



Biosphere Buzz

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Are You Sensitive?

Growing old and crotchety is a normal progression in life. I've been told recently that I am progressing fast! I'm not really crotchety (ha). I just become increasingly impatient with people who seem to be totally insensitive to the beauty and interest available in our natural surroundings. As a matter of fact, I long ago began to stereotype all people into two groups: the Sensitive and the Insensitive, and I made the decision that I wanted to spend all my time with Sensitive and buffer myself from the Insensitive. They are easy to tell apart. Sensitive like learning more and more about the world around them and appreciate beauty, even the small things. People who compost are Sensitive. Sensitive can water even a small plant with a hose without blasting it. They have learned that the more you know about nature, the more you see every time you leave the house and the more you see, the more you appreciate.

Insensitive seem to be unaware and disinterested in natural things unless it is something that may bite or sting. Anything insectivorous should be squashed, anything reptilian should be killed and mammalian things are only of interest if they are good to eat. What a drab world it must be, where all trees look alike and the only difference in flowers would be color or size. Subtle things, like a caterpillar becoming a beautiful butterfly, are completely unknown and something like biodiversity is a very foreign concept.

So, where am I going with this little tirade? If you receive the newsletter, you must be a Sensitive, so I want to recommend you bond together with other Sensitive and to learn as much as you can about nature so you can be a Super-Sensitive. I am not sure that sensitivity is genetic so I encourage you to work with children to nourish their sensitivity. Start them early — first graders are old enough to study metamorphosis and, once they have released a butterfly they raised, they never want to squash another bug. There are many opportunities available all year so take advantage of some of them. (Note some of the opportunities below).

We Sensitive have to stick together! We may even be able to convert a few Insensitive if we try hard.

Jim Thomas

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Some Environmental Opportunities

We still need individuals, groups and families to adopt-a-plot at the Oakland Nature Preserve to help restore this beautiful ecosystem. Our next meeting and training session is Saturday August 10 at 9:00 A.M. at the Preserve in Oakland. We plan to dedicate our boardwalk on October 12 so plan to attend. We still need to sell boards at \$25.00 each.

Orange Audubon meets at Leu Gardens on the third Thursday of each month with interesting programs. The Native Plant Society meets at Leu on the first Tuesday at 7:00 P.M. The staff at Tiblett-Butler

Preserve conduct eco-programs almost every Saturday.

One of our volunteer projects is the fight to save the Henry Nehrling estate in Gotha. Nehrling was a turn-of-the-century botanist and horticulturist and his historic house and gardens are now up for sale and prime for development. We will have an important strategy meeting on Wednesday, August 14 at 7:00P.M. in the Windermere Town Hall. We need all the help we can get!

Feel free to call us for information on any of these 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

The black swallowtail (*Papilio polyxenes asterius*) are still around in large numbers. We have in stock at *Biosphere* a number of fennel and parsley which will carry over into the cooler months. Check out the bronze fennel which makes a striking landscape addition.

The sulfurs (*Phoebis sp.* and others) are also beginning to lay eggs on the cassia group of plants. We grow *Cassia bicapsularis* which will be in bloom in the fall and is a spectacular landscape plant, as well as the native senna and partridge pea.

Also showing up in the nursery are White Peacocks (*Anartia jatrophae*), Giant Swallowtails (*Heraclides cresphontes*), Tiger Swallowtails (*Pterourus sp.*), Queens, Long-Tailed Skippers (*Urbanus proteus*), Gulf Fritillary (*Agraulis vanillae nigrrior*), Zebra Longwings (*Heliconius charitonius tuckeri*) and Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*).

August - Time to...

Prune: All spring-blooming perennials like wisteria, bougainvillea, gardenias and azaleas should not be pruned past this month. Poinsettias can be pruned for the last time this month. Continue to remove dead flowers from annuals and perennials (unless you plan to gather seeds for next year).

Plant: In the butterfly garden, plant late cosmos, Mexican sunflower and zinnia. You can still plant cold-sensitive perennials like porterweed, firebush and many others that will give you plenty of color and nectar before the first frost. If you don't already have them, now is the time to plant fall-blooming perennials such as goldenrods, tree sunflower, cassia, rough sunflower and climbing aster. Remember, it is important to produce food for butterflies all winter long.

Start planning your landscape to include cool-

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season flowers such as wildflowers, snapdragons, dianthus, buddleia, Carolina jessamine vine, yarrow, cornflower, cleome and purple coneflower. These should be planted starting at the end of this month.

In the vegetable garden, start getting ready for the best vegetable season in this part of Florida — from September to February. Start planting at the end of this month: beets, beans, broccoli, collards, onions and tomatoes.

One of our favorite vegetables to grow (and a good one for children to start with) is the tomato. It is also one of the trickiest, since you have to time the entire growing and harvesting cycle between hot weather and first frost. Most varieties will not set fruit if the temperature is over 90 degrees but a light frost will frequently kill the whole plant. The best schedule we have found is to plant in small pots and seed trays, then transplant to the garden when four to six inches high. Fertilize lightly every three or four weeks and they will grow fast enough to provide lots of salads (unless we have an early frost)! Nobody said farming was easy....

A helpful hint if you are planning a raised-bed garden (which we recommend because it is easier to control soils, weeds, etc.): do not use standard pressure-treated lumber. It is treated with arsenic and, while we have no research about leaching or plant-uptake, we wouldn't take chances. A new pressure process is now available in this area which uses boric acid instead of arsenic. Better yet, use concrete blocks or the TREX boards made of recycled plastic. Free compost is available from Orange County to fill up the beds.

Fertilize: Citrus should be fed with one-quarter pound of a balance fertilizer per inch of trunk circumference. If you have prepared your garden space, sprinkle a balanced fertilizer over the area before planting. (Note: we aren't giving you information on lawn treatments because we don't want to encourage you to keep them)!

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.

Featured Plants of the Month

For the Native Landscape: Rough Sunflower (*Helianthus angustifolius*)

This hardy species, also called the narrow leaf sunflower, ranges throughout north and Central Florida and thrives in a variety of landscape situations. It is valuable in a landscape because it blooms in late fall and lasts for some time. In our experience it has not made viable seeds but spreads through root shoots, making a larger clump each year unless trimmed. The leaves have the texture of rough sand paper and the yellow sunflowers are produced in profusion at the top of the stalks. The plant may range up to seven feet tall and the entire plant dies back in winter, re-sprouting in early spring. The late bloom is good for pollinators that stay active in winter.

Biosphere has a special on this plant at \$7.00 each in three-gallon pots with three to five stems.

For the Butterflies: Milkweeds

(*Asclepias* sp.)

Here is a case where we have found an exotic species more practical in the landscape than the native. Actually there are a number of species of *Asclepias* that are native to Florida but we have been unable to produce large numbers of any of them. The native orange-flowered *Asclepias tuberosa* is easy enough to grow for one or two seasons and butterflies like to nectar from them but we have rarely seen them used as larval foods. We have been able to produce limited numbers of swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*) but not enough to meet the demands of hungry monarchs and queen larvae. The species which has been most

is the scarlet milkweed (*Asclepias currassavica*). This plant has red flowers with yellow centers and there is also a pure yellow form.

The scarlet milkweed is attractive to the Monarch (*Danaus plexippus*), Queen (*Danaus gilippus berenice*) and, in some parts of Florida, the Soldier (*Danaus eresimus tethys*). The plant is a real pain because it gets a number of insect pests but it is hardy and will survive with minimal care. The main insect problem is the oleander aphid, a small yellow insect that accumulates around the tender shoots and sucks out plant juices. The aphids will not spread to other plants except to milkweeds or oleanders. They won't kill the plant and they seem to attract ladybugs so we try to leave them. You can wash them off with a mild detergent but be sure you rinse the plant thoroughly. We frequently see spider mites on the tender leaves and these should be removed. Look for a whitish appearance and many small webs on the underside of the leaf. Rather than spray, we cut off the whole tip of the plant, put it in a plastic bag and send it to the landfill. The other pest is a large, flat orange and black milkweed bug which will damage the plant. Fortunately these are not usually large numbers so you can knock them off and use the two-brick method of control.

Milkweed should be grown in great numbers since the butterflies usually arrive "en masse". Try locating them throughout the landscape in several patches. When the plants get too tall, cut them back and they will branch out quickly. Collect the seeds before they blow away and share them with friends. The butterflies will love you for it!

COULD THIS BE YOUR LAST BUZZ?

Please check your address label. Unless you have indicated you are willing to receive this newsletter by e-mail, your name must have an asterisk beside it, indicating you want to continue receiving the BUZZ. Unless you notify us, your name will be removed from the list.

Name _____

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Featured Plants of the Month

For the Lakefront: Thalia

(*Thalia geniculata*)

This broad-leafed emergent plant is found throughout Florida, growing in ponds, ditches, marshes, swamps and lakeshores. It is called several common names: arrowroot, alligator flag and fire flag. The leaves are broad enough, like banana trees, to give it a tropical appearance. It may grow in water down to several feet deep and seems to respond very quickly to nutrients in the water. Its sprays of lavender flowers are attractive and the fruit containing one seed are relished by waterfowl. We frequently use it in an aquascape for a dense clumping effect.

The Fight Against Invasives: Tallow Tree

(*Sapium sebiferum*)

We have discussed before why some exotic plants have escaped cultivation and disrupted native ecosystems and that every gardener should be aware of this serious problem. Invasives share several common characteristics: they grow quickly, propagate easily, resist native pests, grow in a wide range of soils, can invade undisturbed habitats, and have traits considered attractive enough to encourage further distribution by people (mostly by In-sentities). It is important to remember that not all exotic plants are invasive but it is critical that anyone propagating exotics knows what the potential might be.

The tallow tree or popcorn tree, a native of eastern Asia, has long been a popular landscape tree because it has brilliant fall colors, distinctive white seed capsules and is hardy. Unfortunately,

the seeds have been widely distributed, primarily by birds, and it is now found in natural areas throughout Florida. They seem to prefer wet areas but can grow in almost any situation and there is some concern that this plant may become the "melaleuca of the North", spreading rapidly like the melaleuca in South Florida. The tallow can tolerate more cold and is now found scattered throughout the Southeast.

Anyone with one of these trees in their landscape should plan to remove it (and try to talk the neighbors into doing the same thing). The best method is by using a basal-bark treatment using Garlon-4 with a basal bark oil. This treatment involves painting or spraying the herbicide and oil directly to the bark around the circumference of the tree about 15 inches above the ground. Attempts to just cut the tree produces extensive stump and root sprouts.

If you want to see just how invasive this tree can be, go look at the median on the north side of I-4 at Kirkman Road. This was once a natural wetland and is now a dense tallow forest.

Get Ready For Wildflowers

Next month we will give detailed information on planting wildflowers in Florida. The best planting time is October to December and our fresh seeds will be available by September 15. We will be able to offer packets by mail order this year and encourage you to use them instead of exotic bedding plants. More in the next Buzz!

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