



# Biosphere BUZZ

Volume 1. Number 6

September, 2002



## *Sustainability, Economy, Environment, and Quality of Life*

It becomes increasingly obvious that we cannot separate these four topics as we try to live in a way that balances them. We have been told that our personal attempts to encourage people to bioscape their yards are actually wasted time, that the amount of habitat created or preserved is so minimal that it will have no real effect on species preservation. Obviously an acre here and there are not as biologically important as preserving hundreds of acres of natural area, but we argue that it serves more functions than just wildlife habitat. It provides each of us with a daily reminder that all life is inter-dependent and it makes us far more sensitive to the intricate ecological processes that occur at every level, whether it be an apartment balcony with plants or a Yellowstone Park. It helps us learn about our surroundings and to teach others. It also helps us appreciate more every time we go through the landscape and this guarantees a quality of life many people on earth will never experience.

Do you know what the term environmental sustainability really means? Try writing your definition on a piece of paper and give some examples of how we might protect it. (Sorry, it was the old school-teacher in me that brought this out, but it will be a good experience for you). We will discuss it in next months BUZZ. The current World Summit in Johannesburg is trying to deal with global political and economic sustainability but note they cannot separate these from environmental sustainability.

In the meantime, if someone tells you we are wasting your time with this bioscape stuff or comments that your landscape is scruffy because you don't take care of your St. Augustine lawn, just hit him with your shovel. (Then quickly go back to being Sensitive).

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## **Some Environmental Opportunities**

We aren't going to let you rest until you donate some volunteer time to a community environmental project. The Oakland Nature Preserve is still one of our favorites. There will be a work party on Saturday September 14 at 7:30 A.M. where you may still adopt-a-plot to assist in the ecologic restoration of this site, from citrus grove back to a sandhill community.

Our thanks to all of you who bought a plank for the boardwalk. They are still available at \$ 25.00. The walk is a very impressive 3,000 feet through forested wetlands to the shore of Lake Apopka.

Join us to celebrate its completion at 10:00 A.M. on Saturday October 12.

There will be a free landscape workshop presented by the Orange County Utilities Water Division on Saturday, September 14 at 9:00 A.M. to noon at the Orange County Administration Building, 201 S. Rosalind Ave., Orlando. We will present a talk on Bioscaping! Call (407) 836-6923 to reserve a seat.

The Orange County Extension Service is offering 'Gardening School' beginning on October 16 from 7:00— 9:00 P.M. The classes will be held at their facility on Michigan Street in Orlando. For additional information call (407) 836-7570 or you can call us for information on this and other programs.

**Biosphere Consulting, Inc., 14908 Tilden Road, Winter Garden, Florida 34787**

**407-656-8277, BiosphereNursery.com**

**Nursery open to the public, Saturdays, 9 a.m.—3 p.m., or by appointment.**

## Butterfly Notes

We still have numerous larvae in the nursery: Black Swallowtail on parsley and fennel, Giant Swallowtail on hercules club, Long-tailed Skipper on butterfly pea, Sulfurs on cassia and partridge pea, Gulf Fritillary and Zebra Longwing are eating all our passionflowers, Red Admirals on false nettle and Gold Rim Swallowtails on pipevines.

Zen's sharp eyes found our first Zebra Swallowtail this year, puddling in our driveway, but, alas, no pawpaws in the area.

## September - Time to...

**Prune:** Continue to check and prune dead or partially dead tree limbs to be ready for hurricane season. Continue to dead-head faded flowers in the butterfly garden unless you are saving them for seed. Do not prune fall-blooming or early spring blooming shrubs this late in the year.

**Plant: WILDFLOWERS** (see the next article for details) Start a vegetable garden, even if it is a small one - the benefits are physical, mental and financial if you do it right. Early in this month you can plant lima bean, snap bean, cucumber, eggplant, pepper, Southern peas, squash and tomato. Late in the month plant the cooler weather plants: broccoli, cabbage, celery, collards, endive, arugula, lettuce, mustard, onion, radish, strawberry and turnip. We also love to grow sugar peas to use in stir-fry dishes.

In the butterfly garden you can still plant annuals such as Mexican sunflower, partridge pea, zinnias, cornflowers, alyssum, snapdragon and WILDFLOWERS. We also plan to have a cosmos collection ready for planting by late October and some of the new varieties are knockouts!

**Fertilize:** You can still fertilize citrus and any other woody shrubs that have not yet been fed.

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**Biosphere Buzz** is published by Biosphere Consulting, Inc., and is sent free to interested parties.

## It's Time To Plant Wildflower Seeds

Our goal this year is to encourage everyone to include as many wildflowers as possible in the landscape. We will have most species available in the nursery in 4" pots, to be used in lieu of standard bedding plants and to fill in areas between plants in the garden, but the most effective show is a wildflower garden that covers as much area as possible. This involves planting wildflower seeds and our experience is presented below.

Although wildflower gardens take long-term planning they will provide a great deal of color and beauty for years to come with relatively little effort and cost. Not only are they easy to grow, wildflowers also serve a very important function of supporting pollinator insects, which are so vital to our native plant species. Seed eating birds, such as doves, quail and goldfinches, will also enjoy them.

The optimal planting time to insure maximum spring color is September through December. Seeds can be planted as late as January, but flowers may bloom less. Species require different soil temperatures for germination, so depending on time and temperatures for germination, some seeds germinate immediately forming healthy root systems, which help them survive the winter months. Others will lie dormant until spring warming.

When planning your garden select a sunny, well-drained site. Some species will thrive with only five to six hours of sunlight, but most do best in full sun. Remove existing vegetation from the site down to barren soil, either by using a non-select herbicide such as Roundup or clearing by hand removal. If weeds are prevalent in the area you have selected, you should wait for weed seeds to germinate and herbicide a second time. Allow the vegetation to turn brown and rake out all the weeds making the soil as clean as possible.

Prepare the soil to be sure it is not compacted but do not disturb too deeply by plowing or rototilling since this will expose more buried weed seeds. Tilling the soil about one inch deep is adequate and this can be done with a heavy garden rake. Do not plant seeds too deep. The best practice is to sow

Continued

**“Wildflower Seeds” continued**

the seeds and then roll the area to simply press them into the ground.

Wildflowers should not require much or any fertilizer. However, if you feel the soil is very sandy or sterile, add a little balanced fertilizer to the soil as you till it. Do not fertilize heavily or after seeds germinate. This will tend to give you “leggy” plants and fewer blooms.

Adequate soil moisture is necessary for the seeds to germinate. If possible, the seeded area should be watered lightly but frequently for the first month. After germination, water requirements will vary, depending on rainfall, temperature and soil type. When the wildflowers are several inches tall, reduce the watering to only what is needed to keep the plants from drying out. Remember they exist in the wild without special care.

We include a list of new seeds that are available now at the nursery. You can find descriptions of these species on our website. Individual species are sold in packets (1-2 teaspoons), 1 ounce, 1/4 pound and one-pound sizes while the mixes are sold in 1/4 pound and one-pound packets only.

**Maintenance**

Remember, there is no such thing as a free lunch (or a maintenance free garden). You will not need to worry about pesticides or fertilizers, but you will need to remove weeds which compete with your seedling wildflowers, or detract from the beauty of your blooms. The most effective way is to hand-pull all tall weeds and grasses. The greatest problem species will probably be dog-fennel, ragweed, pokeweed, nutgrass and natal grass, so learn how to recognize these and other potential problems and remove them from the site as soon as possible. You may use a selective postemergent herbicide to kill grass species, but most will not kill nutgrass. Routine hand removal of noxious weeds will provide the greatest success.

**How to get to Biosphere**

From Orlando, go west on Colonial Drive (HWY. 50) to Winter Garden. Turn south on Hwy. 535 and go 3 miles. Look for Tilden Rd. on the right (west side). Turn right heading west on Tilden Rd., go about 1 mile. Look for the nursery is on the left.

Patience is the word. Remember that you are planting WILD flower seeds. They have not been bred for generations for uniform germination, height, color and germination rates. So, don't be concerned if every seed doesn't produce a mass of colorful flowers the first year. Just give them plenty of time and they will produce. You will be rewarded with lots of color, plenty of pollinators and the knowledge you have done a lot to help support wild life.

**Featured Plants of the Month****For the Native Landscape: Dotted Horsemint**

*(Monarda punctata)*

Dotted horsemint is a sprawling perennial that can reach three feet in height. The flowers of this plant are small and yellowish- white in color with dots, but the bracts are pinkish and long lasting. Horsemint is a prolific bloomer from April through September. It is drought tolerant and grows best in full sun. This hardy Florida native belongs in the mint family and is an excellent addition to your perennial or butterfly garden as it attracts droves of pollinators. Some light pruning is needed to keep this plant attractive.

In the wild, horsemint can be found along roadsides, meadows, flood plains and coastal sites. American Indians used a leaf tea from this plant to treat flu, fever, colds and stomach cramps.

We have one-gallon horsemint at the nursery for \$3.50. The plant will provide you with numerous seeds for next year.

We still have beautiful Rough Sunflowers, which we featured last month, in 3-gallon pots for \$7.00.

**For the Butterflies: Yellow Cassia**

*(Cassia bicapsularis)*

This attractive tree or large shrub can reach a height of 15 feet if it is not trimmed. It is a valuable addition to the butterfly garden as a larval food for several species of sulfur butterflies and for masses of beautiful yellow flowers in late fall. It is evergreen with small oval leaves, and if trimmed in spring or early summer, will stay full and bushy. It is not native but this species has not become invasive as other cassias have. Our experiments with the Candlabra Cassia (*C. alata*) proved that the plant is beautiful and a good larval food source but it produced many seeds that spread rather quickly, so we

## Featured Plants of the Month

### For the Lakefront (and For The Birds): Black Gum or Swamp Tupelo

*(Nyssa sylvatica bifora)*

This Native wetland tree is a very attractive addition to the lakefront or any wet area in the landscape. It has thick gray bark very similar to an oak and the trunk frequently becomes enlarged at the base to form a buttress. The large leaves turn to a beautiful red color in the fall before dropping and the tree forms dark purple fruits that ripen in November that are relished by the birds. The tree has an appealing shape and will adapt to a number of conditions, from growing in standing water to soils that are slightly moist.

Biosphere has several sizes, ranging from \$8.00 (5'-6') to \$15.00 (8'-10').

### The Fight Against Invasives: Mexican Petunia

*(Ruellia brittoniana)*

The bad guy for this month is not yet on the official invasive plant list but we can attest that it has all the potential for causing real problems. Sometimes called the Mexican Bluebell, this perennial plant grows about three feet tall and has long narrow leaves with purplish blossoms. New varieties, some dwarf, have now been developed that range from pink to blue. The problem with this plant stems from the fact that they form many small seeds which germinate readily. It is now beginning to appear everywhere. Garden shops still sell the plant but should be stopped.

There are several species of native Ruellia,

## Next Month: Bird Gardening

There are many things you can do to attract birds to your landscape. We should all be concerned about what is happening to our feathered friends. Of the 9,700 species of birds in the world, nearly half (4,500 species) breed in the Americas. Of these, one-fourth are at risk of extinction. Many species require hollow cavities for nesting. We will present our suggested nest boxes next month. You should plan to install them by the end of January.

## A Special Task

Every homeowner should take the responsibility to check their entire landscape for standing water which may harbor mosquito larvae. Bird baths should be cleaned routinely and flowerpot saucers dumped if they are holding water. Bromeliads may hold enough water to serve as breeding areas and a routine rinsing and flushing with a garden hose will help get rid of them. If you have a garden pond, install a population of mosquito fish (*Gambusia*), the most common gray minnow in our lakes and pond, which live on mosquito lar-

## Mount Dora Plant & Garden Fair

Mark your calendar to come and visit us at the Mt. Dora show on November 2 -3 from 9:00 -5:00. It will be held in Simpson Cove (just about one block from historic downtown Mt. Dora). For information call Christine Cole (352) 357-4116. In the meantime, remember **Biosphere** is open to the public every Saturday from 9:00A.M. to 3:00 P.M.

Printed on Recycled Paper  
(30% post-consumer waste)  
With environmentally friendly soy ink

U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Permit No. 13  
Oakland, FL 34760

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