Gopher Tortoise: *Gopherus polyphemus*

**Appearance:**
The gopher tortoise is a moderate-sized, terrestrial turtle, averaging 23–28 cm (9–11 in) in length. The species is identified by its stumpy, elephantine hind feet and flattened, shovel-like forelimbs adapted for digging. The shell is oblong and generally tan, brown, or gray in coloration. Gopher tortoises can live 40 to 60 years in the wild.

Gopher tortoises are ancient; their ancestors are a species of land tortoise that originated in western North America some 60 million years ago. They are members of the Class Reptilia, Order Testudines, and Family Testudinidae. Of five North American tortoise species (genus *Gopherus*), the gopher tortoise is the only one that occurs east of the Mississippi River.

**Habitat:**
Gopher tortoises live in well-drained sandy areas with a sparse tree canopy and abundant low growing vegetation. They are commonly found in habitats such as sandhill, pine flatwoods, scrub, scrubby flatwoods, dry prairies, xeric hammock, pine-mixed hardwoods, and coastal dunes which have historically been maintained by periodic wild fires. When fire is suppressed in gopher tortoise habitat, small trees, shrubs, and brambles begin to grow making it difficult for the gopher tortoise to move around and eventually shade out the low growing plants that gopher tortoises eat.

During winter, tortoises are much less active; although on warm afternoons some individuals trudge to the earth’s surface to bask on the sandy aprons of their burrows. A superb earth-mover, it lives in long burrows that offer refuge from cold, heat, drought, forest fires and predators. The record length for a burrow is over 47 feet long, however, the burrows average 15 feet long and 6.5 feet deep. The burrows maintain a fairly constant temperature and humidity throughout the year and protect the gopher tortoise and other species from heat, cold, drought, and predators. Burrows also act as a refuge from the periodic, regenerative fires that are required to maintain the quality of their habitat.

Gopher tortoises have adapted to living in dry habitats with frequent fire occurrence by digging burrows deep into the sandy soil. The absence of natural cycles of burning in pine forests spells hardship for tortoises. The dense vegetation (shrubs, brambles, small trees) that grows in a
forest in the absence of fire shades out the tender herbs tortoises like to eat, and limits their food supplies. Fire is vital in maintaining many native ecosystems, like longleaf pine sandhills, where gophers live.

**Behavior:**
Gopher tortoises are slow to reach sexual maturity, have a low fecundity, and a long life span. Females reach sexual maturity at 9–21 years of age, depending on local resource abundance and latitude; males mature at a slightly younger age. The breeding season is generally April–November. Nests are constructed (often in burrow mounds) from mid-May to mid-June, and only one clutch is produced annually. Clutch size is usually five to nine eggs, with an average of six. Predation on nests and hatchlings is heavy.

These reptiles feed on low-growing plants like wiregrass, broadleaf grasses, and legumes (bean family plants). They also eat prickly pear cactus, blackberries, paw-paws, and other seasonal fruits. In addition to needing open areas with abundant food, gopher tortoises require relatively deep, sandy soils for burrowing and sunny spots for laying eggs.

An amazing trait of the gopher tortoise is that it shares its burrow with more than 350 other species, including burrowing owls, Florida mice, indigo snakes, opossums, rabbits, gopher frog, eastern diamondback rattlesnakes and gopher crickets. For this reason it is called a keystone species, so named because the upper stone in an arch, the keystone, supports the other stones to hold them in place. Animals which utilize the gopher tortoise burrows are known as commensal species. Since many commensal species depend on the burrows for survival, decreases in gopher tortoise populations result in a decline of other species.
Program Announcements

Landscape Matters 10AM -11AM

Drought Tolerant Plants
Wednesday July 6
Rebecca Jordi

Location
Yulee Satellite Office (attached to Fire Station #30)
86026 Pages Dairy Rd. Yulee, FL

Native Plants
Wednesday July 20
Rebecca Jordi

Location
Yulee Satellite Office (attached to Fire Station #30)
86026 Pages Dairy Rd. Yulee, FL

Vegetable Gardening
Wednesday August 3
Master Gardener Joseph Smith

Location
Yulee Satellite Office (attached to Fire Station #30)
86026 Pages Dairy Rd. Yulee, FL

Invasives and Alternatives
Wednesday August 17
Rebecca Jordi

Location
Yulee Satellite Office (attached to Fire Station #30)
86026 Pages Dairy Rd. Yulee, FL

Plant Clinics 10AM-2PM

Monday July 11
Monday July 18
Monday August 1
Monday August 15

Bring us your tired, diseased, insect infested plants yearning to be free of problems. When possible place your plant in a plastic bag to prevent chances of spreading issues to other plants. You will receive current researched based information on proper plant care, disease management and insect control. These sessions are free to the public. No registration required. Come anytime between 10AM and 2PM for expert advice.

Location
Yulee Satellite Office (attached to Fire Station #30)
86026 Pages Dairy Rd. Yulee, FL

Page 3 - July/August 2016
**Florida Fresh: Summer Squash**

**Nutrition Facts**
Summer squash in Florida are:

- High in vitamin C. Vitamin C helps to heal cuts and keeps teeth and gums healthy.
- High in vitamin A when left unpeeled. Vitamin A aids in normal vision, healthy skin, and protects against infections.
- A good source of vitamin B6, which helps us metabolize protein.
- Supplier of folate. Folate produces red blood cells and reduces a woman’s risk of having a baby with certain brain or spinal cord birth defects.
- Supplier of potassium, which helps to control blood pressure.
- Naturally free of fat, cholesterol, and low in sodium.

**Note:** Squash are divided into summer squash and winter squash. Florida produces more summer squash including zucchini (part of the summer squash family) and yellow.

**Why buy locally?**
The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates that the average farmers’ market produce travels about 50 miles to its destination, compared to 2,000 miles for supermarket produce.

Buy locally and get these benefits:

- Freshness and good nutrition. Fruits and vegetables harvested in their peak have better flavor and nutritional characteristics.
- Social/cultural. Helps the community to be aware of the importance of agriculture.
- Environmental. Protects the natural resources such as green space, wildlife, water, air, and soil.
- Economic. Promotes local labor force.

**Where are Florida’s summer squash harvested?**
Most of Florida’s zucchini are grown in North Central Florida, while most of Florida’s yellow squash are grown in West Central and South Florida. Summer squash adapts well to the warm climate. They should be harvested before they are fully mature.

**When can you buy Florida summer squash?**
You can buy Florida Summer squash from September through June. This is ten months out of the year!

**Select**

- Glossy deep green, slim, and cylindrical-shaped zucchini.
- Bright yellow, bottle-shaped or cylindrical-shaped yellow squash.
- Summer squash that are tender and firm with no soft spots.
- Summer squash that are heavy for their size.
Florida State Saltwater Fish

Sailfish (*Istiophorus platypterus*)

**Size:** Atlantic variety - up to 11 feet, 25-50 pounds

**Range:** worldwide; Atlantic, and Gulf of Mexico coasts

**Fun Facts:**
- typically live about 5 years
- groups of sailfish raise sails to corral schooling fish
- can swim 68 mph, faster than marlin

The sailfish is a popular saltwater game fish in Florida's offshore waters. It is named for its large, sail-like dorsal fin that is raised when the fish is excited or comes to the surface. Sailfish are brilliantly colored with dark, iridescent blue on top, silver on the belly, and purple stripes on the back. The sailfish often travels and feeds in schools. The sailfish is known among fishermen for its fighting ability and tendency to leap out of the water. In recent years, sailfish populations have declined from overfishing, and anglers are encouraged to catch and release this beautiful state fish.
July brings on the dog-days of summer, our national independence day, and some great wildlife activity here in the state of Florida. Here are some interesting things to look for in July:

**Birds**
- Shorebird migration starts in mid-July, peaking in August.
- Swallow-tailed kites begin gathering as do purple martins and tree swallows in preparation for migrating south for the winter.
- Look for frigate birds flying overhead in south Florida.
- Look out for nesting shorebirds, and keep your vehicles and dogs from disturbing them.

**Reptiles**
- Later this month, young alligators and crocodiles will begin to hatch.

**Insects**
- Mosquitoes and chiggers are abundant, so watch out while you’re camping.

**Mammals**
- Baby raccoons, foxes, armadillos, possums, and bobcats leave dens and begin following parents
- Deer mating season in the Everglades

**Plants**
- Sea oats flower along the Atlantic
- Scrub morning glory and butterfly weed begin to bloom

**Special date in July**
- July 22, 1982 First Florida bog frog discovered in a panhandle wetland.
August continues the traditional Florida summer of afternoon rains and sticky heat, but the wildlife don’t mind and there are some stellar activities for you to see. Here are some interesting things to look for in August:

**Birds**
- First flocks of blue-winged and green-winged teal arrive to winter on Florida lakes and wetlands.
- Yellow warbler migration begins.

**Mammals**
- Two-year old black bear cubs will wean from their mothers.
- Short-tailed shrews will begin a second round of breeding for the year.

**Reptiles**
- Young sea turtles are hatching so watch where you’re walking on the beach.

**Insects**
- Thousands of great southern white butterflies can be seen migrating through coastal areas.

**Invertebrates**
- Corals along the Keys spawn at the full moon
Hello everybody! Welcome back to Harvest Gold! And welcome to the Third Annual Master Gardeners’ Cookout. Below, you will find some great summertime party recipes shared by Nassau County’s Master Gardeners and their friends. But before the recipes, a little bit about summertime food safety. (The food safety information below first appeared in Harvest Gold back in July of 2014).

Food safety is very important in the summertime. As the temperatures rise, so do cases of food poisoning. No one wants a cookout or party ruined by someone getting sick. To prevent bacterial infection of food, wash all surfaces and equipment with soap and warm water before beginning the cookout, and wash hands both before and after handling food. Keep meat refrigerated before cooking, and once cooked, keep cooked meat separate from raw meat or raw meat juices (this includes washing the dish the raw meat was on before reusing it for the cooked meat). Do not use the marinade you soaked your meat in to baste with while cooking—prepare a fresh batch if needed. And remember, keep cold side-dishes cold (below 40 Degrees Fahrenheit) until ready to serve.

To destroy harmful bacteria when grilling or barbecuing, meats should be cooked to a minimum internal temperature. Poultry should be cooked to a minimum temperature of 165 Degrees Fahrenheit, and beef, veal, pork, and lamb to at least 145 Degrees. Ground meats, and fully cooked meats that are being reheated, should be cooked to a minimum temperature of 165 Degrees. When judging when a particular piece of meat is done, do not rely on looks alone: Use a meat thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the meat and away from the bone to accurately gauge doneness. Once the meat is done, serve immediately. After eating, refrigerate leftovers as soon as possible—food should not be left out for more than two hours; one hour if the temperature is above 90 Degrees.

Well folks, that’s it for today. Thanks to all who shared their summertime recipes with us. Until we meet again, Happy Harvesting, Happy 4th of July, and God Bless America!

Peace and Goodness,

Joseph

NB: All items in the following recipes that can be successfully grown here in Nassau County have been marked with an asterisk (*).
Appetizers

Stephen’s Bacon-Wrapped Stuffed Dates

Ingredients
• ¼ Cup Reduced Sodium Soy Sauce
• ½ Teaspoon Ground Ginger*
• ¾ Cup Dark Brown Sugar
• 20 Whole Pitted Dried Dates
• 20 Whole Smoked Almonds
• 10 Bacon Slices (Cut in Half)
• 20 Wooden Toothpicks

Directions
In a bowl, mix together the soy sauce and ground ginger. Place brown sugar into a separate shallow bowl. Stuff each date with a smoked almond. Wrap each date with half a slice of bacon, and secure bacon to the dates with wooden toothpicks (presoak toothpicks in water). Dip the wrapped dates in the soy sauce mixture, and then dip in brown sugar. Place the wrapped dates into a greased 9x13 Inch baking dish, and bake in a 400 Degree Fahrenheit preheated oven for about 15 to 25 minutes, or until the bacon is brown and crisp. (If desired, sprinkle a bit more brown sugar over the stuffed dates before baking.) Allow to cool for about 15 minutes before serving.

Notes
Sprinkle on a bit of cayenne pepper just before baking if you like a little heat.

Recipe courtesy of Stephen Rhodes.
Kathy’s Three Layer Cheesecake

Ingredients

- 3 Packages (8 Ounces Each) Softened Cream Cheese
- 3 Tablespoons Chopped Pimento-Stuffed Green Olives
- 2 Teaspoons Olive Juice
- 1 Tablespoon Mayonnaise
- 1 Cup (About 4 Ounces) Shredded Sharp Cheddar Cheese
- 1 Jar (2 Ounce) Diced Pimentos (Drained)
- 1 Teaspoon Onion* (Grated)
- ¼ Cup Butter (Softened)
- 2 Garlic Cloves* (Pressed)
- 1 Teaspoon Dried Italian Seasoning

Directions

Beat 1 package of cream cheese at medium speed with an electric mixer until creamy. Stir in olives and olive juice. Spread olive mixture into bottom of an 8 x 4 inch loafpan lined with plastic wrap. Set aside. Beat 1 more package of cream cheese at medium speed until creamy, add mayonnaise and cheddar cheese, and beat until well blended. Stir in pimiento and onion, and spread over olive mixture. Beat remaining package of cream cheese and butter at medium speed until creamy. Add garlic and Italian seasoning, and beat until blended. Spread garlic mixture over pimiento mixture, cover, and chill for at least 3 hours, or until firm. Remove cheesecake from loafpan, remove plastic wrap, and serve with assorted crackers and fresh fruit.

Notes

This wonderful appetizer will get the conversation going at your summertime parties. Enjoy.

Recipe courtesy of Kathy Warner.
Aunt Dorothy’s Pizza Bombs

Ingredients

• 1 Can (8 Count) Biscuit Dough
• 1 Small Jar Paul Newman’s Marinara Sauce
• 16 Slices Pepperoni
• 16 Cubes Mozzarella Cheese
• 3 Tablespoons Butter (Melted)
• 2 Cloves Garlic® (Minced)
• Sea Salt (To Taste)
• Black Pepper (To Taste)
• 1 Tablespoon Italian Seasoning
• Shredded Parmesan Cheese (For Topping)

Directions

Cut each biscuit in half like you would a hamburger bun. Press each half into a circle with your thumb. Place about a tablespoon of marinara sauce, 1 slice of pepperoni, and 1 cube of mozzarella on each biscuit round. Bring the edges of the biscuit round up and cover the toppings, and pinch the edges together, being sure to leave no gaps for the filling to leak out. Lay the pizza bombs on a baking sheet lined with greased parchment paper, and set aside. Combine melted butter, garlic, salt, pepper, and Italian seasoning in a small bowl. Brush the butter mixture onto each pizza bomb, and top with parmesan cheese. Bake at 375 Degrees Fahrenheit for 15 to 20 minutes, or until biscuits are golden-brown. Remove from oven and let cool. Serve warm.

Notes

Enjoy!

Recipe courtesy of Aunt Dorothy Rogers.
Luke’s Bacon-Wrapped Hotdogs

Ingredients

- 8 Beef Hotdogs
- 8 Slices Bacon
- Lea & Perrins Worcestershire Sauce
- 8 Hotdog Buns
- Hickory Smoked Barbecue Sauce
- Toppings

Directions

Wrap each hotdog in 1 slice of bacon. Secure bacon with toothpicks. Marinate in Worcestershire sauce for several hours in the refrigerator. Remove hotdogs from marinade, and place on grill. Brush with hickory smoked barbecue sauce, and grill for several minutes. Turn hotdogs, brush hotdogs again with barbecue sauce, and grill for several more minutes, or until bacon is done (turn as needed). Remove toothpicks, and serve on hotdog buns with grated cheddar cheese, diced onions®, pickle relish, slaw, mustard, catsup, mayonnaise, and other favorite hotdog toppings.

Notes

These hotdogs are easy to prepare, and are great for the 4th of July.

Marlee’s Bacon Blue Burger

Ingredients

• 3 Pounds Lean Ground Beef
• 8 Ounces Blue Cheese (Crumbled)
• ¼ Cup Real Bacon Pieces
• ¼ Cup Vidalia Onion* (Finely Minced)
• 3 Cloves Garlic* (Finely Minced)
• 1 Teaspoon Frank’s Hot Sauce
• 1 Teaspoon Worcestershire Sauce
• 1 Teaspoon Freshly Ground Black Pepper (To Taste)
• 1 Teaspoon Kosher Salt (To Taste)
• 12 Onion Rolls (Lightly Toasted)
• Romaine Lettuce*
• Tomato* Slices
• Red Onion* Slices
• 12 Strips Fried Bacon (Broken in Half)
• Duke’s Mayonnaise

Directions

Add ground beef, 5 ounces crumbled blue cheese, bacon pieces, minced onion, minced garlic, hot sauce, Worcestershire sauce, black pepper, and salt to a large bowl, and mix well. Cover, and refrigerate for 2 hours. Preheat grill to high heat (brush grill and oil grate with olive oil before cooking). Gently form the burger mixture into about 12 patties. Place patties on grill, and cook for about 5 minutes per side, or until done. Serve on toasted onion rolls topped with lettuce, tomato, red onion, two half strips of bacon, a sprinkling of the remaining blue cheese, and a dollop of Duke’s mayo.

Notes

If you love blue cheese, you will love these burgers. They are great served at any cookout.

Recipe courtesy of Marlee Frazel.
Kathy’s Pork Tenderloin with Raspberry Sauce

**Ingredients**
- 1 Pork Tenderloin
- ¼ Cup Soy Sauce
- ¼ Cup Vegetable Oil
- ¼ Teaspoon Ground Black Pepper

**Sauce**
- ¼ Cup Seedless Black Raspberry Preserves
- ¼ Cup Water
- 1 ½ Tablespoons Dijon Mustard
- 1 Teaspoon Fresh Lime* Juice
- 1 Teaspoon Soy Sauce
- ½ Teaspoon Salt
- ½ Teaspoon Black Pepper
- ¼ Teaspoon Caraway Seeds (Crushed)
- ½ Teaspoon Steak Sauce

**Directions**
Place pork tenderloin into a large Ziploc bag. Combine soy sauce, vegetable oil, and black pepper, and pour over meat. Marinate in refrigerator for 2 hours to overnight. Combine all sauce ingredients in a small saucepan, and cook over low heat until thoroughly heated, stirring occasionally. Bake or grill pork tenderloin until it reaches an internal temperature of 145 Degrees Fahrenheit (about 20 minutes). Remove tenderloin from oven or grill, and wrap with aluminum foil. Let rest for five to ten minutes. Slice and serve with raspberry sauce.

**Notes**
This pork tenderloin is an easy and elegant dish to serve your summertime guests.

Recipe courtesy of Kathy Warner.
Aunt Henrietta’s Southern Oven Fried Chicken

Ingredients

- 1 Whole Chicken or 6 Leg Quarters (Cut Up)
- Salt Water (For Soaking)
- 3 Cups Self-Rising Flour
- 1 Tablespoon Paprika
- 2 Envelopes Good Seasons Italian Dressing Mix (Powder)
- 2 Envelopes Lipton Tomato Cup-A-Soup (Powder)
- 1 Teaspoon Sea Salt
- 1 Stick Butter
- Buttermilk
- Texas Pete Hot Sauce (Optional Marinade)
- Ground Cayenne Pepper* (Optional—To Taste)

Directions

Cut up and wash chicken. Soak in salt water at least overnight in the refrigerator to remove blood. Drain and rinse. Marinate overnight in Texas Pete Hot Sauce, again refrigerating (if you prefer a less-spicy chicken, omit this step). Mix flour, paprika, Italian dressing mix, tomato Cup-A-Soup, and salt (and if you want a spicier chicken, add a little ground cayenne pepper to the mix here). Just before cooking, remove chicken from marinade (do not rinse), dip chicken in buttermilk, then roll or shake chicken in the flour mixture. Repeat. Place butter in the bottom of a casserole dish, warm until melted, and add chicken. Cover chicken, and bake for about 40 minutes at 350 Degrees Fahrenheit, or until the largest piece of chicken is tender and done. (For crispier chicken, fry in a deep fryer or cast iron frying pan in the traditional manner.)

Notes

I got this recipe many years ago from a Kentucky Colonel I was once acquainted with. He told me that one day he would be famous for his chicken. I hope he was successful—haven’t heard from him in years. Anyway, this chicken is finger-licking good.

Recipe courtesy of Mrs. Henrietta Witherspoons.
Condiments

Sandy’s Roquefort Dressing

Ingredients
• ½ Pound Roquefort Cheese
• 2 Cups Mayonnaise
• 2 Cloves Garlic* (Minced)
• 1 Cup Sour Cream
• ½ Cup Wine Vinegar
• 2 Tablespoons Fresh Lemon* Juice
• Cracked Pepper (To Taste)

Directions
Crumble Roquefort cheese (do not buy already crumbled) into a large container. Add all other ingredients to the container, and mix well. Let chill for at least 24 hours, and stir well one more time before serving.

Notes
I have no idea where I got this recipe. Sometimes it is hard to find the best quality of cheese here in Nassau County, but Publix carries an 8 ounce wedge of BelGioioso Crumbly Gorgonzola which seems to work. You need good cheese for this dressing—it tastes nothing like the bottled stuff. And the wine vinegar gives it a slight tint. This recipe makes a quart, but is easily halved.

Recipe courtesy of Sandy Barron.
Vicki’s Candied Jalapeños

Ingredients
- 1 (12 Ounce) Jar Pickled Jalapeño Pepper* Slices
- 4 Red Chili Peppers* (Sliced)
- ¾ Cup Sugar
- 1 Teaspoon Loosely Packed Lime* Zest

Directions
Drain pickled jalapeño slices, discarding liquid and reserving jar and lid. In a bowl, toss together jalapeño slices, red chili slices, sugar, and lime zest. Let stand for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add sweetened peppers to reserved jar, scraping any remaining sugar mixture from the bowl into the jar. Cover jar with lid, and chill for 2 days to 1 week, shaking jar several times a day to dissolve any sugar that settles.

Notes
This is our new go-to summer condiment. Chill at least 48 hours ahead so the jalapeños have time to take on a fiery-sweet crunch.

Recipe courtesy of Vicki Martin.
Salad and Sides

Sandy’s Claremont Salad

Ingredients

- 1 Head Cabbage* (About 2 Pounds, Grated)
- 2 Carrots* (Finely Grated)
- 1 Green Pepper* (Chopped)
- 2 Cucumbers* (Thinly Sliced)
- 1 Red Onion* (Thinly Sliced)
- ¾ Cup Oil
- ¾ Cup White Vinegar
- ½ Cup Sugar
- ½ Cup Water
- ⅛ Cup Salt (Or Less, To Taste)

Directions

Wash and prepare all vegetables. Toss vegetables in a large bowl, and set aside. In another bowl, mix together oil, vinegar, sugar, water, and salt. Pour dressing over salad, and let salad marinate in the refrigerator for at least a day before serving (turn the salad a couple of times while marinating).

Notes

This salad is named after the original Claremont Diner in Verona, New Jersey. It was served at all family gatherings at my parent’s home. I have seen similar salads in delis, but they just do not taste the same to me. My favorite things about this salad are that it tastes great, stays well, and is made ahead of time.

Recipe courtesy of Sandy Barron.
Claudia’s Buffalo Chicken Pasta Salad

Ingredients

- 1 Package (16 Ounce) Uncooked Rotini Pasta
- ½ Cup Mayonnaise
- 1 Cup Chunky Blue Cheese Dressing
- ½ Cup Buffalo Wing Sauce
- 1 Teaspoon Salt
- ½ Teaspoon Black Pepper
- 1 Pound Frozen Cooked Chicken Strips (Defrosted and Diced)
- ½ Cup Red Bell Pepper* (Diced)
- ½ Cup Green Bell Pepper* (Diced)
- 1 Cup Red Onion* (Diced)

Directions

Fill a large pot with lightly salted water, and bring to a rolling boil over high heat. Once the water is boiling, stir in the rotini, and return to a boil. Cook uncovered, stirring occasionally, until the pasta has cooked through but is still firm to the bite (about 8 minutes). Drain well in a colander set in the sink, and let cool. Stir together the mayonnaise, blue cheese dressing, buffalo wing sauce, salt, and pepper in a large bowl. Add the chicken, bell peppers, red onion, and cooked pasta to the bowl, and toss to coat with the dressing. Cover and chill at least 1 hour in the refrigerator before serving.

Notes

My family loves this chicken pasta salad. Serve as a side dish to accompany hamburgers, hotdogs, and barbecue, or on a bed of lettuce for a light summertime lunch.

Recipe courtesy of Claudia Forshier.
Vicki’s Salad with Tomato, Red Onion, Dill, and Feta

Ingredients

- ½ Red Onion* (Finely Sliced)
- 1 Large Red Tomato* (Cut into Bite Sized Chunks)
- 1 Large Orange Tomato* (Cut into Bite Sized Chunks)
- 1 Clove Garlic* (Minced)
- Flaky Sea Salt (To Taste)
- Freshly Ground Black Pepper (To Taste)
- 2 Tablespoons Red Wine Vinegar
- ¼ Cup Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- 1 Red Bell Pepper* (Seeded and Cut into 1 Inch Chunks)
- ½ Large Cucumber* (Thinly Sliced)
- 1 Cup Kalamata Olives (Pitted)
- ¼ Cup Fresh Dill* (Roughly Chopped)
- ¼ Cup Fresh Mint* (Roughly Chopped)
- 1 Cup Feta Cheese (Crumbled)

Directions

Soak onion slices in a bowl of cold water for about 10 to 15 minutes. Drain the onion and pat dry. Place the garlic, a pinch of salt, and the vinegar into a large mixing bowl. Slowly drizzle in olive oil and whisk. Add the onion, red pepper, cucumber, olives, and herbs, and let marinate for 10 minutes. Add the tomatoes, feta, salt, and pepper, and toss gently to combine. Lift out of the bowl with a slotted spoon, leaving juices behind. Place on a large platter and serve immediately.

Notes

We tried this recipe at a party, and everyone loved it.

Recipe courtesy of Vicki Martin.
Esther’s Cold Bean Salad

Ingredients
• 2 Cans Chickpeas* (Drained)
• 2 Cans Red Kidney Beans* (Drained and Rinsed)
• 2 Cans French-Cut Green Beans* (Drained)
• 1 Purple Onion* (Sliced Thin)
• 1 Large Green Pepper* (Diced)

Marinade
• 1 Cup Corn Oil
• 1 Cup Apple Cider Vinegar
• 2 Teaspoons Salt
• ¼ Cup Sugar

Directions
In a large bowl, mix together chickpeas, kidney beans, green beans, onion, and green pepper. Set aside. Add all ingredients for the marinade to another container, and mix well. Pour marinade over bean mixture, toss well, and refrigerate for 2 days before serving (turn salad several times while refrigerating).

Notes
I have a vintage filing box with hand written recipes, many from my Mother when I was first married. Nothing has been added to this box in over 30 years. The recipes were written on the back side of calendar pads dated around 1976 left at my Father’s medical practice. This recipe comes from that box, and has been served many times at our house. It is easy to make, and delicious.

Recipe courtesy of Sandy Barron.
**Beverly’s Avocado-Peach Salad**

**Ingredients**
- 2 Medium Fresh Peaches* (Peeled and Thinly Sliced)
- 1 Large Red Tomato* (Diced)
- 1 Avocado* (Sliced)
- 1 Tablespoon Fresh Lime Juice*
- 1 Teaspoon Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- Freshly Ground Pepper (To Taste)

**Directions**
Wisk lime juice, olive oil, and pepper, and toss with prepared fruit. Serve chilled.

**Notes**
This avocado-peach salad is quite refreshing on a hot summer's day.

Recipe courtesy of Beverly Stormoen.

**Beverly’s Summer Tomato Salad**

**Ingredients**
- 1 Box Mixed Color Grape Tomatoes*
- 1 Cup Red Seedless Grapes
- 1 Medium Cucumber* (Seeded and Chopped)
- ¼ Cup Sweet Onion* (Diced)
- 1 Avocado* (Peeled and Chopped)
- Italian Dressing (To Taste)
- Salt (To Taste)
- Pepper (To Taste)

**Directions**
Mix tomatoes, grapes, cucumber, onion, and avocado. Toss with Italian dressing, salt, and pepper. Serve.

**Notes**
This salad can be made ahead of time (minus the avocado), and refrigerated until time to serve. To serve, remove from refrigerator, and toss in avocado.

Recipe courtesy of Beverly Stormoen.
Beverly’s Corn Relish Salad with Spaghetti

Ingredients

- ½ to 1/3 Box Spaghetti (Broken into Small Pieces, Cooked, and Rinsed)
- 2 Ears Fresh Corn* (Or 1 Cup Frozen Whole-Kernel Corn*)
- 1 Cucumber* (Chopped)
- 1 Small Summer Squash* (Chopped)
- 1 Small Onion* (Chopped)
- 1 Stalk Celery* (Thinly Sliced)
- ½ Sweet Red Pepper* (Chopped)
- ¼ Cup Cider Vinegar
- 1/6 Cup Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- ½ Tablespoon Sugar
- ¼ Teaspoon Dry Mustard
- 1 Tablespoon Celery Seeds

Directions

Mix vinegar, olive oil, sugar, mustard, and celery seeds. Set aside. Break spaghetti into small pieces, cook, and drain. Set aside. Cook and cut corn off the cobs, or thaw frozen corn. Toss corn with the other vegetable ingredients. Add dressing, and toss salad again. Chill salad in refrigerator. Toss salad once more before serving.

Notes

This salad is best refrigerated for up to 24 hours before serving.

Recipe courtesy of Beverly Stormoen.
Beverly’s Tomato-Strawberry Salad

Ingredients
• ½ Box Fresh Strawberries* (Chopped)
• 2 or 3 Mixed Variety Tomatoes* (Cut into Wedges)
• Fresh Basil* (Torn into Large Pieces, To Taste)
• Zest of One Fresh Lemon*
• Salt (To Taste)
• Black Pepper (To Taste)

Directions
Combine and toss all ingredients. Refrigerate until ready to serve. Serve with your favorite vinaigrette dressing.

Notes
A box of mixed grape and cherry tomatoes (halved) could be substituted for the tomato wedges above.

Recipe courtesy of Beverly Stormoen.

Marlee’s Creamy Lemon Pasta

Ingredients
• 12 Ounces Wide Egg Noodles
• Zest and Juice of 2 Fresh Lemons*
• 1 Cup Heavy Cream
• Kosher Salt (To Taste)
• Freshly Ground Black Pepper (To Taste)
• Parmesan Cheese (Optional)

Directions
Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add noodles, and stir to separate. Cook for 8 minutes, or until tender. Drain, then return to the cooking pot. In a separate small saucepan, combine the lemon zest, cream, salt, and pepper. Cook over medium heat for 2 minutes, or until cream comes to a boil. Pour cream mixture over drained noodles, add the lemon juice, and stir to coat. Cook over medium heat, stirring, until all the liquid is absorbed (about 1 to 2 minutes). Season with additional pepper, and serve with a sprinkling of Parmesan cheese.

Notes
This creamy lemon pasta is a good side at any summertime party, and is easy to make.

Recipe courtesy of Marlee Frazel.
Valerie’s Summer Squash Casserole

Ingredients
• 3 to 4 Yellow Summer Squash* (Roughly Chopped)
• 1 Large Vidalia Onion* (Peeled and Chopped)
• 4 Cloves Garlic*
• 2 Tablespoons Unsalted Butter
• 1 1/2 Cups Aged White Cheddar (Shredded)
• 1/2 Cup Sour Cream
• 1/2 Cup Flour
• 1/4 Cup Corn Meal
• 1 Teaspoon Sea Salt
• 1/4 Teaspoon Ground Pepper
• 1/2 Teaspoon Dried Thyme*
• 1/8 Teaspoon Cayenne Pepper*
• 2 Cornbread Muffins (Crumbled)

Directions
Preheat oven to 350 Degrees Fahrenheit. Put the roughly chopped squash, onions, and garlic in the food processor, and pulse until finely ground into pulp. Place a medium skillet over medium-high heat, and add the butter to the skillet. Pour the squash mixture into the skillet and sauté the squash pulp, stirring regularly, for 5 minutes to soften. Pour the cooked squash into a mixing bowl, and add the shredded cheese, sour cream, flour, cornmeal, salt, and spices. Mix well, and spoon into a casserole dish. Sprinkle the crumbled cornbread over the top of squash mixture, then place in the oven. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes, or until the cornbread top is golden and the edges are bubbly. Serve warm.

Notes
My Sister Valerie likes to bring this when we have a large amount of fresh from the garden summer squash. This is an easy and delicious dish for any summer potluck, and can be made ahead of time and refrigerated until ready to cook (if you refrigerate, increase cooking time to at least 45 minutes).

Recipe courtesy of Vicki Martin.
Debbie’s Corn and Black Bean Salsa

Ingredients
- 2 Cups Frozen Corn*
- 29 Ounce Can Black Beans* (Drained and Rinsed)
- 14.5 Ounce Can Petite Diced Tomatoes* with Chilies*
- ½ Cup Diced Red Onion*
- 4 Tablespoons Diced Chipotle Chilies* in Adobo Sauce
- 3 Teaspoons Finely Minced Garlic*
- ¾ Cup Fresh Cilantro* (Chopped)
- ¼ Cup Cider Vinegar
- ½ Cup Fresh Lime* Juice
- 1 Tablespoon Chili* Powder
- ½ Tablespoon Cumin
- 2 Teaspoons Kosher Salt
- 1 Teaspoon Black Pepper

Directions
In a large bowl, combine the corn and black beans. Set aside. Prepare onions, garlic, and cilantro. Add vegetables and all remaining ingredients to the corn and black beans, and stir well. Chill before serving.

Notes
My Sister-in-law Debbie brought this dip to a family get together, and it was gone in no time. Everyone enjoyed it and wanted her recipe.

Recipe courtesy of Vicki Martin.
Ellie’s Pickled Wax Beans

Ingredients
• About 1 ½ Pounds Wax Beans*
• 1 ½ Cups Apple Cider Vinegar
• 1 ½ Cups Water
• 2 Tablespoons Sea Salt
• 4 Medium Cloves Garlic*
• 4 Teaspoons Dill* Seeds
• 2 Teaspoons Black Peppercorns
• 4 Sterilized Half-Pint Jars and Lids

Directions
Wash and cut beans so they fit into the jars (green beans can be substituted for wax beans). Combine vinegar, water, and salt in a medium-sized saucepan. Bring liquid to a boil. While liquid heats, pack beans into jars, pushing them down to leave about ½ inch of headspace. Add 1 clove garlic, 1 teaspoon dill seeds, and ½ teaspoon peppercorns to each jar. Slowly pour hot pickling liquid over beans, leaving ½ inch headspace. After jars are full, use a wooden chopstick to dislodge any trapped air bubbles. Add more liquid if necessary to return headspace to ½ inch. Wipe rims, screw on lids and rings, and process jars by submerging in boiling water for 10 minutes. Remove jars from water-bath, tighten lids if necessary, and allow jars to seal. Let beans pickle for at least a couple of weeks in a cool, dark place before serving.

Notes
These pickled wax beans are a family favorite. We always have them as a side at summer cookouts.

Recipe courtesy of Ellie Frazel.
Sonja’s American Pie

Ingredients
• 2 Packages (8 Ounces Each) Softened Cream Cheese
• 1/3 Cup Sugar
• 1 Container (16 Ounce) Thawed Cool Whip
• 1 Premade Graham Cracker Crust (9 Inch)
• 2 Cups Fresh Strawberries* (Halved)
• 1/3 Cup Fresh Blueberries*

Directions
With an electric mixer, beat cream cheese and sugar in a large bowl until well blended. Whisk in Cool Whip. Spoon mixture into pie crust, and refrigerate for three hours or until set. Remove pie from refrigerator, and in the upper left quadrant of the pie, arrange the blueberries to represent the union of the American flag. To the right of the union and below, line up halved strawberries to create the red stripes of the flag. Chill until ready to serve.

Notes
I love this recipe because it is so quick and easy to make, yet so good. It will be the hit of your 4th of July cookout. Happy 240th Birthday America!

Recipe courtesy of Sonja Douglas.
Esther’s Sour Cream Cake

Ingredients

- ½ Cup Butter
- 1 Cup Sugar
- 2 Eggs
- 1 Cup Sour Cream
- 1 Teaspoon Vanilla
- 2 Cups Flour
- 1 Teaspoon Baking Powder
- 1 Teaspoon Baking Soda
- ¼ Teaspoon Salt
- ½ Cup Chopped Nuts*
- ¼ Cup Sugar
- 1 Teaspoon Cinnamon
- Pam Cooking Spray

Directions

Add chopped nuts, sugar, and cinnamon to a small bowl, and stir well. Set aside. In a mixer, cream butter and sugar. Add eggs, then sour cream, and then vanilla, and combine. Slowly add flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt, and mix well. Pour ½ of the cake mix into a Bundt pan sprayed with Pam, and sprinkle with half of the nut topping. Spread the rest of the cake batter on top, and sprinkle on remaining topping. Bake at 350 Degrees Fahrenheit for 45 minutes.

Notes

All of us remember comfort foods from childhood—perhaps homemade mac and cheese or a bowl of chocolate ice cream. Mine was my Mother’s sour cream cake. I remember being 8 and my brother 4. We got home from school one day, and Mom was dressed in a “good dress;” the kind she usually wore a hat with. There were party clothes for us to change into. A photojournalist was coming to our house—Mother and her sour cream cake were being featured in the Jersey Journal. She had just been elected President of a woman’s club, and we three were a public interest story. For the picture, Mother held an empty bowl and a wooden spoon, my brother had a finger in his mouth pretending to taste the batter, and I was looking at “the batter” in the bowl. This was 60 years ago, and I still make the cake.

Recipe courtesy of Sandy Barron.
Sandy’s Lemon Pound Cake

Ingredients

- 1 Duncan Hines Lemon Cake Mix
- 1 Box (3 Ounce) Instant Lemon Pudding
- 4 Large Eggs
- 1 Cup Light Sour Cream
- 2 Teaspoons Lemon Extract (Optional)
- Zest of 1 Fresh Lemon*
- Juice of 1 Large Fresh Meyer Lemon*
- ½ Cup Oil
- Duncan Hines Lemon Frosting

Directions

Put all ingredients (except frosting) in the large bowl of a mixer, and mix for about 3 minutes at medium speed. Pour mixture into a Bundt pan (prepare pan by spraying with baking spray, and flouring). Bake at 350 Degrees Fahrenheit for about 33 to 36 minutes, or until cake pulls away from sides of the pan (time depends on your pan). Let cake cool, and remove from pan. Spread just less than ½ cup Duncan Hines Lemon Frosting around the crown of the cake. Sprinkle a bit more fresh lemon zest on the frosting to decorate just before serving.

Notes

This recipe is a tried and tested family favorite. When I make it for the family, it is always smaller in the AM than when I put it away the night before. I also like to make it along with my darn good chocolate cake for large gatherings. People tell me the cakes complement each other, and often take a slice of each.

Recipe courtesy of Sandy Barron.
Sandy’s Darn Good Chocolate Cake

Ingredients
• 1 Package (18 Ounce) Devil's Food or Dark Chocolate Fudge Cake Mix
• 1 Box (3 Ounces) Instant Chocolate Pudding
• 4 Large Eggs
• 1 Cup Light Sour Cream
• ½ Cup Warm Water
• ½ Cup Vegetable Oil
• 2 Cups Semisweet Mini Chocolate Chips
• Duncan Hines Chocolate Frosting

Directions
Put everything except frosting and chocolate chips in large mixing bowl. Blend on low for 1 minute. Scrape sides of the bowl with a rubber spatula, increase speed to medium, and beat for 2 to 3 additional minutes, scraping bowl as needed. Fold in 1 ½ cups of the chocolate chips, distributing well. Pour mixture into a Bundt pan sprayed with baking spray with flour, and bake in a pre-heated 350 Degree Fahrenheit oven for 45 minutes, or until cake pulls away from the sides of the pan. Cool for 20 minutes on a rack. Remove cake from pan when cool, and frost just the crown with Duncan Hines chocolate frosting, distributing the remaining ½ cup of chocolate chips on the frosting.

Notes
This recipe comes from the original (October 1999) edition of Anne Byrn’s The Cake Mix Doctor. Subsequently, there have been newer editions of the book published, but those are not as good as the original. If you see a copy of the October 1999 The Cake Mix Doctor at a book sale, grab it—all of Byrn’s recipes are easy and wonderful.

Recipe courtesy of Sandy Barron.
**July Checklist**

**Citrus:** Depending on citrus fertilizer label, apply fertilizer every six weeks or as directed. Check for citrus insects and disease. If adding horticulture oil or insecticidal soap be sure to use it only before 10am or after 6pm. Also be sure to use ultra-fine horticulture oil rather than dormant oil. Weed as needed, keep mulch away from trunk. Water once a week unless it rains.

**Fruit:** Remove about 1/4 to 1/5 of the oldest blueberry canes (usually 1 to 3 of the oldest canes.) Apply 6-6-6 or 8-8-8 fertilizer to nectarine. Weed as needed.

**Flowers:** Annuals to plant include celosia, coleus, crossandras, exacum, impatiens, kalanchoe, nicotiana, ornamental peppers, portulaca, torneias, salvia, and periwinkle.

**Bulbs:** Separate bulbs and give away to friends. Bulbs planted too deeply need to be removed. Transplant bulbs to raised beds or a dryer area if the soil does not drain well or it receives too much water. Any diseased bulbs should be thrown away.

**Herbs:** Bay laurel, culantro, ginger, horehound, lavender, Mexican tarragon, mint, parsley, oregano, rosemary, sesame, and thyme can be planted now.

**Roses:** Continue spray program. Water, water, water. Cut and remove spent blooms. Check for spider mites and aphids.

**Lawns:** Add iron sulfate to green up lawn but avoid high nitrogen fertilization or high amounts this month. “Take-all-root-rot” will be in full force during the summer - be sure to avoid over watering and over fertilizing.

**Perennials:** Cut off old flower heads, prune off dead or insect infested areas, and pinch off tips of stems to encourage denser growth.

**Trees:** Remove old flower and seed stalks. Palms should have a “palm special” fertilizer applied over the root system under the spread of the fronds if you forgot to fertilize in June. The configuration should be 8-2-12-4 (N-P-K-Mg). Ideally this would also include manganese, boron, sulfur, etc. with appropriate formulations.

**Vegetables:** It’s too hot to be planting anything now but lima beans, eggplant, okra, Southern peas, peppers, and watermelon. However, this is a good month to solarize your fall garden. Till your plot, moisten the soil, cover the ground with clear plastic. Place heavy objects around the edges to keep the plastic from blowing away. Let the sun bake your soil. It will help control fungi and nematodes. After 30 days till soil, replace the plastic and bake another few weeks. Plant your August or September garden.

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
August Checklist

**Citrus:** Depending on citrus fertilizer label, apply fertilizer every six weeks or as directed. Check for citrus insects and disease. Weed as needed, keep mulch away from trunk and grass out beneath the canopy. Water once a week unless it rains.

**Fruit:** Apply azalea fertilizer to blueberry shrubs, at 1/2 pound per 3 feet of shrub. Weed as needed. Check irrigation to ensure it is working. Make repairs.

**Flowers:** Plant asters, balsam, begonias, black-eyed Susan, blue daze, cats whiskers, coleus, cosmos, cockscombs, dianthus, forget-me-not, gaillardia, golden globe impatiens, marigolds, melampodium, moon vine, pentas, periwinkles, petunias, phlox, porterweed, portulaca, purslane, salvia, scabiosa, strawflowers, sunflowers, tithonias, torenia, verbena, and zinnias.

**Roses:** Repeat July procedures. Water, water, water.

**Bulbs:** Plant African Iris, agapanthus, amaryllis, cannas, crinums, daylilies, gladioli, gloriosa lilies, society garlic, and rain lilies (Zephyranthes).

**Herbs:** Bay laurel, culantro, ginger, horehound, lavender, mexican tarragon, mint, parsley, oregano, rosemary, sesame, and thyme can be planted now.

**Lawns:** There is still time to install a seeded lawn but do not delay. Select good quality seed such as Argentine Bahia, common bermudagrass or centipede. Initially the seeds need stay moistened but once they have germinated irrigation can be reduced. These grasses do well without heavy irrigation and high nitrogen fertilizers. They turn brown earlier than St. Augustinegrass in the winter. Contact your local Extension service regarding a test for your soil pH. Common bermudagrass has a wide range of of pH numbers; bahia and centipede prefer acid soils so be sure to have soil tested before investing in a new lawn.

**Perennials:** Start salvia, violets, ruellia, lion’s ear, gerbera daisy, butterfly weed, and blanket flower from saved seeds. Let seeds dry on the plants. When pods open, dry seeds inside on screen or cheesecloth. Put into a plastic bag or a jar and label. Keep the seeds in the vegetable section of the refrigerator. Use within one year. Do not store in the freezer!

**Trees:** Cut back unwanted limbs to a branch angle or the trunk. Do not apply paints or coverings to wounds. You can remove old seed heads from crape myrtle trees to encourage additional blooms in the fall however, not all cultivars rebloom. Remove only totally dead fronds from palms. Palm seed stalks can be removed after flowering but before fruiting. Be careful not to nick the bud.

**Vegetables:** To produce fruit August plantings are especially important for corn, eggplant, pumpkins, peppers, tomatoes, and watermelons. Each of these crops takes about 90 days to come to fruition. Do not wait too late, or an early frost may reduce the yield. Other cold tolerant veggies to plant include snap beans, pole beans, lima beans, broccoli, cauliflower, collards, corn, cucumber, bunching onions, Southern peas, peppers, pumpkin, summer squash, tomatoes, turnips, and watermelons. One pest to be especially aware of is the cutworm.
Garden Talk - with Rebecca Jordi

Q: What is causing the growths on my bay tree leaves?

A: The red bay psyllid, *Trioza magnoliae*, was originally called the bay magnolia psyllid (Ashmead 1881) because the host plant from which it was originally described was believed to be the plant that is now known as sweet bay (*Magnolia virginiana* L.) which is in the family *Magnoliaceae*. However, there are no known verifiable records of this insect on plant species other than native species of Persea bay trees (Mead 1967) in the family *Lauraceae*.

Most, but not all, species of psyllids are narrowly host specific (Hodkinson 1984), and *R. magnoliae* is not known to use even other species of *Lauraceae* besides *P. borbonia* (redbay tree) and *P. palustris* (swamp bay) as hosts. Therefore, it is referred to as the red bay psyllid. Red bay psyllid galls are almost universally present on *P. borbonia* and *P. palustris*. In fact, they are so omnipresent that Nelson (1994) has suggested using the presence of the galls as an “identification clue” to these species of Persea. The galls cause absolutely no harm and no steps should be taken to cure the tree.

Red bay psyllids are not believed to attack avocado, *Persea americana* Mill, which has also been threatened by the ambrosia beetle. *Persea borbonia*, redbay, as well as other southeastern U.S. *Lauraceae* and some of the organisms dependent on this tree are now threatened by a lethal fungal species living in the exotic red bay ambrosia beetle, *Xyleborus glabratus* Eichhoff. It is this beetle which has destroyed thousands of acres of our native red bay species. This information was provided through the Features Creatures article produced by the UF/IFAS Entomology & Nematology Department: http://entnemdept.ufl.edu/creatures/orn/trees/red_bay_psyllid.htm

For more information on the redbay tree check out the University of Florida publication by Dr. Ed Gilman: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/st436

Q: My neighbor has planted a bromeliad in full sun. I thought they all had to be grown in shade.

A: Bromeliads come from a wide range of environments, from areas with deep shade to full sun, so chances are good you can find a bromeliad suitable for the amount of light your landscape receives. Light exposure can alter a bromeliad’s leaf color, leaf shape, and growth rate. If the light levels are too low for the variety then the leaves will become long, thin, and greener in color. If light levels are too high the leaves become shorter, thicker, and lighter in color, sometimes even the edges of the leaves will turn brown. Bromeliads have very shallow roots which are mainly used to anchor the plant so it is important to provide well drained soil which is moist but never wet. The ideal soil should consist of equal parts peat, bark and coarse sand. Attached is a publication from the University of Florida: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep337 In addition, this article was printed in the Bromeliad Society Newsletter and lists some full sun bromeliads for South Florida. However, do note, these bromeliads may not be able to handle the colder temperatures of Northeast Florida: http://fcbs.org/articles/full-sun-bromeliads.htm
Q: What is the shrub growing along the roadside which has five finger like flower structures? I have never noticed it before and it appears to be everywhere.

A: Thanks for bringing in a clipping which made it easier for me to identify. The shrub is most likely White Titi (Cyrilla racemiflora L.). This shrub is often called summer titi which is a common tree or small shrub, found in swamps and on stream banks from Alachua County northward. It blooms May to July. It usually produces little nectar, but in heavy production years, like now, it is considered undesirable because the nectar and pollen are responsible for a condition known as “purple brood,” which kills the brood, turning it a rich purple color. In areas where White titi abounds and there is a history of such problems (Taylor and Jefferson Counties), beekeepers routinely move their bees away when the White Titi is blooming. White Titi plant should not be confused with spring Titi, black Titi or the Buckwheat tree, Cliftonia monophylla. The photo attached is of the White Titi tree. Let’s look at the trees a little more closely and make some comparisons. White Titi is deciduous (drops its leaves in the fall) whereas the Buckwheat tree is evergreen. The flower of the White Titi has the long (3-6 inches), finger-like structures blooming downward in the late spring to early summer. The flowers of the Buckwheat are small, white to pink, 5 petals, occurring in upright clusters at the branch tips, 2 - 4 inches long, appearing in spring. The fruit of the White Titi is long whereas the fruit of the Buckwheat tree is rounded and winged similar to a buckwheat achene.

Q: I found this pretty, lilac wildflower growing near a ditch in my neighborhood. Can you tell me what it is and can I dig it up and plant it in my yard?

A: I consulted the University of Florida Herbarium to be sure my guess was correct and they agree the wildflower is probably a false dragonhead in the genus, Physostegia. Physostegia is from Greek physa “bladder” and steg “covering”, in reference to the somewhat inflated a calyx. A calyx is the green leaf-like sepals which enclose the petals and forms a protective layer around a flower in bud. Some species in this genus go by the name obedient-plant because the flowers remain temporarily in place when pushed to one side. False Dragonhead is best planted in rich, moist soil in full sun or light shade. False Dragonhead has 1 inch tubular flowers tightly clustered in long spikes at the top of stems and grows wild in moist ground in prairies, edges of glades and along streams. The leaves are opposite with toothed edges, up to 5 inches long, becoming smaller in size as the flower head develops. The stem is four-sided (roughly square in cross section,) as is typical of members of the mint family. False dragonhead is sometimes used as an ornamental and the “Obedient Plant” name really doesn’t apply to the plant in cultivated gardens as these plants can be aggressive colonizers. Regarding picking or removing wildflowers illegally from wildlife areas here is the USDA Forest service comment: “Almost all wildflowers are fragile and many wilt and perish soon after being picked. Over the years, the repercussions of wildflower picking by unthinking people go far beyond the loss of the flowers themselves. A critical chain of events is triggered for years to come once wildflowers are lost. We don’t often realize it, but wildflowers support entire ecosystems for pollinators, birds, and small animals on a micro scale. Butterflies and other insects, small birds, and animals depend on seeds, nectar, and pollen for their food supply and life support system. In addition, some pollinators are not very mobile or have very small home ranges or depend on just one species of plant and die once their habitat has been destroyed.” The complete article, “Wildflower Ethics and Native Plants”: http://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/ethics/
Q: I don’t see the small green lizards here anymore. I used to see them all the time when I moved here ten years ago. They seem to have been replaced by a brown variety. What happened?

A: Most likely what you are now seeing is the Cuban brown anole, Anolis sagrei. Apparently this lizard was first detected in 1887 in the Florida Keys but has become fully established within the last 10 years. An increase in the population occurred in the early 1940s as it was detected in many areas of South Florida. It became more fully established in urban areas south of Gainesville by 1980. From there it spread to north Florida and the panhandle then extended to Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas either in landscape container plants and/or by cars and trucks. Larger populations of the brown anole began to be seen along major highways at rest areas, campgrounds and hotels in the mid 1990s. Severe cold winters have from time to time reduced their population but this lizard has able to keep a sustainable number of offspring to continue future generations. They are even able to populate islands as they hitch rides on boats or firewood transferred by boaters or campers. This species thrives in disturbed habitats and ornamental plantings but can potentially inhabit almost any inland or coastal habitat in Florida. It is apparently the most abundant anole over much of the southern half of peninsular Florida, and populations now occur in every county in Florida. It often perches low in trees and shrubs but is quite terrestrial, often escaping by running along the ground. Males reach a length of 20 cm (8 in). The body is brown, and males often have bands of yellowish spots, whereas females and juveniles have a light vertebral stripe with dark, scalloped edges. The hanging fold of skin under the neck is called a dewlap. The edge of the dewlap is white and appears as a stripe on the throat when not distended. The dewlap may vary in color from a bright red-orange to pale yellow. They are prolific hunters, similar to the green anoles. It is regrettable the brown anole could not live well with the green anole but this is a common result when an invasive species is introduced and has no local predators to keep it in check.