Native to the Caribbean, the Cuban tree frog is considered an invasive species in Florida. The first Cuban Treefrogs in Florida likely arrived as stowaways in shipping crates. By the mid-1970s, they had dispersed throughout most of southern Florida. This species continues to expand its range, with sightings in Georgia and South Carolina, as well as the panhandle of Florida in the past few years. They spread by hitchhiking on ornamental plants, motorized vehicles, boats, etc.

Cuban Treefrogs eat a wide variety of food items, including snails, millipedes, spiders, and a vast array of insects. They are predators of several of Florida’s native frogs, and are cannibalistic. They are also known to eat lizards and even small snakes.

Cuban Treefrogs thrive in human-modified landscapes. As a result, they are making an impact on the quality of life of Floridians. Homes and buildings provide the tight enclosed spaces which Cuban Treefrogs seek during the day, as well as offering food sources and good breeding sites. Cuban Treefrog populations can therefore become quite dense creating a real nuisance for people.

On warm nights in Florida it is common to encounter Cuban Treefrogs hanging on walls and windows near lighted areas as they sit and wait for insects. As they feed, they defecate on the windows and walls, which become very unsightly over time. Furthermore, when a person enters or exits his home at night, Cuban Treefrogs may be startled and will occasionally jump onto people or into their homes through open doors. This can be a scary experience. Florida’s native treefrogs rarely enter homes and buildings and do not cause the problems attributed to Cuban Treefrogs.

When they get into homes, Cuban Treefrogs can be especially annoying. Cuban Treefrogs enter homes by jumping through open doors or windows, hitchhiking on a house plant, traveling through the home’s plumbing system or going through vent pipes on a roof. Unsuspecting people have opened the lid to their toilet only to find a bug-eyed Cuban Treefrog staring back at them. They also may clog sink drains.

Cuban Treefrogs have a sticky skin secretion that is extremely irritating to the mucous membranes of people, such as the eyes and nose. The secretions cause a burning and itching sensation that can last for more than an hour. This can be especially problematic for people who suffer from asthma or allergies, in which case full recovery from the ill effects of the frog’s skin secretions may take several hours. Therefore, it is always a good idea to wash your hands after handling a Cuban Treefrog. Even though there do not appear to be any documented deaths or serious injuries of pets from ingesting or attempting to eat a Cuban Treefrog, dogs and cats should be kept away from these noxious frogs.

Floridians can help manage invasive Cuban Treefrogs and help scientists at the University of Florida track their spread in the state and elsewhere.

To report the presence of Cuban Treefrogs on your property, please send an e-mail message to Dr. Steve A. Johnson of the University of Florida at tadpole@ufl.edu. Please be sure to include the county where the frog was seen and a street address of the location (for mapping purposes).

When possible, please take a digital picture of the frog and include the image as an attachment in your e-mail message. This will allow positive identification of the frog and provide a confirmed record for our archives.
Program Announcements

Landscape Matters
There will be no programs in November or December.

Spotlight on Nassau Gardens

August Winner - Ann Wilson
After the loss of a large red bay tree, Ann Wilson of Fernandina Beach replaced bulkheads and built this terraced garden filled with zinnias, wave petunias, cosmos, black-eye Susans, sago palm, hydrangeas, angel trumpets, bamboo, shrimp plant and blue asters.

September Winner - Mrs. Doug Sikes
Mrs. Doug Sikes has tended to this fig tree for more than 35 years. It has continued to produce such abundant fruit she often shares it with family, friends and neighbors.

October Winner - Mike and Donna Cappucio
The selection for October is Mike and Donna Cappucio’s beautiful garden of Yucca, Mexican Petunias, New Guinea Impatiens and Palmetto.

View more photos online at http://nassau.ifas.ufl.edu/horticulture/spotlight/spotlight.html.
To be considered for Spotlight on Nassau Gardens, send a digital photo, with a description of your garden, along with your name, address and phone number to atwoodca@bellsouth.net. For more information contact Rebecca Jordi at 491-7340.

Plant a Palm - Coontie Palm (Zamia floridana)

The Coontie plant, Zamia floridana, is Florida’s only native cyad. The name cyad means “living fossil.”

Coonties were once used by native Americans (Seminoles) as a source of starch. The roots were harvested and used for food, tasting somewhat like celery. Another common name for coonties is “Seminole Bread.”

Coonties tolerate any type of soil, are slow growing, very drought tolerant, mildly salt tolerant and relatively pest-free. Although they can be grown in full sun they seem to prefer some shade. If grown in the shade they produce beautiful, dark green feathery foliage. At maturity they can reach heights of four feet with six foot spreads.

In the southern regions of Florida, the coontie is the host plant to the caterpillar of the atala butterfly - a butterfly once thought to be extinct by 1965 due to the commercial harvesting of the coontie. Persistent efforts by conservationists have enabled this beautiful butterfly to make a remarkable comeback.

Coonties are diecious – they have “male” and “female” plants, therefore both plants are required for pollination. The fruiting structures look very similar to small ears of corn on a stick, which can vary from dark brown to red-orange in color.

Because it has so few problems, the coontie should be considered more often as a choice for North Florida landscapes. See this publication by Dr. Ed Gilman from the University of Florida for more information http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/mg347

November/December 2010
**November Checklist**

**Citrus & Fruit:** Weed as needed. Protect grafted area if freeze occurs.

**Flowers:** Sow seeds of larkspur, bachelor’s buttons, sweet peas, and California poppies in full sun for a colorful spring show. Set out hardy plants such as sweet alyssum, petunia, dianthus, and snapdragon.

**Roses:** Continue spray program. Water, water, water. Cut and remove spent blooms. DO NOT fertilize. Have soil tested, especially pH. Make necessary soil corrections.

**Lawns:** Avoid the temptation to apply winter fertilizers in NE Florida. Check your mower. Resharpen blades, change the oil, and clean mower of debris.

**Perennials:** Plant now for fall color. Mexican bush sage has spikes of purple-and-white flowers that will wave in the wind. Pineapple sage has brilliant red blooms and leaves each with the hint of pineapple aroma. Firespike with its red bloom spikes is great for partial shade. Philippine violet brightens fall days with its lavender flowers. The brilliant yellow of swamp sunflower will stop traffic a block away. Cigar flower has an abundant display of small orange-and-yellow, tubular blooms.

**Trees:** If you are planting a new tree, staking may not be necessary. New trees become stronger if some movement is allowed. Planting too deeply causes future problems. Plant trees so the top root is just at or slightly above soil level.

**Vegetables:** Keep crops picked to encourage new production. Irrigate during morning hours (6-10am) with drip irrigation to discourage disease.

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**December Checklist**

**Annuals:** Plant carnations, digitalis, pansies, petunias, shasta daisies, and snapdragons this month.

**Bulbs:** Check for declining plant portions and pests. Examine bulbs in storage and remove adhering soil or damaged portions.

**Citrus & Fruit:** Weed as needed. Protect grafted area if freeze occurs.

**Roses:** Water as needed. Continue spray program, if fungi or pests are present. DO NOT cut blooms. DO not fertilize.

**Herbs:** Anise, basil, bay laurel, borage, caraway, cardamom, chervil, chives, coriander, dill, fennel, ginger, horehound, lemon balm, lavender, lovage, marjoram, Mexican tarragon, mint, nasturtium, oregano, rosemary, sage, savory, thyme and watercress can be planted now.

**Lawns:** Do not apply fertilizer or any nitrogen this time of year, wait until March or April. Keep mowing height the same year round. Water ¼ to ½ inch every 10-14 days if we receive no rain.

**Trees and Shrubs:** Late December is the ideal time to begin transplanting plants if the weather has turned cool. It is best to transplant trees and shrubs after they have gone into dormancy. Prune roots two to three months before digging by severing roots with a spade just inside the intended root ball to generate new root hairs and reduce transplant shock. Be sure to keep plants out of the ground as little time as possible. Do not put anything in the transplant hole, simply keep the plant irrigated well for 3-4 months. Do not transplant palms during cold season, wait until late spring or summer.

**Vegetables:** Choices for this month include beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, Chinese cabbage, English peas, onions, and radishes.

Selected from Florida Vegetable Guide by JM Stephens, RA Dunn, G Kidder, D Short, & GW Simone, University of Florida and Month-by-Month Gardening in Florida by Tom MacCubbin

Photo by Kim Starr
Cigar Flower

Photo by Martin Wall
Digitalis

November/December 2010
The Demonstration Garden was established September 2005. The purpose is to show examples of Best Management Practices (BMPs) for Northeast Florida landscapes, adopted from the University of Florida’s “Florida Yards and Neighborhoods” program. The garden provides an opportunity for Nassau County residents, children and businesses to see the principles or Best Management Practices (BMP) of common landscape plants best suited for the Northeast Florida area. These principles include: micro-irrigation; ‘Right Plant/Right Place’; mulching; recycling; attracting wildlife; and Integrated Pest Management (IPM).

And like our personal landscapes, the Demonstration Garden at the James Page Governmental Center needs maintenance: fertilizing, pest treatment, pruning and weeding. Until 2005, this has been a team effort, with Master Gardeners participating in "Demo Garden Workdays" to tidy up the grounds and remove weeds.

October 2009, John Richardson completed Master Gardener Volunteer training for Nassau County and discussed specific volunteer opportunities that would be compatible with his other responsibilities, including continuing his ophthalmology profession, on a part time basis. John asked if he could take on maintenance of the Demonstration Garden as his volunteer project. And that he has! John performs virtually all maintenance of the Demonstration Garden, including the parking lot medians and islands. Whatever it takes, John does: from laying pine straw to pulling weeds to pruning, he's a one-man show. He even installed a compost bin in the Demonstration Garden!

John has also installed an outdoor bulletin board at the Yulee Extension office. Once he heard our Extension Agent desired one, John took care of it! With an interest in vegetable gardening, John signed up to teach the Landscape Matters class on vegetables - and hosted over 40 people.

For a first year in Master Gardener volunteering, John has excelled. And, we are most grateful that his care of the most visible project of the Nassau County Master Gardener volunteer program (or Nassau Extension) has added new ‘brilliance to the jewel of our crown, i.e., the award-winning UF/IFAS Nassau County Demonstration Garden.
The Class of 2011 is ready to work! Terri Oliver, Joseph Smith, and Norm Pineault will be responsible for maintenance of the Fruit Demonstration Garden at the Yulee Extension office.

One of the first tasks they have planned is to rake the wood chips from the planted area and 're-install' it in the area where we put plants for the Plant Sale. In its place they're putting pine straw!

Also, we've provided them a "Fruit Maintenance Calendar" (borrowing from Paul's Rose calendar idea!) and they will be fertilizing the blueberry shrubs this month.

Of course, they will be "weeding as needed" according to the calendar. Becky is looking forward to our fruit plants truly being a Fruit Demonstration Garden of Best Management Practices (BMP's)!

Patti Rendo is joining the Rose Maintenance team. While the months are assigned through the end of 2010, Patti will be helping in October, by providing supplemental watering to the Knockouts - which are on the road to recovery.

Welcome, Class of 2011!
Consumers worldwide are rediscovering the benefits of buying locally grown food. It is fresher, tastier, and more nutritious. It is also good for the local economy--buying directly from family farmers helps them stay in business.

Five Reasons to Buy Local

1. Local produce tastes better and it’s better for you.

Studies have shown that fresh produce loses nutrients quickly during transportation. During the trip from harvest to dinner table, sugars turn to starches, plant cells shrink, and produce loses its vitality. Food grown in your own community was probably picked within the past day or two and therefore is much fresher.

2. Local food supports local farm families.

Fewer than one million Americans now claim farming as their primary occupation (less than 1%). Farming is a vanishing lifestyle. That’s not surprising considering that today’s farmer gets less than 10 cents of the retail food dollar. Local farmers who sell directly to consumers cut out the many middle people and get full retail price for their food - which means farm families can afford to stay on the farm, doing the work they love.

3. Local food protects genetic diversity.

In the modern industrial agriculture system, produce varieties are chosen for their ability to ripen simultaneously and withstand harvesting equipment. Shippers demand produce with a tough skin that can survive packing, transport, and a long shelf life in the store. Only a handful of hybrid varieties of each fruit and vegetable meet those rigorous demands, so there is little genetic diversity in the plants grown. In contrast, local farmers that sell direct to you or direct to your local restaurants and grocery stores grow a huge number of varieties selected because they have the best flavors, provide a long harvest season, and come in an array of eyecatching colors. Many varieties are heirlooms, passed down from generation to generation because they taste good. These old varieties contain genetic material from hundreds or even thousands of years of human selection. They may someday provide the genes needed to adapt to a changing climate or new pests.

4. Local food preserves open space, and can support a diverse environment.

As the value of direct-marketed fruits and vegetables increases, selling farm land for development becomes less likely. The patchwork of fields, hedges, ponds and buildings can serve as habitat for many species of wildlife. That landscape will survive only as long as farms are financially viable. When you buy locally grown food, you are doing something proactive about preserving the agricultural landscape.

5. Local food is about the future.

By supporting local farmers today, you can help ensure that there will be farms in your community tomorrow, that there will be green space for wildlife, and that future generations will have access to locally grown food.

Nassau County is proud to provide you with this information. Horticulture News is a joint project with contributions by county agents and Master Gardener Volunteers.

Sincerely,

Rebecca L. Jordi,
County Extension Director
Horticulture Agent III