



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

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Locustberry bloom, Photo: Kim Gabel

Florida Keys Native Plants

By Liah Continentino
Horticulture Agent

The Importance of Native Plants in the Florida Keys

If you've ever strolled through a hammock trail, spotted an Atala butterfly munching on coontie, or admired a gumbo limbo shining in the sun, you've witnessed something truly special.

The Florida Keys host a unique plant community, with many species that do not occur anywhere else in the continental US, and some that occur nowhere else on earth. This distinctive botanical community stems from our unique geology and climate; however, due to their limited range, a great number of our native plants have been severely impacted by habitat loss and are of high conservation concern.

A 2014 floristic inventory conducted at Dagny Johnson Park in Key Largo documented 417 individual plant species in the park alone. Of these, **38 were listed as endangered and 21 were listed as threatened. Here in the Keys, we receive the lowest rainfall in the state** and are highly susceptible to seasonal droughts and storms. Furthermore, our soils are porous and calcareous, and freshwater resources are limited. These environmental characteristics can put a significant strain on plant life; however, local native plants are well-adapted to these conditions, displaying resilience in the face of hardships.

One way to contribute to the conservation of our botanical communities is to include native plants in your landscaping. Landscaping with native plants promotes environmental stewardship and supports conservation by providing food and shelter to local wildlife such as birds, insects, and other animals. Planting species of varying heights and densities is especially beneficial to wildlife.

Native plants can also mean less work and lower costs for

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

10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Islamorada Library

81830 O/S Hwy,

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

**College of the Florida Keys
Community Day 2025,
Key West
November 1st 10- 2 pm**



Big Pine



Botanical

**Society Pollinator Talk
November 13th 6:30 PM
280 Key Deer Blvd**

**Key West Garden Club
Plant Sale**

**November 21-22
10am to 3 pm**



**Thanksgiving
November 27-28th
(offices closed)**

Sea Grant News



Shelly Krueger
UF/IFAS Florida Sea Grant Agent

Sea Grant Happenings

- Shelly is leading a session at ReeFlorida with the US Coral Reef Task Force and Florida's Coral Reef Resilience Program to focus on shared communications and highlight the tools and strategies we use to work together on issues related to South Flori-

da and beyond.

- Shelly is on the organizing committee for the Florida Keys Marine Science Conference. This 4-day conference brings together over 180 agency staff and researchers and Shelly is moderating the session on "Shifts and strategies for seagrasses, sponges, and nearshore hardbottom habitats" and presenting on sponge restoration aquaculture. She is helping to facilitate the workshop "A Collab-

orative Visioning and Research Identification Workshop for the Florida Keys Marine Ecosystem" to ask attendees to create a white paper "What does a "successful" Florida Keys marine ecosystem look like 10 years from now and how can science help get us there?"

- Shelly is hosting a group of college students from North Carolina at Bahia Honda State Park for a shoreline talk about local ecology.



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!

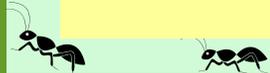
VISIT OUR OFFICE:
Email Monroe@ifas.ufl.edu or
Call (305)292-4501 to schedule an appointment

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

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



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.

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.

Monroe Master Gardener Volunteers logged 199 hours of service and helped 35 residents through one-on-one consultations and local events this month. Master Gardeners are vital to extension; their hard work and dedication make our work possible. **Thank you, Master Gardeners!**

The **College of the Florida Keys** will be hosting its annual Community Day on November 1st from 10 am to 2 pm. Key West Campus. Come visit

the UF/IFAS Extension booth to learn more about our services and get your horticultural questions answered!

Join Liah on Thursday, November 13th, at 6:30 pm at the **Big Pine Native Plant Society, 280 Key Deer Blvd** for a talk on pollinator gardening!

The **Key West Garden Club** will be hosting its annual Native Plant Sale on November 22nd and 23rd from 10 am to 3 pm. The Monroe County Master Gardeners will host a booth to answer your questions and assist you in plant selection throughout the event.

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

Extension Director's News

Alicia Betancourt
Community Development Agent

From the directors desk...

- Alicia led the Beginning Grant Writers Workshop (BGWW) for non-profit board members, community leaders, municipal staff and Extension Agents. This two-day interactive workshop offers individuals, nonprofits, and local governments practical, step-by-step guidance on identifying funding opportunities, developing strong proposals, and effectively managing awarded grants. Participants also receive follow-up coaching, which reinforces learning and supports the

successful implementation of community-driven projects.

- We are currently planning spring online and in-person workshops so reach out to Alicia hold your place at abb@ufl.edu.



- Alicia was invited to attend the Extension Disaster Education Network meeting where over 40 different disaster education and research projects were

shared. One of the most compelling sessions summarized findings from four cross-sectional studies of three major disasters: Researchers identified long-term health impacts and structural barriers that hinder recovery. Participants reported mental health challenges, persistent stress, and difficulty navigating insurance and aid programs.

- These findings underscore the power of Extension's local connections—helping bridge information gaps, promote health resources, and build trust during disaster recovery.

Continued from page 1

you. Incorporating native plants into your landscaping can be an **excellent way to reduce your water bill and save time on landscape maintenance**, as they require little to no water or fertilizer after establishment. Natives can also increase environmental resilience by preventing erosion and protecting landscapes during a storm. Incorporating salt-tolerant and wind-resistant natives in coastal areas could save you from a costly remediation effort following a storm. Similarly, diverse plantings can reduce your landscape's susceptibility to pests and disease.

Keep in mind that natives should still be planted in the right place to satisfy their specific needs to thrive. Plants should always be installed properly and cared for until established to ensure success.

There are many natives to choose from. **The Atlas of Florida Plants lists over 700 registered plant species in the Florida Keys.** Of these, 108 are listed by the Institute for Regional Conservation as "commonly cultivated in Monroe County". Native nurseries and pop-up plant sales provide native plants from Key Largo to Key West. Even endangered plants can be cultivated in our home landscapes, as long as they are purchased from reputable nurseries. One such nursery is the Key West Botanical Garden Nursery, which cultivates endangered species as part of an Endangered Plant Advisory Council (EPAC) program.

Some of my favorite native plants include:

Yucatan flymallow (*Cienfuegosia yucatanensis*): This delicate, medium-height groundcover requires little to no maintenance once established. Its elegant branches

fill a bed or container beautifully and flower daily. Bright yellow flowers provide essential pollen and nectar to native pollinators.

Blackbead (*Pithecellobium keyense*): This attractive species can be grown as a shrub or small tree. It is found in many of our coastal hammocks and serves as an important larval host for the cassius blue and orange giant sulfur butterflies. Its seeds are enjoyed by many native birds, including the rare white-crowned pigeon.



Locustberry (*Byrsonima lucida*): This species boasts showy multi-colored flower clusters and can be grown as a shrub or small tree. It is an important larval host for the Florida duskywing butterfly. Birds and other wildlife enjoy its berries in the spring.

For specific horticultural recommendations or questions or to sign up to take the upcoming Master Gardener Training contact Liah Continentino at Continentino-liah@monroecounty-fl.gov or (305) 998-9580.



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

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88800 Overseas Hwy., Suite 6, Plantation Key, FL 33070

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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

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

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

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](#)