

Educating with Extension



By Brynn Morey, Extension Coordinator, and in collaboration with Alicia Betancourt, Shelly Krueger, and Michelle Leonard-Mularz

Volume 20 Issue 9

University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS), Monroe County

September 2020

Inside this issue:

Sea Grant News from Shelly Krueger	2
Horticultural News from	2
Plant Clinic Information	2
Extension Director News from Alicia Betancourt	3
Page 1 story continued	3
Microplastics Awareness Month	4
Contact us!	4



Gardening in the Keys. A Unique Perspective.

By Michelle Leonard-Mularz,
Environmental Horticulture Agent

With COVID-19 putting a halt to our schedules, many of us have had an opportunity to reconnect with old hobbies and interests and also find new passions to explore. Gardening has become a welcomed pastime for longtime enthusiasts and even beginners, with little to no experience. Whether it is a desire to grow more local food, learn about our native flora and fauna, or simply observe and understand more of what is happening in our yards.....gardening has become a much-needed distraction. Yet gardening in the Keys has its challenges and those challenges need to be considered when making decisions about our landscapes and gardens.

Plant Clinics



EVERY TUESDAY & 3rd SATURDAY OF THE MONTH
Email Monroe@ifas.ufl.edu or call (305)292-4501 to register!

Plant Clinic Plus!

Along with answering all of your plant/insect questions, we will also start each clinic with a brief topical discussion. See topics and dates below:

September 8th:
Ficus & the Edwards Wasp Moth



September 15th:
Soil Considerations for the Keys



September 19th:
Watering Best Practices



September 22nd:
Easy to Build Rain Barrels



September 29th:
Benefits of Composting



In USDA Hardiness Zone 11 (North Florida starts at zone 8A), the Florida Keys are situated in a sub-tropical region, just above the tropics; however, we are governed by a tropical climate. Tropical climates are characterized by monthly average temperatures of 64.4°F or higher year-round, and with our average temperatures in the coldest month of the year, January, at 68.7°F, we definitely fall into that category. As cold fronts approach from the north, they are strongly modified by our warm ocean waters. This means we enjoy a 365-day, frost-free, growing season. Plants that are better adapted to more temperate regions of the state will have a hard time thriving in our intense heat and lack of cooler weather. Fruit crops like lychee, in particular, need long periods of cool temperatures for fruiting, and will not fruit successfully here in the Keys.

Our elevation ranges from directly at sea level to 18 feet in just two locations; most of the islands are only 4 to 6 feet above sea level, with a prevalence of easterly trade winds. This means plants could be subjected to salt winds and salt water flooding from storm surges, high tides, and sea level rise. Careful consideration should be given on plant selection in areas that may experience periodic salt water flooding and/or high salt content carried in our winds. Current projections by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, estimate sea levels will rise 15 inches by 2045. This means flooding events will only increase over time. Using plants that are adapted to higher saline conditions will help reduce the impact of these more 'normal' events. Many plants can show significant damage during extended dry periods with high winds, characteristic of our winter months from January through March. This past March was one of the driest on record with Key West only receiving 0.02 inches of rainfall and Marathon receiving 0.06 inches.

These extreme wet and dry seasons also have further implications on plants, since plants need water to grow. The annual rainfall in the Keys is about 42 inches and much of that

...Continued on page 3

Sea Grant News



Shelly Krueger
UF/IFAS Florida Sea Grant Agent

Shelly recently accomplished the following activities:

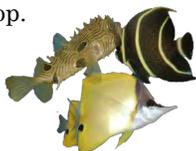
- Shelly has been invited by Dry Tortugas National Park staff to develop a stony coral tissue loss disease underwater surveillance training ahead of the disease front along with staff from FDEP and Mote Marine Laboratory.



- Shelly was invited to Boy Scouts of America Sea Base on Summerland Key about stony coral tissue loss disease and performed REEF Fish and stony coral tissue loss disease reporting to:

SEAFAN.org/seagrant.

- Shelly was invited to Curry Hammock State Park to teach Florida Keys Water Watch workshop.



The Environmental Horticulture Program and Master Gardener Volunteers remain dedicated to helping you with your plant related questions.



CALL OUR OFFICE:
(305)292-4501

We have many different ways we can assist!

ZOOM PLANT CLINICS:
Every Tuesday & 3rd Saturday of the month!!
Email Monroe@ifas.ufl.edu or
Call (305)292-4501 to Register

EMAIL YOUR QUESTIONS TO:
mastgardener@monroecounty-fl.gov

Please include a detailed description of the problem and photos if available

FACEBOOK PAGE:
Visit our Facebook page for updates, requests, information and so much more!
<https://www.facebook.com/MonroeCountyExtension/>

Horticulture News



Michelle Leonard-Mularz
UF/IFAS Environmental Horticulture Agent

Michelle recently accomplished the following activities:

- Michelle was elected as an officer to Florida Association of Natural Resource Extension Professionals as a board treasurer.



- Michelle was recently accepted into the Soil & Water Departments Masters of Science program with the University of Florida. Part of her research will be studying sargassum compost as a potential landscape soil amendment. This project will also involve the Sea Grant agent, Shelly Krueger, and both were approved for a \$10,000 Florida Sea Grant professional development grant to pursue the pilot study.



- Michelle conducted 28 interviews of perspective Master Gardener interns for the fall Master Gardener course.
- Michelle offered 7 educational programs online via Zoom in August with 110 participants.

Be sure to “Like” us on [Facebook](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#)!

Extension Director's News

Alicia Betancourt

UF/IFAS Family and Community Development Agent and
Monroe County Extension Director

Alicia recently accomplished the following activities:

- Alicia developed trainings for Extension professionals on the health impacts of climate change. This is part of an online program for Extension professional called Climate Change 101.



- Alicia worked on finalizing the Handbook for Municipal Action on Climate Change. This handbook is intended to help small municipalities in Florida plan steps to address climate change and resiliency in their communities. She surveyed 90 municipalities to determine their needs on adaptation and mitigation measures which informed the process. Many reached out to me to request the handbook which will be completed in September.

- Alicia held a training on designing highly effective programs for the National Network of Sustainable Living Educators.



- Alicia has been selected as a representative of Extension efforts addressing natural resources, and as such invited to help in the process of restructuring Initiative 3 of the [Extension Roadmap](#)

Continued from page 1

occurs in the summer and fall. Our freshwater is pumped through 1,000 miles of pipes from the Biscayne Freshwater Aquifer, which provides freshwater to the 80,000 residents of the Keys, the millions of visitors we get each year, and the 6 million residents of South Florida. At peak usage, Florida Keys Aqueduct Authority (FKAA) pumps almost 24 million gallons a day of freshwater. FKAA also estimates that about 30 percent of that amount is used to water grass and landscapes. By choosing native, drought-tolerant plants, we can reduce our water consumption and help conserve this valuable, limited resource. Additionally, the less water we apply to our landscapes, could mean less water runoff to our nearshore waters and thereby reducing the potential for non-point source pollution from nitrogen and phosphorus in fertilizers and pesticides.



We have two distinct types of limestone soil substrates in the Keys. Key Largo Limestone of the upper Keys down to Big Pine and Miami Oolite, through much of Big Pine and throughout the lower Keys. Limestone-based soils are characterized by high calcium content, high soil pH (very alkaline), low native fertility and low organic content, and are generally well-drained. This has

implications on nutrient availability, since some nutrients become unavailable to plants in higher pH soils. This also means our soils have very little water-holding and nutrient-holding capacity. So, any excessive water and nutrients applied to our landscape, has the potential to leach into our waterways. Using organic mulches, adding compost or allowing leaves to remain and breakdown in the landscape will help add much-needed organic matter to the soil, thereby increasing microbial activity and nutrient availability, in addition to helping regulate soil temperatures and avoid extremes.



It may seem with these extreme conditions, our plants are doomed. But as tropical gardeners, we know we have a wide variety of options. By choosing plants best suited to our environmental conditions and by understanding and managing our inputs sustainably, we can help our plants thrive and protect our natural resources. Happy gardening!

Be sure to “Like” us on [Facebook](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#)!



UF/IFAS/MONROE COUNTY EXTENSION

1100 Simonton Street, Suite 2-260, Key West, FL 33040
 102050 Overseas Hwy., Suite 244, Key Largo, FL 33037

KW Phone: 305-292-4501 KL Phone: 305-453-8747
 KW Fax: 305-292-4415 KL Fax: 305-453-8749

General e-mail: monroe@ifas.ufl.edu
 County Extension Director: Alicia Betancourt
 Newsletter Editor: Brynn Morey, Extension Coordinator

This newsletter can be accessed online at:
<http://monroe.ifas.ufl.edu/newsletter.shtml>

We're on the Web at: <http://monroe.ifas.ufl.edu>



University of Florida (UF)
<http://SolutionsForYourLife.ufl.edu>
<http://ufl.edu>
 Electronic Data Information Source (EDIS)
<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>



UF/IFAS Extension is
 Putting Florida First

Scan this code to go directly to our UF/IFAS Website for more information!



SEPTEMBER IS MICROPLASTICS AWARENESS MONTH

*300 million tons of plastic is produced each year.
 8 million tons of that goes into our oceans annually.*



FISH EAT THE PLASTIC AND WE EAT THE FISH.

HOW YOU CAN HELP:

- Read labels on personal care products (deodorant, toothpaste, shampoo, etc.) avoid products containing polyethylene
- Use paper or reusable shopping bags
- Use a reusable water bottle or a cup instead of buying single-use plastic bottles
- Use a washable coffee mug instead of a disposable cup
- Choose natural fabrics rather than microfiber or other synthetic fabrics (acrylic, nylon, polyester, etc.)
- Use reusable containers for your lunch instead of single use bags
- Properly recycle as many plastic items as possible

<http://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/flagler/marine-and-coastal/microplastics/>



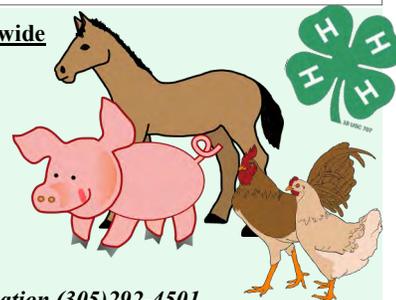
<https://www.facebook.com/MicroplasticAwarenessProject>

UF/IFAS/MCES QUARTERLY CONTACTS

	June	July	August	Totals
Phone calls	52	57	36	145
Office visitors	0	0	0	0
Email Consultations	150	191	154	495
Learning events	66	57	34	157
Participants	831	598	454	1883
Media submissions	13	58	5	76
Publications distributed	169	182	75	426
TOTAL contacts	1281	1143	758	3182

4-H Virtual Clubs Offered Statewide

- Digital Dairy
- Florida 4-H Virtual Horse Club
- Florida 4-H Virtual Poultry Club
- Florida 4-H Virtual Swine Club
- Teen Life Ready Club
- Young Leaders Club



Please contact our office for more information (305)292-4501

An Equal Opportunity Institution. UF/IFAS Extension, University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, Nick T. Place, dean for UF/IFAS Extension. Single copies of UF/IFAS Extension publications (excluding 4-H and youth publications) are available free to Florida residents from county UF/IFAS Extension offices.