

Educating with Extension



By Brynn Morey, Extension Coordinator, and in collaboration with Alicia Betancourt, Liah Continentino, and Shelly Krueger

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Planting in the Presence of Saltwater

By Liah Continentino,
Environmental Horticulture
Agent & Master Gardener
Volunteer Coordinator

The Keys are known for their idyllic seascapes, warm climate, and fascinating geological history. While we love these aspects of the Keys, many plants may not. If you have gardened here, you know it can be difficult. One increasing horticultural threat is the presence of saltwater in our landscapes.

The Keys have a predominantly saltwater ecosystem with minimal freshwater resources. The land is composed of porous fossilized coral reefs and ancient sandbars, with 90% of it sitting at 5ft or less in elevation. These factors make the Keys especially susceptible to flooding from storm surges, sea-level rise, and king tides. King tides are usually highest in October, with a smaller King tide in June, and can be up to 2 feet higher than the average high tides. 2017 data from Key West shows maximum king tides of 2.6 to 2.73 feet. It is common for king tides to flood roads and yards in the Keys, sometimes called “sunny day flooding”.

According to the 2017 NOAA Technical Report, sea levels are rising at an unprecedented rate. Projections show that with a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, sea levels will be around two feet higher in 2100 than in 2000. With no change in emissions, sea levels are projected to be 13 feet higher in 2100 than in 2000. However, this rate is not consistent across coastlines; some areas will feel it more than others, the Keys included. Sea levels in the Gulf are expected to be 16-18 inches higher in 2050 than in 2020, roughly 6 inches higher than the nation’s average. Key West Harbor tide data documented a 0.87 foot rise from 1913

Plant Clinics

Saturday, May 3rd
Plant Clinic
9 a.m. to 12 p.m.
Key Deer Refuge Nature Cntr.
30587 o/s Hwy.
Big Pine Key

Wednesday, May 7th
Plant Clinic
9 a.m. to 12 p.m.
Key Largo Library
101485 O/S Hwy.
Key Largo

Thursday, May 15th
Plant Clinic
9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
Gib Reese Park
81031 O/S Hwy,
Islamorada

Saturday, May 17th
Plant Clinic
9 a.m. to Noon
KW Botanical Garden Nursery
5210 College Rd.
Stock Island

Saturday, May 17th
Plant Clinic
9 a.m. to Noon
Marathon Home Depot
4555 O/S Hwy,
Marathon

Tuesday, May 20th
Plant Clinic
9 a.m. to 11 a.m.
Garden Club of Upper Keys
94040 O/S Hwy.
Tavernier

MAY HAPPENINGS

Mental Health Awareness Month

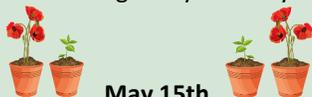


May 9th

Reef Relief Annual Luau
5PM-8:30PM
Lagerheads Beach Bar & Grill
0 Simonton St. Key West

May 10th

World Migratory Bird Day!



May 15th

Marathon Garden Club
Open Nursery 9AM-12PM
5270 o/s Hwy. MM50 Bayside



May 16th

Endangered Species Day



May 26th

Memorial Day!
County offices closed in observation.



Sea Grant News



Shelly Krueger
UF/IFAS Florida Sea Grant Agent

Shelly recently accomplished the following activities:

- Shelly was interviewed for a University of South Florida press release regarding satellite tools to forecast Sargassum biomass approaching the Florida Keys. LINK: <https://www.usf.edu/marine-science/news/2025/new-sargassum-system-takes-aim-at-a-troublesome-seaweed.aspx>
- Shelly is on the prevention team for the Florida Marine Debris Action Plan and identified priority actions for measuring success for preventing the introduction of marine debris into the local environment.



- Shelly is the Monroe County non-voting member of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force Florida's Coral Reef Coordination Team and volunteered to be the project delivery team lead for Florida Keys Water Quality Improvement Program and gave updates on the current status. She is also the alternate to provide Biscayne Bay and Southeastern Everglades Restoration aka BBSEER updates to the group.

- Shelly was invited to present her training and teaching to the virtual Florida Sea Grant federal site review on Healthy Coasts and Ecosystems over the past 4 years.



- Shelly taught 57 5th grade students in partnership with SOS Sprouts Program about native pollinators.



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!

VISIT OUR OFFICE:

Email Monroe@ifas.ufl.edu or
Call (305)292-4501 to schedule an appointment

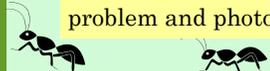
EMAIL YOUR QUESTIONS TO:
mastergardener@monroecounty-fl.gov

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



Liah Continentino
UF/IFAS Environmental Horticulture Agent

- Liah offered many one-on-one consultations via plant clinics, individual client communications, and educational booths at the Keys for Sustainability event and Bahia Honda Earth Day festivities. These consultations provided residents with personalized information on ecologically friendly horticultural practices and pollinator ecology. Kids learned about horticulture through a hands-on seed planting activity and about pollinators through a coloring activity. Through these consultations, Liah reached 84 adults and 26 youth, and distributed 103 educational publications.
- Liah provided nine group learning activities in April. 78 adults and 86 youth participated in these activities, and 52 educational publications were distributed. Adult programming covered hydroponic gardening, salt-tolerant landscaping, Florida Friendly Landscaping, and Master Gardener Volunteer program information. Youth programming covered Hydroponic gardening, pollinator ecology, and pollinator conservation.
- Liah provided media outreach by speaking on US-1 Radio about the importance of plastic waste reduction. Liah authored an article on salt-tolerant landscaping for Keys Weekly. She also created two presentations in April, one covering salt-tolerant landscaping and the other covering important information regarding the Florida Master Gardener Program. Liah created informative coloring pages depicting the importance of pollinators and how to support them. She also authored four Master Gardener Newsletters providing updates, upcoming CEUs, upcoming volunteer opportunities, and much more.



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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 held workshops with Extension professionals nationwide to develop an Extension Climate Action Community Development Toolkit. This resource is intended for Extension professionals working to facilitate more productive, action-oriented, climate-action engagement with community partners, including local government officials, business leaders, and educators. It contains:

National-Level Best Practices: General guidance and templates for engaging communities, forming partnerships, and fostering meaningful climate action discussions.

Local Customization Framework: Extension professionals can use a "fill-in-the-blank" section to develop specific strategies and outreach to local climate challenges.

Implementation Roadmap: Strategies for rollout, refinement, and continuous improvement of this toolkit.

Alicia spoke on the radio about how to prepare financially for a disaster. Here are some key points to consider when creating your disaster preparedness financial plan:

- **Ensure you have an 'Emergency Fund'.** You'll want to maintain an emergency savings fund with enough money to cover at least 3 to 6 months' worth of your living expenses.
- **Check your Homeowner's or Renter's Insurance.** Even if you're already insured, review your homeowner's or renter's policy and make sure it's up to date. Does it cover everything you need it to – and for adequate amounts?
- **Plan for Repairs.** You already know your home may require significant repairs after a disaster, such as if you were in the path of a major hurricane or your home got flooded.
- **Document, Document, Document.** An important part of disaster preparedness is gathering and keeping all your important

information and documents safe. Consider holding them in a safe deposit box or another secure location outside your home, such as a digital storage solution.

Here is more information about financial planning as a part of disaster preparedness: [FEMA's Emergency Financial First Aid Kit \(pdf\)](#)



- Alicia worked to develop a seminar series on sustainability that will be held this fall. This will be a weekly discussion series using the book Choices for Sustainable Living. This book will provide a powerful opportunity to explore sustainability more deeply and learn its unique meaning from individual, societal, and global perspectives.

Continued from page 1

to 2024. While extreme events, such as king tides or storm surges, may seem like the most significant threat, it is important to remember that increased sea levels intensify these events, allowing smaller changes in water levels to cause flooding.

Most food crops and landscape ornamentals have little to no salt tolerance. Salty soil or water leads to dehydration, inhibited growth, and plant death. While short-term management solutions such as flushing soil with freshwater and amending soils exist, these are often costly and time-intensive.

The best approach is to adapt rather than react. You can do so by planting the right plant in the right place. Right plant, right place is a key Florida Friendly Landscaping principle that focuses on achieving healthy, low-maintenance landscapes by ensuring that your plant's needs fit the environment they are in. In this case, this means planting salt-tolerant plants, saving you the hassle and cost of scrambling to revive your plants down the line.

Salt-tolerant plants have special adaptations which make them resistant to salt spray and occasional inundation. They are often acclimated to infertile, alkaline, sandy soils and high winds. Many Keys native plants are salt-tolerant and aesthetically beautiful, making them ideal for landscaping.

Here are three recommended salt-tolerant plants:

Buttonwood (*Conocarpus erectus*): A hardy, low-branching evergreen tree with smooth, oval leaves, button-like inconspicuous flowers, and striking ridged bark. It can grow to 40 feet tall or be pruned for use as a hedge or screen.



Photo Above: Buttonwood (*Conocarpus erectus*)

Mangrove spider lily (*Hymenocallis latifolia*): With large, fragrant white blooms and long, glossy leaves, this spider lily is gorgeous. It is an excellent choice for borders, accents, or ground cover.



Photo Above: Mulhy grass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*)

Mulhy grass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*): A tall, clumping grass that boasts an impressive display of pink and purple flowers in the fall. This Idyllic landscaping plant is perfect for accents, borders, or mass plantings.

Monroe County Extension is here to assist you with any plant needs!

If you have questions, contact us at monroe@ifas.ufl.edu, Continentino-liah@monroecounty-fl.gov, or (305) 998-9580

Cover Photo: *Conocarpus erectus* by Shiners

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UF/IFAS/MONROE COUNTY EXTENSION

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 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>

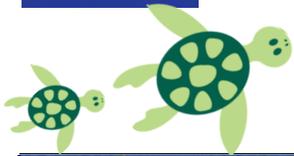


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UF/IFAS Extension is Putting Florida First

EXTENSION HAPPENINGS



Environmental Horticulture Agent, Liah Continentino, presents to 5th graders on the importance of pollinators.



Master Gardener Volunteers assist visitors with plant questions at our local plant clinic.



Extension Coordinator, Brynn Morey, certifies a group of home schooled students in CPR and First Aid.



UF/IFAS/MCES QUARTERLY CONTACTS

	Feb	Mar	April	Totals
Phone calls	27	44	39	110
Office visitors	9	92	113	214
Email Consultations	78	94	82	254
Learning events	11	33	33	77
Participants	493	899	562	1,954
Media submissions	5	9	8	22
Publications distributed	225	188	218	631
TOTAL contacts	848	1,359	1,055	3,262

CPR Training

for Adults, Children & Infants

Monroe County Extension is offering CPR Certification courses throughout the Keys!

Wednesday May 14th CPR & First Aid 10AM

Location: Marathon Government Center (BOCC Conference Room,) 2798 Overseas Hwy. Marathon

Tuesday May 20th CPR & First Aid 10AM

Location: Harvey Government Center (BOCC Conference Room) 1200 Truman Ave. Key West

Availability is limited. CPR class is \$35 & First Aid/CPR is \$50

Please contact our office if you have questions or if you would like to register for this course (305) 292-4501