



Biosphere Buzz

Volume 5, Number 1

Summer Edition

June 2007



Time to Define Your Gardening Philosophy and Conscience

Since we opened to the public full time a little over a year ago we have met many gardeners, some serious and experienced, others amateurs. We have really enjoyed this part of the business because of the interesting people. One of our goals has always been to help educate people about environmental problems facing Florida and how they can have an effect on solving or preventing these problems. This is how our focus on 'bioscaping' began.

So, where do you start? Are you going to use only native plants and, if so, how much of a purist are you going to be. Are you willing to use cultivars of native plants? (See our article on cultivars). Are you going to use exotic species if they are more colorful? Are you going to be sure they are not invasive? (Actually, many species not yet on the State invasive list can be very invasive so you have to do some research). Are you going to use pesticides?

Do you really understand how serious our water problems are in Central Florida related both to quality and quantity? Do you leave the water running while you brush your teeth? Do you believe global warming is man-induced? (no, wait, we better not go there yet)!

You can see the issue is far more complicated than it seems, but it is something all of us must consider as we introduce plants into our landscape. It is very easy for some to be talked in to buying a beautiful plant that actually may be very harmful to natural systems. At the same time, if you make the effort to truly understand the ecologic value of your plants, they will mean more to you and make your garden more valuable and interesting than a typical landscape.

Let me take this opportunity to thank every one of you for your support since we opened to the public. We are off the beaten track so we need your help to promote us so please do what you can to spread the word that our plants are different from the typical garden shop and help us any way you can.

Jim Thomas

Inside Biosphere Buzz

<i>Great Groundcovers.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>How to Get to Biosphere.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Plant of the Month</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>TLC Corner.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Check Out Our Gardens.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>What is a Cultivar?</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Mark Your Calendars</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Drought and Heavy Mulching ...</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Got a Question.....</i>	<i>3</i>
Summer Events at Biosphere:	
<i>Rain Barrel Workshop.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Butterfly Forum.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Stork Report</i>	<i>4</i>
Summer Edition	
June 2007	

Learn Ecologic Restoration

Become a new member of the Oakland Nature Preserve, a 128 acre preserve located on the southwest shore of Lake Apopka. Acquired and developed entirely by volunteer workers, a large part of the acreage is being restored from citrus grove to natural plant communities. Go out and walk the trails and boardwalk through forested wetlands to the shore of Lake Apopka. Better yet, come to our volunteer training sessions on June 12 at 7:00 PM and June 30 at 9:00 AM at the Preserve.

Classes & Workshops at Leu Gardens

Registration is now open for a diverse list of classes and workshops available this summer at Harry P. Leu Gardens in Orlando.

Adult and children's classes require pre-registration and are limited in size so if you are interested in availability you should call Leu Gardens today 407 246-3621 for additional information on classes and registration.

Biosphere Consulting, Inc., 14908 Tilden Road, Winter Garden, Florida 34787
407-656-8277, BiosphereNursery.com
Nursery open to the public, Tuesday - Saturday, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Great Groundcovers

Our retail manager, Zen Silva, gets asked at least five times a week about groundcovers that are fit for the Central Florida area. Here is a breakdown of the species that he recommends.

Dune Sunflower (*Helianthus debilis*) This Florida native blooms almost all year. It is very drought tolerant because its natural habitat is coastal dunes. The blooms are golden yellow with a dark brown center, similar to a black-eyed Susan. It is irresistible to butterflies and loves full sun. It grows up to 24" and there are three known subspecies occurring in Florida.

Sensitive Mimosa (*Mimosa strigillosa*) is another Florida native that is very drought tolerant. It will handle partial sun and can handle light foot traffic. In full sun it blooms a lot heavier with pink ball-like flowers dappled with a touch of yellow pollen, which is very attractive to butterflies. It grows up to 12" in height.

Moss Verbena (*Verbena tapiens* and *Verbena tenuisecta*) These two species of verbena make excellent groundcovers. They both have very fine dissected moss like foliage. They grow up to 6" in height and can handle light foot traffic. *Verbena tapiens* come in various colors from purple to light pink. *Verbena tenuisecta* only comes in white as far as I know. They both love full sun and a well drained soil. They are not as drought tolerant as the Florida native groundcovers but will easily maintain a healthy root system with water two times a week. They are very attractive and well worth a try.

Perennial Peanut (*Arachis glabra*) This groundcover has been used a lot lately. It has several different cultivars ranging from different leaf shapes and ranges of drought tolerance. It is very hardy and cold tolerant and blooms profusely with yellow blooms. It can handle light foot traffic and typically grows up to 12" in height and prefers full sun. Being a legume it also nitrifies the soil.

Bacopa (*Bacopa spp.*) This groundcover likes very moist areas and is the larval food for our native white peacock butterfly. Bacopas bloom best in full sun but can handle partially sun also. There are three species that are native to Florida and all are very fleshy and do not handle foot traffic well.

Asiatic Jasmine (*Tracheaspermum asiaticum*) This ground cover is great for shady areas. It typically grows from 6"- 12" in height and is not fussy about soils. There are several variegated forms offered.

How to get to Biosphere

Sorry, I ran out of room. If you have trouble and can't seem to find us - don't give up! Give us a call (407) 656 - 8277. I will be happy to help you find your way!

Plant of the Month:

Walters Viburnum (*Viburnum obovatum*)

This native shrub occurs throughout Florida, typically occurring in floodplain forests. In the landscape it can be grown in a variety of situations, including full to partial sun and is relatively drought tolerant. The compact clusters of white flowers are produced in profusion in spring followed by black berries that ripen in late summer and are relished by birds. The flowers are attractive to many pollinator insects including butterflies.

The small leaves form a dense growth and the plant can be used as a small specimen tree or trimmed to form a dense hedge or screen. In some cases, the plant can send up root shoots that may have to be controlled.

Several cultivars are now available:

'Whorled Class' has a mounding growth habit and can be kept at 4 to 6 feet with light shearing. The foliage grows much tighter in whorled patterns.

'Densa' is a fairly dwarf cultivar with smaller leaves and a height up to 4 feet if not trimmed. It maintains a tight mounding growth habit and usually blooms heavily in Spring.

'Mrs. Schiller's Delight', named for Laurel Schiller, grows more laterally than upright, up to 3 feet.

'Select' is a tall variety like the wild type but does not send up root shoots.

'Compacta' has larger leaves than the other cultivars and grows up to 5 feet tall.

'Withlacoochee' grows 10 to 12 feet, spreads 6 to 10 feet and tends to hold more leaves in the winter.

'Pinkie' is a new cultivar and no information is available at this time.

Check Out Our Gardens

We have had a lot of fun creating an experimental organic garden in the empty field next to our new greenhouse. We hope to eventually have vine-ripe pesticide-free tomatoes and other vegetables available.

Adjacent to the vegetable garden we are beginning an area to be used as a test garden where we will plant species we want to grow to test them for pollinator value, utilization by butterflies, and cold and drought tolerance.

Don't Overlook Our TLC Corner

We are defying all the rules of good plant marketing by developing an area where we give away plants that are not diseased but just need some tender loving care. All the plants within the white picket fence in the front of the nursery are free — we can't bear to throw them away just because they may be ugly!

What is a Cultivar?

One of the issues concerning native plant enthusiasts is the question about whether we should use cultivars of our native plant species. A cultivar is a plant variety that is developed for specific characteristics of a species. It is different from a hybrid that combines the genes of two or more species. The cultivar is still the same genus and species as the original plant from which they were developed but may have very different characteristics. If a nurseryman notes a desirable characteristic (such as dense foliage etc.) showing up in a population of plants, he can propagate this characteristic through vegetative propagation and in-breeding, literally creating a different plant. Some of the differences may actually involve a change in the genes of the plant for some unknown reason while others may just be a vegetative difference.

This has thrown many of our purist native plant gardeners into a tizzy. The major concern is the possibility that a cultivar with a genetic difference may cross-pollinate within a wild population, creating a change in the genetics of the wild population. This 'genetic drift' issue may be a valid one, especially if populations are in close proximity (does anyone know how far a bee with pollen-loaded legs can fly?).

We have decided to use cultivars in urban and suburban areas but to discourage them in gardens near natural areas with the same species growing there.

There are no clear-cut rules for naming cultivars and anyone can propagate them unless they are patented by the developer. Some have very strange names.

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Mark Your Calendars — Upcoming Events

Saturday, June 16

Rain Barrel Workshop at Biosphere for everyone interested in exploring this simple way to help save and conserve water. Workshop begins at 10:00 AM. (se pg 4)

Sunday, July 8

Butterfly Forum at Biosphere all butterfly enthusiasts are invited to come and share their knowledge about butterflies and butterfly gardening (story pg 4).

Saturday, October 27

Oakland Heritage Festival This show is close to our hearts. All the proceeds from this event go to benefit the Oakland Nature Preserve. Lots of small town charm spills over into hayrides, boat rides on Lake Apopka, good food and down home music, plus a silent auction. Come and enjoy an afternoon under the oaks in the Town of Oakland. This one-day event goes from 10:00 AM until 4:00 PM. For more information call (407) 905-0054.

Saturday, November 3 and Sunday, November 4

Mount Dora Plant and Garden Fair This show always strives to be a complete all-garden show offering all kinds of fun things to plant and some great yard 'art' projects. This will be their 13th annual show and it has just gotten better with every year. The show runs from 9:00AM until 5:00 PM both days. For more information call (352) 357-4116.

Drought Makes the Need for Heavy Mulching Even Greater

Our favorite mulch is still pine straw, put down three to four inches deep. We have a good supply of bales and bagged straw at \$5.00/each. One bale will cover 30 to 40 square feet.

Got a Question?

If you have a question or you have discovered something interesting to share send us an e-mail at biosphere@biospherenursery.com

You can also check out our website to find a lot of useful information on what we are all about here at Biosphere. There is a great section on lakefront restoration, which offers a homeowners guide and aquatic plant information. We also have information on butterfly and bird gardening, growing wildflowers, plant availability and upcoming shows and events. Have you missed a newsletter or flyer? They are available on our website also. Take a look!

www.biospherenursery.com

Summer Events at Biosphere

Rain Barrel Workshop - Saturday, June 16

With the water crisis facing us we need to explore every possibility for conserving water. One interesting project is the use of a rain barrel to collect roof runoff for use in the landscape. Using a food-quality 50-gallon barrel with simple hose-bit fittings, it becomes a very functional water saver. **On Saturday, June 16 at 10:00 AM** we will have Dennis Jones, Water Conservation Coordinator for the City of Winter Garden, do a workshop that will teach us how to make one. We will have plenty of barrels and fittings available for sale at our cost so you can take home a wonderful project! They can even be painted and decorated to add to your garden décor!

Butterfly Forum - Sunday, July 10

This is a chance for the amateur butterfly enthusiast and experienced gardeners to get together in an informal session where we learn from each other. We will meet at Biosphere at 10:00 AM on Sunday, July 8 to exchange our ideas and experiences. We will not have a formal presentation — just talk among ourselves about butterfly gardening. Biosphere will provide cold drinks and we invite you to bring snacks if you like. We also encourage you to bring displays, extra caterpillars to share and butterfly plants, cuttings or seeds to trade. Invite anyone you know to attend.

We will give a 10% discounts on all butterfly plants that day.

Stork Report From Our Aviaries

Our bird collection has been busy this spring and we have several babies fledged: Princes of Wales Parrot, a rare colorful parrot has fledged two babies and are currently doing a good job feeding them, our Australian Crested Doves have raised two young, the Button Quail have reared 10 babies, Java Rice Birds have two young, Zebra Finches have seven and the Cordon Bleu Finches, a beautiful African finch which seldom breeds in captivity, have produced four young.

Our rarest bird, the Nicobar Pigeon, is building a nest so we have high hopes for a baby!

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