishing ‘Royal Jelly.’ This is a concoction made of digested pollen, honey or nectar, and a chemical released from the head of the nursing bee. Essentially, this milky substance is what changes a normal worker bee larva into a Queen. For the rest of her life, she will consume royal jelly. She is expected to keep the population of the colony at its highest numbers and quality. Though a Queen bee only mates for a little over two weeks with the drones, she will hold the sperm and will use it to produce the numerous eggs laid daily. On a good day a Queen can lay up to 200 eggs.

The Worker bees’ name says it all. Thousands of worker bees collect pollen, nectar, produce bees-wax, tend to the comb, and the larvae and pupae. They also supply all of the water for the hive. A typical worker is literally worked to death, as her lifespan usually does not last much longer than six weeks in the summer time. In her life time, a worker bee may only make ½ a teaspoon of honey, much less than we might use on a peanut butter and honey sandwich. An entire colony of bees can produce up to approximately 200 pounds of honey per year.

The “Bee Movie” gets a few things turned around, but that is Hollywood and animation. The Drone has no stinger and does not leave the hive. There is
The Green ‘Zine

Steps in the Green Direction

I received an email which brought a smile to my face. It conveyed a sense of greening a community. The Villages residents have made many positive strides to become green. They have held both the Environmental Expos and Water Conservation expos.

Just a couple of years ago, rain barrels were not allowed in The Villages. Taking into concerns for the environment and the movement to go more green, today, rain barrels are allowed in The Villages with a few restrictions. The rain barrels do have to remain in the rear of the house. Please see your local Architectural Review Committee (ARC) for specific rules and regulations, concerning size and color.

Rain barrels, which connect to the downspout of the gutter tend to be between 50 and 55 gallon drums. A good constant rain can easily fill a rain barrel with fresh water. Remember, they must be food grade drums. You certainly don’t want an old chlorine vat. Nearby flower beds or hanging plants can benefit from the water collected.

Workshops for making rain barrels will be available on a quarterly basis at The Village’s Annex, sponsored by UF/IFAS Sumter County Extension, Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program. For more information and registration please call 352-753-0124.

Many residents remember their compost piles from their past. Composting can now happen in The Villages. Some specific requirements are that the compost has to be kept into a self contained unit. Please approach the Architectural Review Committee for further information in regards to composting regulations. Once one gets approval for their composting unit, they can start turning their greens/veggies from trash to a pot of gold.

Last but not least, Zoysia Grass can now replace St. Augustine grass. Most areas still require 51% of turf in a yard, however, speak with your local Architectural Review Committee for clarification and specifications. Zoysia Grass tends to have more of a northern grass texture as compared to the thick bladed St. Augustine grass.

Going green often is defined by a homeowners’ association, but we were all taught to color within the lines. That includes the color green. Residents, take advantage. Go green where you can.

By Holly E. Tuxbury, Master Gardener and Florida Master Naturalist

Tips for Living Green: Give Them a Try

- There are many environmental volunteer opportunities which can encourage greener living. Volunteering is a great way to help. Go to www.volunteermatch.org.
- Use a refillable water bottle. Plastic comes from petroleum., 1.5 million barrels are used annually for America’s bottled water. * The Green Book
- Learn about an endangered species in your area and learn what you can do to help. Then tell your friends and family about it.
- Be creative when it comes to choosing containers for your plants. Any container that will hold soil and water can be turned into a garden. Add a hole for drainage.
- Scraps of lumber can often be turned into cozy homes or homemade feeders for birds. Use any search engine to find out bird house or feeder dimensions.

By H. E. Tuxbury, Master Gardener, Florida Master Naturalist
one exception, however. During the winter months, the Queen will kick the Drones out of the hive, which leads to the Drones demise. Only the worker bees, have the ability to sting as they wander from the hive, work inside, or guard the hive.

The Field Worker bee leaves the hive in search of the sweet smelling nectar which is often associated with pollen. The Field Worker will collect pollen and store it in pouches until it is time to fly back to the hive. There they turn over their pollen to the other workers employed at the hive. If we did not have pollination because of bees, we would lose at least 1/3 of the foods we consume today. As the field workers collect honey for the hive they help to pollinate our flowers, fruits, nuts, and vegetables. Remember though, we can help the bees by adding certain plants to our yards, gardens, and land. Keep pesticides away from the bees’ plants and hive. If you have a hive of concern in your area, you can find some resources at: floridabeekeepers.org. Remember a honey bee in the garden means beautiful and bountiful crops and flowers. When you see a honey bee, say ‘thank you.’

By Holly Tuxbury, Master Gardener, Florida Master Naturalist


Photo by: Holly Tuxbury

Anytime Gift Ideas for the Green Gardener

Green gardeners are cropping up everywhere. Here are some ideas for inexpensive gifts:

1. A plant is always a great gift for flora lovers. An orchid can brighten up almost any room, or go with another indoor favorite that brings the green indoors. 2. Make a donation to an eco friendly group in the gift recipient’s name. Check out the group first and ensure it is a cause which the gift receiver feels strongly about. 3. A plastic trash can, drilled for aeration can make a great bin for the beginning composter. Fill it with garden goodies and the composter will turn into gift wrap. 4. Try a used bookstore for gardening books or field guides. 5. Does your gardener need new garden tools? Don’t toss out the old ones. Sharpen them up and use them for less delicate jobs. 6. Make birdhouses, feeders, and suet. Just because it’s homemade doesn’t mean you’re going cheap! It’s the thought that counts!

Look for the most recently published books and those that pertain to their area. By Holly Tuxbury, Master Gardener and Florida Master Naturalist

The Sumter Gardener
Central Florida residents may notice the oak trees shedding their leaves at this time of year. What they may not notice are the small spheres on the undersides of the oak leaves. These perfectly shaped spheres are caused by an insect called a gall wasp. The gall wasps lay their eggs on the oak leaves, which causes the plant cells to grow abnormally around the developing insect. If you were to take a cross section of these galls, you would find either an egg, larvae, or a pupa inside. Gall wasps go through a complete metamorphosis like a butterfly.

There are many different species of gall wasps that cause different growths on trees. Some gall wasps lay their eggs on the leaves only, while others can infect the twigs and branches. Gall wasps are very small, many are less than 1/4” in length. 80% of all gall wasp species lay their eggs on oaks.

It is typically not recommended to treat your trees for gall wasps. The wasps are hard to control with insecticides and most species do not critically harm the tree. However, trees that are declining in health can have more gall wasps than a healthy tree.

Galls on twigs and stems can be pruned out if they are severe. The plant tissues would need to be destroyed after removal in order to prevent the gall wasps from hatching and spreading.

Gall wasps are not the only pests that can cause abnormal growth on trees. Galls can also be caused by fungi, bacteria, mites, and flies. Galls can range in size of less than an inch in diameter to several inches in diameter. Color, texture, and shape can all vary depending on the plant host and the pest causing the gall. For more information please visit edis.ifas.ufl.edu/document_in022

The Jadera bug is an insect that causes alarm to Central Florida residents, because it appears in large numbers. Residents will find this bug along the ground as it feeds on fallen seeds. This red insect is also called the golden rain tree bug, because it is commonly found feeding on golden rain tree seeds. To help control Jadera bug populations the University of Florida recommends raking the seeds and disposing of them. The Jadera bug can be found throughout the year, but it is most prevalent in May.

Gall wasp adult inside a leaf gall

Jaderia nymph.
The Plant Match Maker: Looking For A Bulb That Thrives in Florida?

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.

My Profile: Amaryllis (Hippeastrum x hybridum)

Description: Here in Central Florida I can put on quite a show in the landscape every spring! I am native to South Africa, but bulbs are available from North America and Holland. (The Dutch hybrids have the largest bulbs and thus the largest flowers!) I come in a huge variety of cultivars with single or double trumpet-shaped flower colors ranging from deep reds, pinks and oranges to soft pink, salmon or white – I can even appear striped and multicolored, with 2-6 blooms per stalk. Most experts think that the greatest landscape effect is when ten or more bulbs of the same color are grouped together (planted 10-12” apart), but I can also be a stunning specimen plant.

The University of Florida is trying to develop new lines that are even better adapted to our area’s weather. My “little sister”, the dwarf amaryllis, is harder to find, but can produce up to 18 smaller flowers per bulb! I am hardy from zones 8-10; so there is no need to dig up my bulbs in the winter, unless it’s time to divide them. Keep in mind my foliage might die back in a serious frost. At that time, propagation is easy. You can break off the little ½ inch bulbs (bulblets) around the mother plant and plant them. In two years they will be ready to flower!

Likes: I like light “shifting shade”, with a few hours of direct sunlight – in the morning. I thrive in well drained soil, with 3-4 inches of organic matter worked in, and 2 inches of mulch on top. When planted, ideally anytime between September and January, the soil should just cover my bulb with the neck protruding. I enjoy a good watering when planted and a fertilizer boost two to three times a year (either bulb fertilizer 6-6-6, or some experts recommend a slow release with higher phosphorus 15-30-15). I like to have my dead blooms removed before seeds are produced so that I can have a better flower display the next year. My bloom life can be extended by removing the anthers (male plant organs recognizable as long yellow filaments sticking out from the flowers) which prevents pollination.

For those wishing to grow me in containers, you need to use a pot slightly wider than my bulb(s). The pot needs to have a drain hole and be weighted, I can get tall and top heavy. Leave 2/3 of my bulb showing above the soil and water thoroughly. After I am established, only water when the soil feels dry to the touch. When I start to grow, move me to a sunny place and rotate my pot every few days so my stalks grow straight up. When blooms appear, move me to a cooler, less sunny spot to prolong flowering. After blooming, cut me back to the top of the bulb and give me water – I just may give you another stalk of flowers!

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

You: Someone looking for a rather care-free, Florida-Friendly bulb for dramatic landscape color in the spring – or for container gardening and gift giving throughout the year.

References:
• Hendry County Horticultural News “Bulbs for Florida Forget Northern Favorites” [no date given online]
  “Garden Magic” Show transcript (IMPACT TV) [no date given online]

By Pat Provance, Master Gardener

Photo by: H. Tuxbury
When temperatures dip it can sure take a toll on our plants.

Try to protect as much as you can by pulling mulch away from the root system and watering heavily before the cold weather occurs. The warm soil will release heat and give some cold protection to smaller plants. Sheets and blankets also provide some protection against freeze/ frost damage. Leave cold damaged plant material in place until the last freeze or frost. This old foliage will offer protection for the plant. The best protection is to avoid planting delicate tropical plants in marginal interior areas. Fortunately, these cold events may not occur for many years, but as we recently found out this was a cold year. The Keys are the only truly frost free place in Florida.

Decide what you want to protect or save. The crinums and big leaf philodendrons will have leaf damage, but the plant should survive if you do nothing. The geraniums and crotons however, are going to turn brown if they freeze. Learn what temperatures your plants can withstand. There is no use wasting time on plants that are not cold survivors. Forget the plastic bags. How warm do they make you feel? They are going to do the same for the plants. Use blankets, cloth covers (frost cloth), and similar materials—old hay works well for low growing plants. Also use cardboard boxes and trashcans, which help trap ground heat.

Make sure that you cover plants to the ground. You are trying to entrap heat and keep the cold out. Forget water as a source of heat. Turn the irrigation system off. Watering at the wrong time or not applying it properly could increase the cold damage. 

Source: Tom MacCubbin

For those plants that you just cannot bring inside, try this:

To prevent heat loss from sides of containers, push together large outdoor pots and wrap the bases with plastic, burlap, or a blanket. Mulch or cover plants with straw, blankets, or cardboard.

Don’t worry if plant leaves wilt; they will protect themselves against cold by dehydrating themselves. Give it time and most will perk back up. Keep plants watered at the base before a hard freeze; moist soil absorbs more heat and can protect plants.

Make sure that newly planted evergreens are well watered throughout the winter because they will dry out.

If possible, create a shield next to your plants to protect from damaging winds. Take water timers (attached to faucets) indoors as they can be damaged by frost. If you see damage from frost (black or purple flaccid leaves or stems) particularly on woody perennials, wait until the spring to prune so as to not shear off healthy tissue.

Source: Walter Reeves, University of Georgia College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, Cooperative Extension Office

-by Nancy King, Master Gardener

Let’s Review:

- When you cover plants, it is important to remember, do not allow the blankets to touch the plants. If you have some pipes or dowels, lay the blankets over these. You still need to make sure that the covers) go all the way to the ground and clothespin any gaps at the top to keep the heat inside.

- If you have a table on your patio, like mentioned before, gather as many pots that you can underneath the table and cover the entire table to the ground in blankets.

- This year many of us lost plants due to the hard freezes (6-8 hours below freezing) and multiple days back to back. Unfortunately, sometimes Mother Nature will win out. Be patient and do not cut any dead matter off of your plants until spring. This will protect the plants from further weather problems.

- Stay tuned to your local forecast. Check www.weather.com and get hourly temperature reports. Keep informed.

- H. Tuxbury, Master Gardener and Florida Master Naturalist
It’s Time to Hit the Trails: Check Out Florida’s Native Plants and Habitats

Sumter, Lake, Pasco, Polk Counties:
The Green Swamp Wilderness Preserve is located in the Four Corners area of Lake, Pasco, Polk, and Sumter Counties.

It is approximately 110,000 acres. It is broken into 4 different tracts. The Green Swamp and its terrain is home to the headwaters of the Withlacoochee, Ocklawaha, Hillsborough, and the Peace Rivers. The Green Swamp Tract is located along and surrounds 471 south of Webster. For a list of the many locations and activities please go to http://www.swfwmd.state.fl.us/recreation/areas/greenswamp.html. There are several birding trail areas. Check out the many varieties of habitats and various preserves that protect the Green Swamp. It will be well worth your time.

* Remember when you go out into these preserves to let someone know where you are going, what you plan to do, and a time to expect to hear from you. Before you go to any locations, go to www.enature.com and list the zip code to find out what types of birds, animals, and plants inhabit the area. Happy hiking!

Source: SWFWMD website Recreation Guide

By Holly E. Tuxbury, Master Gardener, Florida
Master Naturalist

What’s Going On?

- The Florida Yard and Neighborhoods Speaker Series are held at the Oxford Community Building, the second and fourth Thursdays at 1pm. The series covers a variety of gardening topics.
- 2/27 - 3/7 Sumter County Fair and Horticulture Show, Sumter County Fair Grounds.
- 3/20 - 3/21 First Annual Citizen Science Symposium 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. in Ruskin. Please visit www.campbayou.org or call Dolly at 813-363-5438 for information.
- 3/23 Florida Gardens Speaker Series: Topic - Choosing and Caring for Palms. Please call 352-793-2728 for information. Chula Recreation Center will be the first location at 9 a.m. and Truman Recreation Center will be held at 1 p.m.
- 4/12 - 4/20 National Environmental Education Week—Earth Week, with Earth Day falling on 4/20. Check for local activities. Cemex Mine in Center Hill, will be holding an event on April 4th from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Master Gardeners will be there to answer questions.
- 4/18 - Sumter County Master Gardener Plant Sale located at the Oxford Community building from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.
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.

http://sumter.ifas.ufl.edu

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

For watering restrictions:

www.watermatters.org

For gardening information:

www.solutionsforyourlife.com

To have your yard certified as a Florida Friendly Yard contact Jim Davis at 352-753-0124 for criteria. To certify your yard as a National Wildlife Federation Backyard Habitat visit their website and criteria at www.nwf.org.