

# 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.

## Keeper Plants of the Season

Text and photos by Joy Derksen, Master Gardener 2004



Calla Lily

Blooming plants are popular Easter and Mother's Day gifts and some (but not all!) can go from indoor pot to outdoor garden with proper care.

Easter lily (*Lilium grandiflorum*) is a favorite. As an easy indoor plant, it should bloom for several weeks inside. Remove any plastic sleeve so that the roots do not rot, and keep it moist (not drenched!). Put in a bright location out of direct sunlight and drafts (e.g., under air conditioning ducts or fans). When a new flower opens, carefully remove the yellow anthers to prevent pollen stains on petals, furniture, and clothing. If you live east of 1-75 where it is cooler, give the Easter lily a try in your yard. After blooming, plant the bulb four to six inches deep in an area with afternoon shade and morning sun. Fertilize with long acting fertilizer. It may bloom again in late summer or early fall, or it may wait until next year.

Azalea (*Rhododendron* spp.) has a better record as an indoor/outdoor plant. Indoors, the azalea likes the coolest part of the house and indirect light. A potted azalea should not be allowed to wilt or dry out. Water by submerging the pot in a bucket of water. Remove the pot when the bubbles stop rising and allow to drain before putting it back into a saucer. Use a soluble liquid fertilizer every two weeks while the plant is in the house. When blooms fade, it can be planted outside. Azaleas love acid soil, light shade, and good drainage--think about a sloping area near an old live oak. They cannot tolerate the alkalinity near the cement edge of a driveway or the walls of a cement slab home. Fertilize with special acidic azalea fertilizer after blooming and again in the fall.

Hydrangea should last several weeks in the home with proper care. It needs frequent watering; if the plant appears wilted, soak it in a bucket of water and then let it drain thoroughly. After the flowers fade, the plant can be moved outside. Hydrangea favors shade and water, yet needs good drainage. It cannot tolerate salt; if you live on the coast or on the islands, give the plant to a friend who lives inland. Although not used as often as a potted plant, Oak-Leaf Hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*) does better here.

The calla lily (*Zantedeschia* spp.) and Amazon lily (*Eucharis grandiflora*) are also popular. Calla lily requires indirect light and moist soil; it grows best in some shade and in inland areas. The Amazon lily may be grown in the ground but it likes to be pot bound for good bloom.

Tulip, daffodil, narcissus, and hyacinth are northern bulbs that do not make successful yard transplants here. Enjoy them indoors and then compost them.



Amazon Lily



**Q:** “I” moved to Bradenton earlier this year and have noticed what I believe are "mole runs" in our yard, which is mostly sand. “I” understand that primary diet for moles is earthworms, and possibly grubs. “I” don't want to destroy earthworms and prefer NOT to put out "poison" that would kill grubs and earthworms. “I” have read online that sprinkling coffee grounds on lawn would encourage moles to go somewhere else, which I am willing to try. What other suggestions could you provide that might be helpful?

E.T., Bradenton

**A:** Oh, those pesky moles! They make unsightly tunnels in your yard, and it's easy to turn your ankle if you happen to step in one! Contrary to popular belief, moles don't eat the grass roots and as unsightly as they are, their tunneling usually doesn't harm the lawn. In fact, there is some thought they help your lawn by loosening the soil and opening the root zone to air. Little comfort when they're in YOUR lawn, I know.

They do feed on earthworms, a desirable critter in your yard, but also on beetle grubs - undesirables that DO eat grass roots. You are wise to not want to use poison as it indiscriminately kills bad and good bugs. Take

heart - once the grubs and earthworms are gone, the moles will move on to other feeding grounds and this doesn't take long. Home remedies like "sprinkling coffee grounds around" may or may not work but the grounds surely won't hurt the lawn. Earthworms and grubs thrive in moist environments, so if you're watering more than once a week you may discourage moles by cutting back to once a week. You can simply step on the tunnels to tamp them down as often as you see them.

Moles usually aren't in one area very long and if they are unbearable, you can set traps. Mole traps usually result in killing the animal, so take that into account. That may be more trouble than putting up with the look of the tunnels for a short time. For more information, visit: <http://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/design/gardening-with-wildlife/moles.html>.



Photo credit: Kenneth Catania, Vanderbilt University. Courtesy of the [National Science](https://www.national-science.org/)

Master Gardener Karen Holleran answers your email questions and looks at photos for identification of problems at [ManateeMG@gmail.com](mailto:ManateeMG@gmail.com). Or visit our Plant Diagnostic Clinic Monday through Friday (closed Wednesdays) from 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. at 1303 17th St. W., Palmetto, FL. Or call us with questions at 941-722-4524 and ask for a Master Gardener.

# COME VISIT OUR BROMELIAD GROTTO

By Mary Lange, Master Gardener Intern 2017



The Manatee County Master Gardeners' Educational Gardens on the grounds of the Manatee County Extension Service offer an impressive variety of native and non-native plants, trees, and shrubs. Over the past two years, the gardens were made more beautiful by the addition of a new bromeliad garden. Visitors and staff are encouraged to stop and admire this stunning and fascinating display of plants.

Bromeliads, members of the Bromeliaceae (Bromeliad family which includes pineapples), are easy to grow and maintain. Most are tropical or subtropical plants and do well outdoors in the warm and humid conditions that central Florida provides. Bromeliads such as Spanish moss and ball moss are often seen growing as epiphytes up in trees and shrubs. Some bromeliads can also be planted in the ground but do not actually require soil or fertilizer. They absorb water and nutrition from decaying material that collects in the center. Although some Bromeliad varieties can tolerate full sun, most prefer shade or indirect sunlight. For this reason, they are also popular houseplants.

Visitors to the garden will see bromeliads displayed in all their glory, some in the ground, others attached to a stone wall, and still others clinging to the East Palatka holly tree. The garden is located on the southeast corner outside the Kendrick building. This corner had long been an eyesore, hosting a waterfall feature that had not functioned in nearly two decades, a cracked cement pond, and assorted unkempt plantings. Maureen Burke (Master Gardener 2015) took it on renovating this area as her class project. With bromeliads raised and contributed by Dave Johnson (Master Gardener 1994), this neglected 500 square foot patch was turned into an idyllic setting that hosts nearly 300 colorful bromeliads, accented with a few ti and dracaena plants as well as a staghorn fern.

Maureen Burke continues to lovingly maintain the garden, tending to it at least twice a month. She waters when needed, monitors the plants to ensure they are not hosting mosquito larvae, and separates the "pups" from the mother plants, creating new bromeliads for the annual Master Gardener Plant Fair. In August 2017, Maureen dug up and replanted the entire garden, arranging the bromeliads to even better complement each other and to highlight their beauty. A sign was also added to help visitors identify the garden's six bromeliad genera (*Aechmea*, *Neoregelia*, *Dyckia*, *Tillandsia*, *Guzmania*, and *Vriesea*). Next time you visit Extension or take a tour of our gardens, the Bromeliad Grotto is a must-see!

For more information:

Bromeliads at a Glance: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep337>

Florida's Native Bromeliads: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/uw205>



Swamp azalea

Photo credit: A. Cressler  
Missouri Botanical Gardens



Florida azalea

© 2009 Floridata.com



Pinxter azalea

Photo from: uflst.edu



Chapman's azalea

Steve Christman © 2009 Floridata.com

# FLORIDA AZALEAS

By Mack Lessig, Master Gardener 2015

The presence of azaleas (*Rhododendron* spp.) in the garden is considered a hallmark - dare I say *requirement* - of the traditional southern garden. Though ubiquitous throughout Dixie, only a handful of cultivated azaleas are native to the southeastern United States. Azaleas are classified as members of the Ericaceae (Heath family), which means they are related to blueberries and cranberries. Members of this family are, with a few exceptions, very specific about growing conditions; in particular, soil pH. All species of *Rhododendron* require acidic soil environments around 4.5-6.0 on the pH scale. They will not tolerate soils that do not provide this crucial environment, and if planted in alkaline soils, will display chronic nutrient deficiencies and drastically stunted growth. Floridian azaleas are no exception. However, if given the proper soil pH, some dappled sunlight, and a well-drained medium, our native azaleas will flourish in your landscape.

Florida has four native species of azaleas. The Florida azalea (*R. austrinum*), Pinxter azalea (*R. canescens*), Chapman's azalea (*R. chapmanii* or *R. minus* var. *chapmanii*), and swamp azalea (*R. viscosum*) all call Florida home. Most are concentrated in the panhandle and northern portions of the state, but one species also occurs in central Florida. All native species can be cultivated successfully in Manatee County, but care must be taken to imitate the conditions present in their native ranges.

For example, the intensity of the sun in central Florida is much stronger than in north Florida; therefore, planting native azaleas in the shade under a **deciduous** tree canopy, or at the edge of a shaded area is recommended. This allows azaleas to photosynthesize at optimal levels in early spring and, once summer returns, they are protected from our intense sunlight by the newly reformed canopy. Planting azaleas in the dense shade of large **evergreen** trees will not be as conducive for thriving growth.

Once planted in the right location, the other key to success is water. Azaleas are shallow-rooted plants and require moist, but well-drained soils. Regular irrigation, especially during the summer (which could be in form of rainfall), is recommended for keeping your native azaleas happy and productive.

With these things in mind, let's decide which azalea species you'd like to invite to your landscape. Our first contender, the Florida azalea, is an impressive plant. **Florida azaleas** are naturally found in northern Florida and the panhandle. They are unique in that they produce brilliant amber blooms. They require well-drained, acidic soils in partial shade, preferably under a deciduous canopy.

**Pinxter azaleas** are equally impressive, producing elegant bouquets of light pink blossoms throughout springtime. They require the same conditions as the Florida azalea, so they can be used interchangeably or planted together. **Chapman's azalea** is one of Florida's great botanical treasures. This species only occurs in north Florida; therefore, it is considered endemic (unique) to our state. It is also an endangered plant, protected by state and federal law. However, if you can acquire this species through legal means, it is a joy. Chapman's azalea also holds the distinction of being the only non-deciduous (evergreen) species of azalea native to Florida. Again, this species requires the same cultural conditions as its relatives listed above.

Lastly, the **swamp azalea** is slightly different compared to its cousins. Swamp azalea and Chapman's azalea both produce luxurious clouds of snow-white flowers; however, the "snowflakes" created by swamp azalea possess an intense, heavenly aroma. Swamp azaleas, though equally dependent on acidic soil, are also the most tolerant of poorly-drained, mucky soils. This species naturally occurs in central Florida, so it is perfectly adapted to our climatic conditions.

Florida's native azaleas are attractive ornamental plants that deserve an invitation to your green spaces. If attention is given to their cultural needs, they are delightfully colored additions that will provide a lovely springtime parade for many years to come. As spring approaches, consider the possibilities for this uniquely Floridian experience and choose to plant our native azaleas. Your neighbors will be jealous, trust me.

For more information visit:

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/mg019>, <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fp503>, <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fp504>, or <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fp505>.

# What's This?

## The **ELECTRIC** Ant Little Ant with a Big Sting

By Norma Kisida, Master Gardener 2012

The electric ant (*Wasmannia auropunctata*), also known as the little fire ant, may be small but carries a painful sting out of proportion to its size. Although this little fire ant usually only stings when pressed against the body by clothing or an object, the sting is painful and long lasting. The ant may not be seen due to the small size.

It may infest household furnishings, clothing, and food, especially oily food. It may also be in fruit trees such as citrus, making harvesting hazardous.

This ant is reddish to golden brown in color and is usually only 1.5 mm in size. It is native to Central and South Africa but has now spread to much of the warmer parts of the world. As of 2000 it was found throughout most of the central and southern Florida counties.

They live in colonies in places such as leaf

litter, under items on the ground, and hollow wood cavities. The ant trails may be found along structures such as building foundations and sidewalks. Trails may also be found inside homes along baseboards or under edges of carpets.

In addition to stinging and infesting homes, the ant is an environmental threat because of reducing species diversity and abundance.

Management consists of eliminating colonies by treating them with a residual insecticide, injecting a dust or aerosol into wood or walls, or using ant baits.

For further information see:  
Little Fire Ant

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/IN/IN29600.pdf> or

<http://flrec.ifas.ufl.edu/media/flrecifasufledu/pdfs/pestant/LittleFireAnt.pdf>.



# PALM TREES UNDER SIEGE

By Amy L. Stripe, Master Gardener 2008

I am a lover of palm trees. But it appears they have been overused in our landscapes in two respects: too many of the same species and too many that are cold sensitive. As a result, we are seeing an increase in host-specific diseases and pests, as well as some issues to which all palms are susceptible.

Same species: Plant diseases and pests can attack virulently and then run their course. On palms, we have seen this in recent years with rugrose spiraling whitefly (insect) and lethal yellowing (disease), which seemed to especially favor coconut palms (*Cocos nucifera*). Both problems have abated; the whitefly became prey to predatory insects and parasitic wasps, and the last case of lethal yellowing diagnosed in Manatee County was in 2007.

However, these issues have been replaced by a host of others, all lethal: fusarium wilt, thielovopsis trunk rot, palmetto weevils, and Texas Phoenix palm decline. Particularly susceptible to all the above are the Canary Island date (*Phoenix canariensis*), Bismarck (*Bismarckia nobilis*), queen (*Syagrus romanzoffiana*), Mexican fan (*Washingtonia robusta*), and cabbage (*Sabal palmetto*) palms.

Another lethal disease, ganoderma butt rot, will kill *any* palm. The conundrum is that these problems are difficult to detect before it's too late, making it next to impossible for a homeowner to manage.

Cold-sensitive palms: Manatee County is not in the tropics. This means popular tropical palms such as foxtails (*Wodyetia bifurcata*), royals (*Roystonea regis*), adonidias (*Adonidia merrillii*), Bismarcks, and coconuts, may all be vulnerable to cold damage. Research has shown that palms exposed to gradual temperature drops may survive cold weather, yet a sudden cold snap may kill them regardless of frost or freeze. Cold-sensitive palms get stressed in low temperatures; this sends out a signal that pest diseases and insects quickly key in on to attack.

What to do? Keep your palms healthy. They have specific nutritional needs, so fertilize them appropriately. Do not "hurricane prune" them, ever! The leaflets of palm fronds and flexible trunks are uniquely suited for high force winds. And do not plant palms that are not cold tolerant for your area.

Look for palms with ratings of 9a or above for sites east of I-75; 9b or above west of I-75; and 10a or above at the beaches. (These are "rule of thumb" parameters; you might have a site in your yard that is in a lee or south facing, which could provide further protection.)

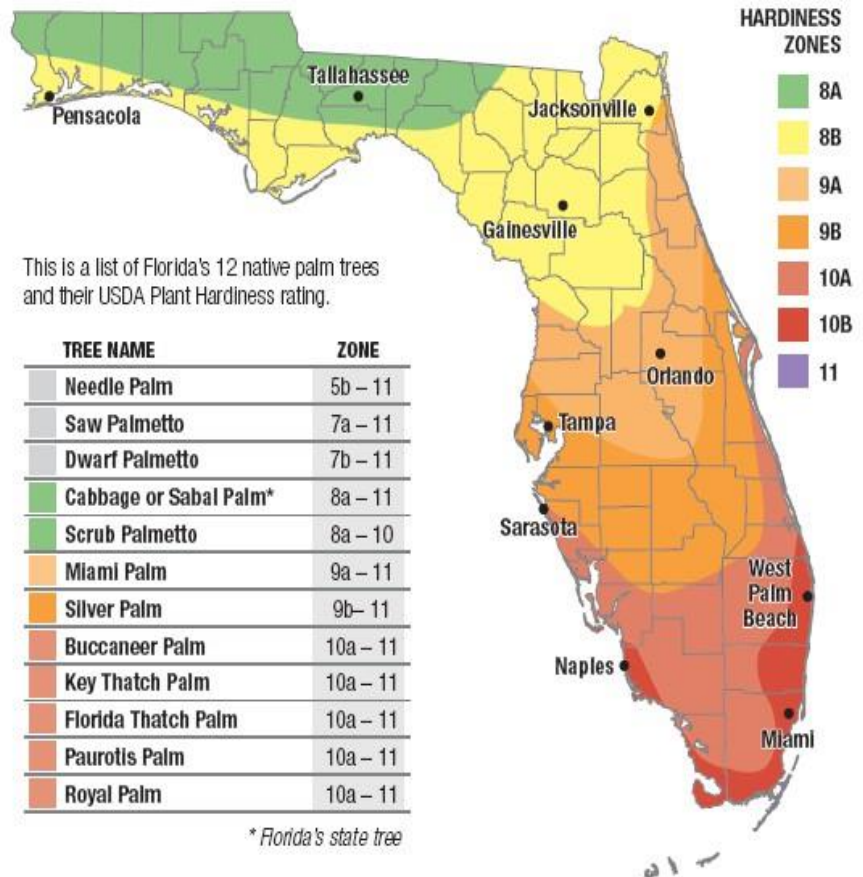
Lastly, avoid planting the palms that are most prone to these problems.

Below are links to palm selection, nutrition, and cold weather mitigation.

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep273>  
<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep020>  
<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/mg318>

## Florida native palm tree hardiness

There are over 2,500 different palm tree species in the world and almost all of them can be grown in Florida. This map shows the USDA Plant Hardiness Zones in Florida. These zones are based on average annual minimum temperature in five degree increments. For instance, the temperature for zone 10b is 35 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit, while 10a is 30 to 35 degrees Fahrenheit.



SOURCES: EDWIN M. EVERHAM, FGCU; STEPHEN BROWN, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA/IFAS, USDA, [FLORIDA-PALM-TREES.COM](http://FLORIDA-PALM-TREES.COM) FLORIDA WEEKLY GRAPHICS

# Garden Chores for Our Snow Birds Before They Fly Home

Text and photos by Joy Derksen, Master Gardener 2004



Easter is early this year, but for many of our Northern visitors, it is a signal to return to homes in the North. Here are some suggested garden chores to do before leaving your Florida landscape for the summer. Manatee County residents can also do these chores.

**Pruning:** The azaleas bloomed early this year, so now is the perfect time for pruning them back to shape them or make a fuller plant for next year's blooms. Other spring blooming trees and shrubs can also be pruned back after they have flowered. Summer blooming shrubs can be pruned back by a third now. Your hibiscus and bougainvillea can be pruned back into a more compact shape. Cold damaged plants can also be pruned back to where new growth appears.

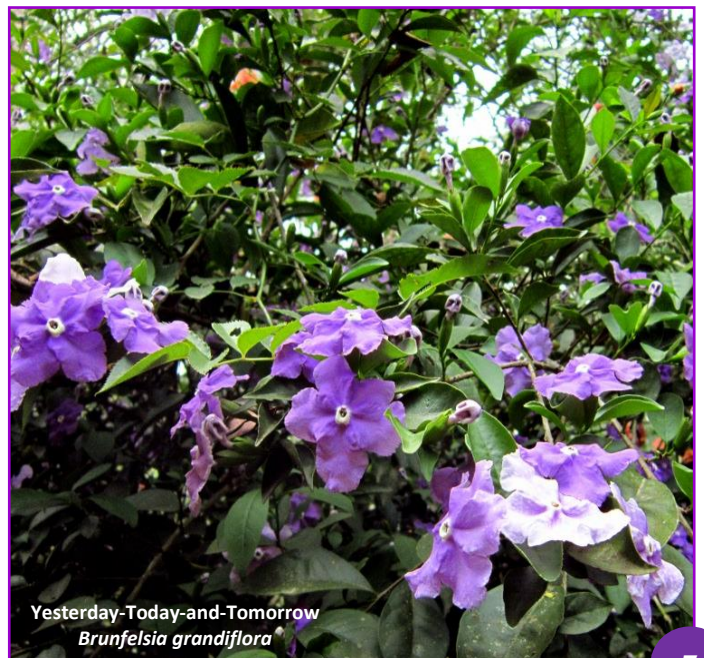
**Fertilizing:** Before you leave, help your plants and shrubs by giving them the fertilizer they need for good health. Palms and citrus need the different nutrients in the special fertilizers designed for them. Look for slow-release Palm Special Fertilizer with Minor Elements and Citrus Special

Fertilizers. The latest information about fertilizing palms is available from the University of Florida at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep261>.

If you have acid-loving plants like azaleas and live near the more alkaline coast, you might want to give them a kick of azalea fertilizer.

**Mulching:** To keep the weeds down and conserve moisture during the hot summer months, consider adding a three-inch layer of organic mulch to your garden beds. In Florida, do not mulch right up to the stems of plants as that can cause fungal problems. Give the plants about three inches of space between bark stem and mulch. Bark chips and/or pine straw break down over time and add welcomed nutrients to the soil. More information about mulches is available at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fr079>.

Have a safe trip home and think about adding some winter blooming shrubs like the Clerodendrum, Yesterday-Today-and Tomorrow, Bougainvillea, or Dombeya to your yard when you come back.



Yesterday-Today-and-Tomorrow  
*Brunfelsia grandiflora*

# March

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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.
Saturday March 10	9:00-11:00 a.m.	<b>Extension Master Gardener Plant ID Tour – Emerson Point Preserve</b> - Stroll through Emerson Point Preserve to learn more about Florida’s native plants and inhabitants of a coastal habitat. Suitable for all ages. Tour begins in tower parking area at 5801 17 <sup>th</sup> Street West, Palmetto. Call the Extension Master Gardeners at (941) 722-4524 to register.
Saturday March 10	9:00-11:00 a.m.	<b>Extension Master Gardener Plant ID Tour - Riverview Pointe Preserve</b> – DeSoto National Memorial – Stroll through Riverview Pointe Preserve to learn more about Florida’s native plants and inhabitants of a coastal habitat. Suitable for all ages. The hike begins in the parking area of the DeSoto National Memorial Park and enters into the Riverview Preserve at 8250 DeSoto Memorial Highway, Bradenton. To register call the Extension Master Gardeners at (941) 722-4524.
Saturday March 17	9:00-11:00 a.m.	<b>Extension Master Gardener Plant ID Tour - Rye Preserve</b> - 805 Rye Wilderness Trail, Parrish 34219. Meet at Rye Preserve on the east side of Rye Road and North of Manatee River. Drinking water and hiking sticks are recommended. There are places to enjoy a picnic lunch, if desired. Register by calling the Extension Master Gardener Plant Diagnostic Clinic (941) 722-4524.
Saturday March 17	10:00-11:30 a.m.	<b>Stunning Staghorns</b> - Do you love the look of staghorn ferns but never knew how to care for them? We will teach you how to care for along with how to mount a staghorn on a piece of wood to take home and enjoy. Space is limited! Registration and advance payment of \$20 for plant and mounting materials due by March 9 (cash or check only, payable to Friends of Extension). <a href="#">Click here</a> to register or call the Extension Master Gardeners (941) 722-4524.
Sunday March 18	9:00-11:00 a.m.	<b>Extension Master Gardener Plant ID Tour - Robinson Preserve</b> – Stroll through the Robinson Preserve’s salt marshes to learn more about Florida’s native plants and inhabitants of a coastal habitat. Suitable for all ages. Tour begins in parking area by main entrance at 1704 99 <sup>th</sup> Street Northwest, Bradenton. To register call the Extension Master Gardeners at (941) 722-4524.
Saturday March 24	10:00-11:30 a.m.	<b>Invasive Plants</b> - Learn more about the invasive plants that can be found in Manatee County, keys to identifying them, and the importance of removing them to prevent further spreading. \$5 administrative fee payable cash or check only. <a href="#">Click here</a> to register or call the Extension Master Gardeners (941) 722-4524.
Tuesday March 27	10:00 a.m.-Noon	<b>Landscape Tips for Water Conservation</b> - This class satisfies the landscape educational requirement for the Manatee County Outdoor Water Conservation Rebate Program. Topics will focus on Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ tips such as right plant vs right place, watering efficiently, and the benefits of mulch. Register online at <a href="http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu">http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu</a> or call Joann (941) 722-4524.
Thursday March 29	10:00 a.m.-Noon	<b>Irrigation with Water Conservation in Mind</b> - This class satisfies the irrigation educational requirement for the Manatee County Outdoor Water Conservation Rebate Program. Topics will focus on how to adjust your in-ground sprinkler system to conserve water, how you can repair parts, and the benefits of installing smart irrigation devices. Register online at <a href="http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu">http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu</a> or call Joann (941) 722-4524.



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