



By Alicia Betancourt in collaboration with Liah Continentino, and Shelly Krueger.

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Buyer Beware

By Alicia Betancourt,
Extension Director

The internet has made shopping more convenient than ever—but it has also opened the door for scams. Fake websites that claim to sell cheap products are increasingly common, targeting people looking for good deals. While these sites may look professional and convincing, they often exist only to steal money, personal information, or both.

How Fake Shopping Websites Work

Fraudulent e-commerce sites usually advertise extremely low prices on popular items such as electronics, designer clothing, shoes, or household goods. Once a shopper makes a purchase:

- **The product never arrives** – payment is taken, but no order is shipped.
- **A counterfeit or low-quality item is sent** – instead of the advertised product, customers receive a cheap knockoff.

Personal information is stolen – scammers use credit card numbers, addresses, and other data for fraud or identity theft.

These websites often pop up quickly and disappear once enough people have reported them, only to reappear under a new name and web address.

Red Flags to Watch For

Spotting a fake online store can be tricky, but there are warning signs:

Plant Clinics

First Saturday

Plant Clinic
Big Pine Library
10 am to 1 pm
213 Key Deer Blvd.
Big Pine Key

First Wednesday

Plant Clinic
9 a.m. to 12 p.m.
Key Largo Library
101485 O/S Hwy.
Key Largo

Third Tuesday

Plant Clinic
9 a.m. to 12 p.m.
Garden Club of Upper Keys
94040 O/S Hwy.
Tavernier

Third Thursday

Plant Clinic
11 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Gib Reese Park
81031 O/S Hwy,
Islamorada

Third Saturday

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

Third Saturday

Plant Clinic
9 a.m. to Noon
KW Botanical Garden Nursery
5210 College Rd.
Stock Island

OCTOBER HAPPENINGS

Columbus Day
October 13th (offices closed)



Marathon Garden Club
Pollinator Gardening
Talk
October 17th 1 pm

Florida Keys Wildlife
Society's Native Plant
Day
October 18th 10-12 pm

Halloween
October 31st

College of the Florida Key
Community Day 2025
November 1st 10 2 pm



Sea Grant News



Shelly Krueger
UF/IFAS Florida Sea Grant Agent

Sea Grant Happenings

- **National Seafood Month starts October 1! Eat local seafood!** Spiny lobster season is in full swing and stone crab season starts October 15.
- Florida's Coral Reef Resilience Program communications team released the Florida Bleaching Summary for Summer 2025.
- Shelly worked with the Monroe County public information officer on a press release regarding an October 7th online webinar from Florida Sea Grant for

marinas and boatyards interested in "How to Apply for a Clean Vessel Act (CVA) Pumpout Grant."

- Registration is required at [https://ufl.zoom.us/meeting/register/EaCbKCrAT0yiwZ121KITqA#/registration](https://ufl.zoom.us/j/9121212121).
- The Florida Department of Environmental Protection's CVA grant can cover up to 75 percent of eligible expenses for boating facilities to install, operate, and maintain marine pumpout and dump stations. Join this webi-

nar to learn about eligible and non-eligible expenses, grant requirements, developing a complete application packet, and what happens after submission.

- **The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Water Quality Protection Program Steering Committee and Research Symposium, October 8-9, 2025 has been cancelled.** Extension was helping with the agenda, finding speakers, and presenting on sponge restoration aquaculture at Marathon City Hall.



The Environmental Horticulture Program and Master Gardener Volunteers are 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

- September has flown by! Over the month, Liah and the Monroe County Master Gardeners served 109 community members through one-on-one consultations and local events.
- Monroe Master Gardener Volunteers logged 143 hours of service this month. Master Gardeners are vital to extension; their hard work and dedication make our work possible. **Thank you, Master Gardeners!**

Would you like to become a Master Gardener Volunteer?

The Master Gardener Program recruits individuals who are interested in gardening and enjoy sharing what they learn with others. Certified Master Gardener Volunteers provide research-based information about gardening to the public in various ways, including holding plant clinics, leading classes and workshops, writing educational articles, evaluating Florida-Friendly yards, and more!



The Monroe County Master Gardener class will begin in January and run through April of 2026. If you are interested in enrolling, contact Liah Continentino at Continentino-liah@monroecounty-fl.gov or (305) 998-9580.

- Join Liah on **Friday, October 17th, at 1 pm** at the Marathon Garden Club for a talk on pollinator gardening! Discover the importance of pollinators, the threats they face, and how you can support them through gardening.



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

From the directors desk...

- Alicia and the entire Extension team we saddened to say goodbye to our wonderful Extension Coordinator and Program Specialist Brynn Morey. Brynn has been a valuable team member and friend to Extension.
- **We will no longer be able to offer CPR and First Aid Classes with her departure. Please contact Mary Moller at the Monroe County Fire Rescue for class information at 305-289-6005**
- Alicia co-leads the Choices for Sustainable Living online course. This multi-topic series is designed and hosted by Extension services at Michigan State University, Purdue University, and the University of Florida. She provide attendees with a wide range of knowledge, including real-world examples, to help strengthen critical thinking skills related to future sustainability actions and decisions.
- Series topics will explore how these interconnected systems function together and independently.
- Alicia will attend the Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN), annual conference. Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN) programs include community-based resilience and the EDEN Readiness Series, focusing on topics like green infrastructure, hazard mitigation, and disaster preparedness for individuals and communities in Florida. Visit the [Extension Disaster Education Network \(EDEN\) website](#) to browse recent projects and find more information.



Continued from page 1

- **Unbelievably low prices** – if a deal seems too good to be true, it probably is.
- **Strange website address (URL)** – scammers often use misspellings of well-known brands or random strings of letters.
- **No contact information** – legitimate businesses list a phone number, address, and customer service email.
- **Poor website design** – typos, blurry logos, and broken links are signs of a scam.
- **Suspicious payment methods** – if a site asks for wire transfers, gift cards, or cryptocurrency only, it's not trustworthy.

No reviews or fake reviews – look for independent reviews outside the website itself.

How to Protect Yourself

- **Research before buying** – search the company's name with the word "scam" or "reviews."
- **Check security** – make sure the website uses "https:///" and has a padlock icon in the address bar.
- **Use trusted retailers** – buy directly from brand websites or well-known online stores.
- **Pay with credit cards** – they offer more protec-

tion than debit cards or cash methods.

Be cautious with ads on social media – scammers often use sponsored posts to lure shoppers.



What to Do If You're Scammed

If you realize you've purchased from a fake website:

1. **Contact your bank or credit card company immediately** to dispute the charge.
2. **Change your passwords** if you created an account on the site.

Report the website to the [Federal Trade Commission \(FTC\)](#) or the [Internet Crime Complaint Center \(IC3\)](#).
Warn others by leaving reviews or sharing information.



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



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



UF/IFAS/MONROE COUNTY EXTENSION

1100 Simonton Street, Suite 2-260, Key West, FL 33040
 88800 Overseas Hwy., Suite 6, Plantation Key, FL 33070

KW Phone: 305-292-4501 PKS Phone: 305-797-1086
 KW Fax: 305-292-4415

General e-mail: monroe@ifas.ufl.edu
 County Extension Director: Alicia Betancourt

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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 Putting Florida First

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UF/IFAS Monroe County Extension Service

UF IFAS Extension
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

Florida Keys Plant Clinics

A FREE resource offered by UF/IFAS, Monroe County Master Gardener Volunteers

FREE plant clinics are offered throughout the Keys to help residents with gardening-related questions. Speak with one of our Master Gardener Volunteers and get advice on:

- Proper planting
- Plant selection
- Plant identification
- Fruit & Veggie gardening
- Plant & Insect diagnosis
- Care & maintenance guidelines

Physical samples and/or high-resolution photos are encouraged.

VIRTUAL HELP: Unable to make it to one of our locations, but still have questions? Contact our virtual helpdesk to be connected to a volunteer at MasterGardener@monroecounty-fl.gov

UF/IFAS Monroe County Extension Office
 1100 Simonton Street, Suite 2-260
 Key West, FL 33040
 (305) 292-4501

UPPER KEYS:

1ST Wednesday, 9AM – 12PM:
 Key Largo Library
 101485 O/S Hwy, Key Largo

3RD Tuesday, 9AM-11AM
 Garden Club of the Upper Keys
 94040 O/S Hwy, Tavernier

3RD Thursday, 11AM – 1PM:
 Gib Reese Park
 81031 O/S Hwy, Islamorada

MIDDLE KEYS:

3RD Saturday, 9AM – 12PM
 Home Depot
 4555 O/S Hwy, Marathon

LOWER KEYS:

3RD Saturday, 9AM – 12PM
 Key West Botanical Garden Nursery
 5210 College Rd, Stock Island

1ST Saturday, 10AM – 1PM
 Big Pine Key Library
 213 Key Deer Blvd, Big Pine Key

University of Florida (UF)
<http://SolutionsForYourLife.ufl.edu>
<http://ufl.edu>

Electronic Data Information
 Source (EDIS)
<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>



Interested in more horticultural topics?

Read the September edition of our newsletter here: [Horticultural Sciences Digest](#)