Upcoming Plant Fair --- a Cooperative Effort Better Than Ever

By Teri Lynn Joslin

Combining efforts should prove to offer something for everyone on Saturday, March 31, when Manatee Cooperative Extension holds its annual Spring Plant Fair from 8:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. In addition to the variety of plants for sale and verbal consultations with Master Gardeners, the public will be able to choose from a free lecture by Monica Brandeis, a well-known Florida gardener, information on conserving water in the home landscape, and several ‘college’ courses throughout the morning.

Keynoting the Spring Gardening College will be Peggy Dessaint, Commercial Landscape Horticulture Agent, who will speak on “Plants Are Different Here—Introduction to Growing Conditions in Manatee County.” Breakout sessions will be offered on Taking the Pain out of Your Water Bill, Landscape Plants – Pests, Problems and Solutions, Backyard Citrus Care, and Good Snakes, Bad Snakes. Prominent experts and agents or the faculty for the day include Jack Tichenor, Sylvia Shives, Dr. Steve Futch, and Dr. Steve Johnson. The cost is a reasonable $3.00. Detailed information and registration forms for the Gardening College may be obtained by calling the Extension office at 722-4524 from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Complimentary hot dogs and a beverage will be offered to everyone participating in the fair activities. At noon, Monica Brandies will speak about “Shade Gardening for Florida” and will answer questions and sign books. Among her many publications are Florida Gardening: the Newcomer Survival Guide and Bless You for the Gift.

We hope that combining the efforts of many of the aspects of the Extension office will be a successful exercise in Cooperative Extension, reaching out to and educating the public.
Native Plant of the Month

Virginia creeper Vitaceae Parthenocissus quinquefolia (L.) Planch.

**Sun Exposure:** Will grow from full sun to full shade  
**Danger:** Handling plant may cause skin irritation or allergic reaction  
**Bloom Color:** Light Blue, White/Near White  
**Bloom Time:** Late Spring/Early Summer  
**Foliage:** Deciduous  
**Other details:** May be a noxious weed or invasive  
**Water Needs:** Water regularly; do not over water  
**Propagation Methods:** From softwood, semi-hardwood and hardwood cuttings, from seed; direct sow outdoors in fall, from seed; winter sow in vented containers, coldframe or unheated greenhouse  
**Seed Collecting:** Allow unblemished fruit to ripen and dry

**Virginia creeper** or five-leaved ivy is a woody vine native to eastern and central North America, in southeastern Canada, the eastern and central United States, eastern Mexico, and Guatemala, west as far as Manitoba, South Dakota, Utah and Texas. Also known as "Engelman Ivy" in Canada. It is a prolific climber, in the wild, it climbs smooth surfaces using small forked tendrils tipped with small strongly adhesive pads. Leaves are palmately compound, comprised of five leaflets (rarely three leaflets, particularly on younger vines) joined from a central point on the leafstalk. The leaflets have a toothed margin, which makes it easy to distinguish from poison-ivy, which has three leaflets with smooth edges.

The flowers are small and greenish, produced in clusters in late spring, and mature in late summer or early fall into small hard purplish-black berries. These berries contain oxalic acid, which is poisonous to humans and other mammals, and may be fatal if eaten. However, accidental poisoning is uncommon, likely because of the bad taste of the berries. Despite being poisonous to mammals, they provide an important winter food source for birds.

**Cultivation and uses:** Virginia creeper is grown as an ornamental plant, because of its deep red to burgundy fall foliage. It is frequently seen covering telephone poles or trees. The creeper may kill vegetation it covers by shading its support and thus limiting the supporting plants' ability to photosynthesise. Virginia creeper can be used as a shading vine for buildings on masonry walls. Because the vine, like its relative Boston ivy, adheres to the surface by disks rather than penetrating roots, it will not harm the masonry but will keep a building cooler by shading the wall surface during the summer, saving money on air conditioning. As with ivy, trying to rip the plant from the wall will damage the surface; but if the plant is first killed, such as by severing the vine from the root, the adhesive pads will eventually deteriorate and release their grip.

Native Americans used the plant as an herbal remedy for diarrhea, difficult urination, swelling, and lockjaw.
Virginia creeper
Not So Cool as a Cucumber

By Master Gardener Paul Wills

Despite their longtime reputation, cucumbers are in fact not so cool. If they feel cool on tired eyes, it’s probably because you took them out of the refrigerator before slicing; about five years ago, a curious researcher took the inside temperature of cucumbers in an 83-degree room and found they measured 82 degrees. That’s not a snap of the fingers different. Other curious people have found similar results, pretty well sinking the claims that the insides may be as much as 20 degrees cooler than the room.

No doubt, though, the notion of coolness will persist because it is backed up by centuries of acceptance. The expression “cool as a cucumber” probably goes back at least to 17th century England, where medical men sometimes prescribed a bed of shredded cucumbers for fevered patients. Much earlier, the Israelite tribes wandering in the deserts of the New Testament longed for the cool, watery cucumbers they’d had in Egypt.

Even though this warty, green fruit is next to nothingness in food value, it isn’t about to lose its reputation for coolness, a belief about as harmless as pigging out on cucumbers in a low-calorie diet. Nutritionally, the cucumber is 96 percent water and the rest of it has only slight traces of vitamins and minerals. The smidgen of Vitamin A it starts out with is nearly all in the peel, which is discarded. It’s been estimated that it would take about 100 cucumbers to equal the Vitamin A in just one big carrot.

What the cucumber does for the dining table is bring a distinctive taste, a satisfying crunch and a bit of color to the salad bowl. For these reasons, it has remained popular as far back as written history goes. Cukes are probably distant descendants of a bitter, warty little fruit in prehistoric India. Somehow, a tastier version was found by tribesmen and that is the one we have today. Seeds that were more than 11,500 years old have been found in Thailand but it is unknown if they were from wild or cultivated vines.

It is known that cucumbers were cultivated 5,000 years ago in the Mideast. They were widely planted by biblical times in Egypt, and soon spread to the rest of Africa and Europe. Some 2,000 years ago, the Romans were almost addicted to them as food, and used them as medicines to treat infertility in women, scorpion bites and weak eyes.

They were still valued in the kitchen and the sick rooms of England 1,600 years later. Dr. John Gerard, in his famous Historie of Plants, advised patients to chop their cucumbers, mix them with mutton and not
only eat the result but also “always (sic) during the time of curing you doe wash or bathe the face with this liquor.” Resting tired eyes with cucumber slices seems pretty tame compared to his medical prescription.

It was the Spanish explorers, of course, who brought cucumbers to the New World in the 1500s, where they quickly got into the hands of native Indians who were as besotted by them as the Romans had been. They were spread by Indian traders to Florida within 45 years of their arrival in the Caribbean, and as far north as Canada less than 50 years later.

Despite their popularity and their lack of coolness, cucumbers have faced many a sling and arrow of criticism. Mainly it has been because they bring so very little to the food pyramid. One renowned food historian, Waverly Root, is reported to have said they are “as close to neutrality as a vegetable can get without ceasing to exist.”

An anonymous scribe from biblical days, quoted by my favorite food historian, Rebecca Rupp, editorialized that “a scarecrow in a garden of cucumbers keeps nothing.” That shows they were not exactly kings of the food hill even back then.

The fresh fruits now so abundant in supermarkets year-round are usually of considerable size. But gardeners who grow them at home know that they are tastier and crisper when only a few inches long, like those in many pickles. The seeds can be planted throughout the month of March. They require the warm weather of spring and early summer. And in case you want to try growing your own, your family won’t need more than a couple of healthy vines for they are nearly as productive as the fearfully fruitful zucchini squash. Tying them up a trellis instead of roaming on the ground keeps the vines in smaller bounds.

“A garden is the mirror of a mind. It is a place of life, a mystery of green moving to the pulse of the year, and pressing on and pausing the whole to its own inherent rhythms.”

Henry Beston
American Writer and Naturalist
Of Corso
Take a Grand Tour of DeSoto National Memorial Park
By Carol Ann Breyer

If Mike Corso had lived 400 years ago in this locale, he might well have been an Indian guide (the designation of the Europeans) for explorers and settlers. He moves with ease and quiet confidence through the paths and canopy walkways that border the property of the DeSoto National Monument. The tour he offers on the second Friday of each month harkens back to the world of nature that must have greeted early travelers.

In this spirit, a group of six gathered on February 9 for Mike’s briefing on the bioregions: coastal, tidal, and hammock that we would encounter on our tour. As we walked, Mike identified important plants, pointing out their functionalities for sustenance and utility, and explaining the role of native plants in the immediate area and in the botanical zone surrounding this setting.

On the trail, our attention would be directed to simple plants like the fish kill, and more complex species such as the three varieties of mangroves and their buttonwood counterpart. Legumes and palms, including the cabbage and Sago, were pointed out during our walk which was extended from one hour to two at the request of the tourists. Different grasses were cited including sandcord, Fakahatchee, and sea oats. Whimsical plants like alligator weeds and colorful plants like firebush caught our eye as we traipsed along behind our guide spectators were introduced to the world of invasives with potato vines, strangler figs, and Brazilian peppers, but redeemed by the desirability of the beautyberry bush.

At the juncture where the trail emerged at the curve of the Manatee River and Riverview Park is a beach that is shared by the State with the Diocese of Venice who use the beach site for an annual Easter sunrise service. From there we continued on to the parking lot where some members of the tour decided to visit the museum and the setting that replicates the beginning European settlements.

Much in Mike’s background qualifies him to be a competent tour leader. He majored in botany at Miami of Ohio, and later earned a master’s degree at the University of Northern Colorado. For years, he taught the full gamut of science courses at a middle school in Colorado Springs. During his tenure there, he developed a “Wildflower Walk” that he later used as a blueprint for his DeSoto Park tours “although many adaptations were needed to prepare for the tour in Bradenton.”

The staff of the DeSoto Monument Park expressed gratitude for what Mike’s tour provides. The members of our group totally agreed and would highly recommend it to friends and family.
AARP Brings Experience,
Talent to Extension

By Carol Ann Breyer

If you are greeted with a warm smile and cheery “Hello,” at the front desk, chances are you just met Lynn Frances Gould, one of the three current members of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) workforce enjoying temporary, part-time jobs at the Extension Center.

For the past several years, Manatee County Extension has cooperated with AARP in its back-to-work program for seniors seeking reentry into the world of work. Brenda Wilson, AARP Program Supervisor, reports that the AARP arrangement was already in place when she took over in the Director’s office. “The program functions as a good transition for seniors. It is a big help to them and a help to us,” Brenda states.

Lynn Gould is an example of someone who has had a productive career which ended with retirement, but who wants now to return to work for a number of reasons, financial and otherwise. Lynn traces her own work history from waiting on tables to restaurant management in New York City after receiving training at Brooklyn Academy and Brooklyn College. She wants to return to the food service industry. “In the meantime, I love it here,” she says emphatically, adding, “the people who work here and those I meet at the counter are so nice.”

Less visible in her behind the scene work as an Office Assistant is Linda Petrick who has made good use of the empty space in office of the Horticulture Agent. “Linda has been a real help because she can do so much,” comments Cindy Mozeleski who has an eye for efficiency.

A native of Flint, Michigan, Linda has a heart for health care and a knack for dealing particularly with Alzheimer’s patients. “I have learned a lot working for them. Alzheimer’s often affects people with high intelligence who have had much to offer,” Linda says. Her work history ranges from service as a candy striper to greeting tourists on the Sunshine Skyway, a position she gave up to assist her aging parents. Since her education was in business studies, Linda still likes filing and hopes to find future work in that area.

The third AARP employee is no stranger to Extension. She is Master Gardener, Marie Zimmerman, who is now helping out in 4-H and still putting in her required hours for certification as a Master Gardener. Look for more on Marie in a future article.

Shortly after this article was prepared, it was learned that this project is in danger of being cut. Currently, it is funded by the federal government and administered by AARP. Clients work from 6-12 months and are paid by the program. We need to continue our support for our seniors.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
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<th>EVENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every Wednesday</td>
<td>4:00PM</td>
<td><strong>Classes with Don Rainey</strong>, Environmental Horticulture Agent, Sarasota Extension Office. There is no charge and classes are worth one CEU credit - one hour per class - per title relating to horticulture. More info: <a href="http://sarasota.extension.ufl.edu">http://sarasota.extension.ufl.edu</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>March 1</td>
<td>9:00</td>
<td><strong>Master Gardener Meeting</strong> to nominate candidates for Advisory Committee at Rogers Auditorium and one hour CEU class presented by Dr. Phyllis Gilreath on “Agriculture in Manatee County.” <em>(MGs – 1 CEU)</em></td>
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<td>March 2</td>
<td>8:30 – 10:30</td>
<td><strong>HLC Work Day</strong> followed by Advisory Committee Meeting</td>
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<td>9:00 – 11:00</td>
<td><strong>Emerson Point Walk</strong> – “Florida Trees on the Trail” with Master Gardener Diane Alvarez-- Call 722-4524 to sign up. <em>(MGs – 2 CEUs)</em></td>
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<td>March 6</td>
<td>2:00 – 4:00</td>
<td><strong>Home Composting</strong> – Class fee of $10 includes program material and compost bin. Extension Office, call Cheryl, 722-4524 to register.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 7</td>
<td>9:30 – 12:00</td>
<td><strong>Managing Mangroves for Shoreline Health</strong> presented by John Stevely &amp; Matt Osterhoudt – Bayfront Community Center – 803 N. Tamiami Tr, Sarasota. Free of Charge. <em>(MGs – 2.5 CEUS)</em></td>
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<td>March 9</td>
<td>9:00</td>
<td><strong>Walking Tour of DeSoto National Park</strong> led by Master Gardener Mike Corso. Walks are handicapped accessible. Call 722-4524 to sign up for a tour.</td>
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<td>March 10</td>
<td>9:00 – 4:00</td>
<td><strong>Begonia Bash</strong>: Plant sale, display, free lectures at 10 &amp; noon. USF Botanical Garden, Pine and Alumni Drives, Tampa, 813-974-2329</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 13</td>
<td>2:00 – 4:00</td>
<td><strong>Rain Barrel Workshop</strong> – Class fee of $40 includes rain barrel. Contact Cheryl, 722-4524 to reserve a space.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 14</td>
<td>6 – 8:30 p.m.</td>
<td>“<strong>Landscape Makeover</strong>” Lecture by Elissa Mirabella, Kendrick Auditorium, Extension office, 1303 13th St W, Palmetto, call Cheryl at 941-722-4524 to register. <em>(MGs – 2.5 CEUs)</em></td>
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<td>March 16</td>
<td>9:00</td>
<td><strong>MG Business Meeting</strong> &amp; election of officers held in Rogers Auditorium.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 17 - 18</td>
<td>10:00 – 5:00</td>
<td><strong>Selby Gardens Spring Plant Fair</strong>, 811 S Palm, Sarasota, 941-366-5731 <a href="http://www.selby.org">www.selby.org</a></td>
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<td>March 20</td>
<td>1:00 – 4:00</td>
<td>“<strong>Landscape Irrigation.</strong>” Lecture by Jack Tichenor, Extension Office, Call Cheryl to register 722-4524. <em>(MGs – 3 CEUs)</em></td>
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<td>March 21</td>
<td>8:30 - ?</td>
<td><strong>HLC pre plant sale work day.</strong> Please try to attend this important work day for final plant sale preparations and general clean up of the garden area</td>
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<td>March 22</td>
<td>1:00 – 4:00</td>
<td><strong>Micro Irrigation for Landscapes 101</strong> – Lecture by Jack Tichenor, Extension Office, Call Cheryl at 722-4524 to register.</td>
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<td>March 24 - 25</td>
<td>10:00 – 4:00</td>
<td><strong>Greenfest</strong>, Plants, tools, decorating accessories, workshops, more. Plant Park, University of Tampa, 501 Kennedy Blvd. - 813-837-0131</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 28 - 29</td>
<td>9:00 – 1:00</td>
<td><strong>Delivery of plants for the plant fair</strong> outside the HLC gardens.</td>
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<td>March 30 - April 1</td>
<td>8-5 Friday Saturday10-3 Sunday</td>
<td><strong>Tropiflora Spring Festival</strong>. Huge plant selection, great prices, supplies, books, raffles, free admission and parking, 3530 Tallevast Rd. Sarasota, 941-351-2267 <a href="http://www.tropiflora.com">www.tropiflora.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>March 31</td>
<td>7:30 - ?</td>
<td><strong>Spring Plant Fair Extravaganza</strong> - Manatee County Fairgrounds - 1303 17th St W. Palmetto, Call to register for classes: 941-722-4524 ask for Cheryl.</td>
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