



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

Volume 25 Issue 8

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

August 2025

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Is That Photograph Really Worth that Starfish's Life?

By Brynn Morey,
Extension Coordinator &
Program Specialist II

Starfish, or sea stars, are iconic marine animals often found in tide pools, along the shoreline, in seagrass beds, and mangrove channels. Their unique appearance and vibrant colors make them an irresistible photo subject for snorkelers and beachgoers. However, what many people don't realize is that removing starfish from the water — even briefly — can cause them serious harm and, in many cases, lead to their death.

Unlike fish, starfish do not have gills. They breathe through small structures called papulae, or skin gills, which absorb oxygen directly from the water. When a starfish is taken out of its aquatic environment, these structures collapse and can no longer function properly. Deprived of oxygen, the animal begins to suffocate almost immediately. Because starfish don't have lungs, they can't "hold their breath" when out of the water. Even short exposures to air can cause stress and internal damage, especially in hot or dry conditions.



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Plant Clinics

Plant Clinic

Cancelled, will resume in October.

Key Deer Refuge Nature Cntr.

30587 o/s Hwy.
Big Pine Key

Wednesday, August 6th

Plant Clinic

9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Key Largo Library

101485 O/S Hwy.
Key Largo

Plant Clinic

Cancelled, will resume in September.

Garden Club of Upper Keys

94040 O/S Hwy.
Tavernier

Saturday, August 16th

Plant Clinic

9 a.m. to Noon

KW Botanical Garden Nursery

5210 College Rd.
Stock Island

Saturday, August 16th

Plant Clinic

9 a.m. to Noon

Marathon Home Depot

4555 O/S Hwy,
Marathon

Thursday, August 21st

Plant Clinic

11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Islamorada Library

81830 O/S Hwy,
Islamorada



AUGUST HAPPENINGS

National Water Quality Month!



August 1st-31st

Back to School Sales Tax Holiday!



August 6th

Lobster Season Opens!
Visit myFWC.com for regulations

August 16th

Native Plant Sale
KW Tropical Forest & Botanical Garden 10AM-4PM



August 16th

National Honey Bee Day!



August 19th

Green Drinks! 5:30PM-7PM
Club 504 Sidebar Key West
504 Angela St.
Lets Talk Green Again!!



August 24th

Sherrif's Animal Farm Open House!
1-3PM 5501 College Rd.

Sea Grant News



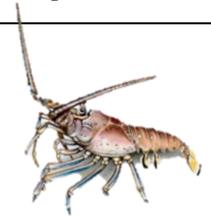
Shelly Krueger
UF/IFAS Florida Sea Grant Agent

Shelly recently accomplished the following activities:

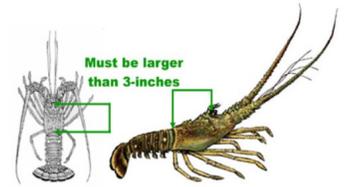
- Shelly completed recording sponge reproduction in the sponge propagules that are located in FWC-permitted nurseries as part of the EPA-funded grant and in support of FWC's sponge restoration aquaculture program. Sponge reproduction was higher in the sponge propagules inside the nurseries than in the adult donor sponges sampled the previous year. The great news is that these sponges are recruiting new sponges to the die-off areas.



- The Florida Keys Water Quality Protection (WQPP) Program Steering Committee held its summer meeting. During the meeting, Shelly was appointed to be the WQPP Steering Committee liaison to the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Adaptation Management Team. The WQPP Steering Committee also approved the communications subcommittee mission statement and website updates, of which Shelly is vice-chair. The new team is designed to be flexible and responsive to changing environmental conditions, new scientific findings, and emerging challenges. Shelly assists with crafting the agenda and invited Dr. Bowden from the University of Florida to speak about his PFAS (perfluoroalkyl substances) research in Florida Keys drinking water and the environment.



- Shelly spoke on Morning Magazine about lobster mini-season. Where she gave information on regulations, proper gear, and safe boating!



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

- In July, Liah offered one-on-one consultations via plant clinics, individual client communications, the Virtual Help Desk, and a composting event at the Key West Botanical Garden. These consultations provide residents with personalized information on horticultural practices, pest management, and Florida Friendly Landscaping. Liah reached 31 adults and distributed 51 educational publications. Group learning activities during the month of June! Master Gardeners are vital to extension; their hard work and dedication make much of our work possible. Thank you, Master Gardeners!



- Master Gardener Volunteers logged 143.27 hours of service during the month of June! Master Gardeners are vital to extension; their hard work and dedication make much of our work possible. Thank you, Master Gardeners!



- Liah provided media outreach by speaking on US-1 Radio about cultural strategies for mosquito reduction. Additionally, she authored four Master Gardener Newsletters and a Keys Weekly article on recent gumbo limbo herbivory.

Events:

- ◇ Pollinator Count at the Garden Club of the Upper Keys. Saturday August 23rd, from 9am-11:30am.
- ◇ Pollinator Count at the Marathon Garden Club. Friday August 22nd, from 9am-10:30am
- ◇ Pollinator Count at the Key West Botanical Garden. Saturday August 23rd, from 10am-1pm

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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 taught workshops on Online Threat Identification, which is designed to help participants recognize and respond to common cyber threats in their daily lives and workplaces. Participants learn to spot red flags in emails, links, and pop-ups, and gain best practices for safe browsing, using secure websites, and protecting devices on public Wi-Fi and Bluetooth connections. Hands-on activities, such as phishing simulations and interactive exercises, help reinforce skills, while participants receive practical tools like cybersecurity checklists and resources for reporting threats.

Alicia spoke on the radio about how to travel safely with your electronic devices.

- ⇒ Avoid public WIFI
- ⇒ Keep your Bluetooth off
- ⇒ Protect yourself from juice jacking
- ⇒ Lock down and update devices
- ⇒ Only bring what you need.

To learn more, find our blog at <https://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/monroeco/>

- Alicia held a webinar to outline resources available to communities, including the Community Resilience Index, Beginning Grant Writing workshops, and community engagement activities. The Community Resilience Index (CRI) is a practical self-assessment tool that helps communities evaluate their ability to withstand, adapt to, and recover from disasters or disruptions. Developed for local governments, organizations, and neighborhoods, the CRI focuses on factors like infrastructure, economy, environment, social systems, and emergency preparedness. By identifying strengths and vulnerabilities, the index guides communities in prioritizing actions that enhance resilience, reduce risk, and build long-term sustainability in the face of climate change, natural hazards, or other challenges.



Continued from page 1

Starfish have a fragile, hydraulic vascular system that controls movement through water pressure. Lifting them or placing them on a dry surface can disrupt this system. In some cases, handling causes irreversible internal injuries, even if the starfish appears fine initially. The rough texture of a starfish may give the illusion of toughness, but they are delicate creatures. Oils, sunscreen, or even the heat from human hands can irritate their outer layers and compromise their health.

Many marine animals, including starfish, are highly sensitive to environmental changes. When removed from water, they experience a spike in stress, which can lead to shock or disorientation. Some species of starfish are especially vulnerable and may die hours or days after being returned to the sea, even if they seemed unharmed at the time of handling.

In popular tourist areas, it's not uncommon for dozens of starfish to die after being collected for photos and left out in the sun. Social media trends encouraging



photos with sea life have inadvertently contributed to mass mortality events. Starfish that are piled up for photos or souvenirs often cannot recover, even if they are placed back in the water afterward.

The best way to appreciate starfish is to observe them in their natural habitat without touching them. Many marine conservationists urge people to follow a "look, don't touch" policy. Not only does this protect sea life, but it also preserves ecosystems for future generations.

If you find a starfish washed ashore, it may already be dead, but not always. If it's soft, flexible, or moving slightly, it's still alive and should be returned gently to the water without flipping or dropping it. Always use wet hands or gloves if contact is absolutely necessary.

While it might seem harmless to pick up a starfish for a quick picture, doing so can cause serious and often fatal consequences for the animal. Respecting marine life means keeping it in the water where it belongs. Next time you're snorkeling, bring an underwater camera, take a photo of a starfish in its natural setting, and leave it just as you found it. Nature's beauty is best enjoyed without causing harm.

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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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Participants who prefer a printed version of the book can purchase a discounted copy after they register for the sessions.

For additional information or registration questions, contact Linda at lseals@ufl.edu

Extension programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, religion, age, height, weight, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or veteran status.

UF/IFAS/MCES QUARTERLY CONTACTS

	May	June	July	Totals
Phone calls	68	36	53	157
Office visitors	78	40	41	159
Email Consultations	110	128	121	359
Learning events	31	31	26	88
Participants	594	545	590	1,729
Media submissions	8	8	9	25
Publications distributed	293	265	487	1,045
TOTAL contacts	1,182	1,053	1,327	3,562

CPR Training

for Adults, Children & Infants

Thursday August 21st CPR & First Aid 10AM

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

Tuesday August 26th 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