



Biosphere Buzz

Volume 1. Number 3

May, 2002



Something to Think About . . .

Feeling as strongly as I do about the need to develop environmental sensitivity and awareness, it is difficult not to preach when I get a forum. Recent events in my personal life have driven home the fact that our time on earth is finite, that every moment is precious and should be used for maximum achievement, not only for personal gain but also for the improvement of the earth.

I also recently lost two good friends in the same week. Each of them has contributed a great deal to improve the environment of Central Florida and both were too young to die. The funeral program of one contained a quote that certainly summarized his idea of success and is one that I share because it is so good.

Success

To laugh often and much; to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others; to leave the world a bit better whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Maybe you and I can leave the world a bit better by working harder to improve the environment around us. I hope each of you will consider volunteering some time for an environmental project. We need lots of help at the Oakland Nature Preserve, with a proposed nature center at Orange Audubon Society, with Friends of Lake Apopka, and other environmental projects. The rewards are worth the effort!!

Okay, enough preaching for one month. Let's get on with the serious business of spring gardening!

Jim Thomas

Inside

Know Your Bugs.....	Page 2
Some Questions.....	Page 2
May Is the Time to.....	Page 2
Plant Shows.....	Page 2
Plants of the Month... Page 3	
Beautyberry, Pas-	
sion flower, Native Canna	
Fight Invasives: Lantana	
.....	Page 4
How to Get to Biosphere.....	
.....	Page 4

So. What Is a Biosphere?

When we incorporated our environmental consulting firm in the mid-1970s, we wanted a name that implied our interest in all life on earth. The more we learned about living organisms, the more we realized how interconnected they are.

The term *biosphere* refers to the layer of life that exists on the surface of the earth. When compared to the

layer of rock making up the core of the earth — the *lithosphere* — and the layer of gases surrounding the earth — the *atmosphere* — and beyond that, the *stratosphere* — the biosphere is very thin.

Within the biosphere there are many varied *habitats* to which certain species are adapted, and within each of these habitats there are *eco-*

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.

So What Is a Biosphere...continued

logical niches occupied by specific plants and animals. It is difficult to study any species without including their interactions with other species and with the physical environment.

We coined the word *bioscape* to specify a landscape that supports life.

So, now you know!

Know Your Bugs

With the arrival of hot weather, insect activity will increase. Every gardener should spend time learning good bugs and how to tell them from bad ones, and then use the least toxic way to kill the bad ones without affecting the good ones. (Two bricks work best!) Insecticidal soaps and other remedies that are approved for organic gardening should be used if you need to spray.

If you still have a lawn, watch for chinch bugs in St. Augustine and mole crickets in Bahia. Our first-choice advice to you is to just let them eat it, but if you insist on treating it, be sure to use the least toxic spray you can find! If you have a lawn service, advise them not to spray unless you find evidence of pests. We are putting too much poison in our environment and cannot justify massive preventive sprays. If you do spray, *keep your children and pets off the lawn for at least five to ten days.*

We will talk about good bugs and bad bugs in a later

Buzz.

Some very good questions!

Have you started your eco-corner yet (see last month's **Buzz**)?

Have you installed Bird Nest Boxes yet? It's not too late, especially for wood ducks, screech owls, or wrens.

Do you have a good source of water for the critters somewhere in your landscape? They need it more in hot weather!

Biosphere Consulting, Inc.
14908 Tilden Road, Winter Garden, FL 34787
BiosphereNursery.com

Jim Thomas, President
407-656-8277

Peggy Lantz, Editor

Biosphere Buzz is published monthly by Biosphere Consulting, Inc., and is sent free to its customers.

May Is The Time To . . .

Prune:

Any perennials that tend to become "leggy" can be pruned now. This will increase your blooms later in the season. A good general rule is to refrain from pruning any plant three to four months prior to its blooming season. In your bioscape you should definitely prune the cاسias and the tree sunflowers to give you more blooms in the fall. (If you don't have these two, you certainly need one of each!) If you planted your Christmas poinsettias, prune now to get a thicker plant with more blooms for next year.

Plant:

In the habitat garden you should be planting seeds of yellow cosmos, zinnias, Mexican sunflowers, giant sunflowers, and partridge peas. All the tender perennials, such as passionflowers, porterweeds, etc., can now be planted safely. See our butterfly list to make sure you have all the recommended species for larval foods and nectar sources.

In the vegetable garden, plant the vegetables that can take the heat: beans, okra, squash, cherry tomatoes, cucumber, eggplant, southern peas, and sweet potato. One interesting vegetable you should try is the chayote. This squash is grown by planting the whole fruit, which forms a large vine that will produce many fruits. Cook like squash after peeling. Very good!

Fertilize:

All fruit and shade trees as well as woody vines and shrubs need fertilizing now. A good quality fertilizer that contains organics and essential elements is necessary, especially for cold-damaged plants. Don't overdo it. Don't use phosphate-containing fertilizers (the middle number in the breakdown) where there is any possibility for runoff into the lake.

Plant Shows

Check out **Biosphere's** spring plants at this show!

Saturday, May 18 –Butterfly Festival, Seminole Springs Herb Farm. Always a great day, especially if you want to learn about butterfly gardening from some of the local experts. Owner Traci Anderson also has beautiful antique roses and lots of great herbs to choose from.

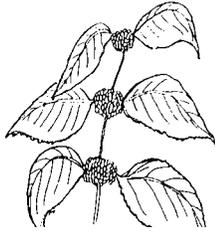
Remember, **Biosphere** is open to the public for retail sales every Saturday from 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. We also invite you to visit us on the web at BiosphereNursery.com.

Featured Plants of the Month

For the Native Landscape (and for the Birds):

American Beautyberry

The American Beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) is a common species native to the southeast and throughout Florida. Another common name is French Mulberry. It is a beneficial shrub for wildlife, is deciduous, will grow well in shade or sun, and may grow to heights of eight to ten feet. It is easily recognized when it fruits in the fall by its tight clusters of violet to purple berries found in the axils of the leaves.



The plant may tend to get tall and leggy in the landscape, especially in the shade. Pruning in late winter or early spring will help make a more dense shrub. We have noted that some garden shops are now selling the Japanese beautyberry (*Callicarpa japonica*), but we see no advantage over the native species.

Throughout the fall and into winter many birds eat the fruit. In our bioscape, we have noted that mockingbirds and catbirds seem to be particularly fond of them. You can make jelly from the fruit, but we were not impressed with it. [The Editor says: I disagree wholeheartedly with Jim's assessment of beautyberry jelly! Here is the recipe. Try it yourself and see what you think. Meanwhile, I'll make some this fall and let Jim try mine. Maybe I can change his mind. (Be sure to not take all the berries; leave some for the birds.)]

Beautyberry Jelly

1 ½ qts. of beautyberries, washed

2 qts. water

Boil 20 minutes and strain to make infusion

Use 3 cups of the infusion, bring to boil, add 1 envelope Sure-Jell and 4 ½ cups sugar. Bring to second boil and boil 2 minutes. Remove from heat and let stand until foam forms. Skim off foam, pour into sterilized jars, cap.

from *Florida's Incredible Wild Edibles*,
by Dick Deuerling and Peggy Lantz

For the Butterflies: Passionflower

This huge, exotic genus (*Passiflora*) is native primarily to the New World, with a few species from Asia and Australia. More than 400 species are known, and there are many hybrids and cultivars as well. They have been introduced throughout the rest of the world.

Besides having a beautiful flower, it is an important larval food for the Gulf Fritillary (*Agraulis vanillae nigrior*) and Zebra Longwing (*Heliconius charitonius tuckeri*) butterflies. In the tropics they also serve for other related butterflies. We have tested and observed various *Passiflora* species and selected several we intend to grow:

P. incarnata, the native maypop, is probably the best habitat plant. Both butterflies utilize it readily, and birds, turtles, and other wildlife relish the fruit. The only problem is the tendency to form many root shoots which eventually spread the vine over vast areas.

P. lutea is a small vine ranging throughout northern Florida and south to Lake County. It is also common in Orange County and may become a landscape pest because it will grow through shrubs and hedges. It has small flowers and fruits and is utilized by both butterfly species. The main problem stems from the fact that the plants are small and do not produce enough foliage to support many caterpillars.

P. suberosa, the "corkystem" passionflower, is native to central and southern Florida and is also preferred by both butterfly species. Again, the small size does not produce enough foliage for large caterpillar populations.

P. alba is often listed as *P. subpeltata* and produces beautiful pure white flowers. The vine is smaller than the large-flowered varieties such as 'Amethyst' and 'Incense' but not as small as *P. lutea* or *P. suberosa*. The butterflies seem to like it.

We also like two hybrids that do well here and grow into large vines that support large populations of caterpillars. Passionflower 'Incense' is a hybrid of our native *P. incarnata* with *P. cincinnata*. It is fairly cold hardy, but

We are willing to try again!

If you haven't had the time to respond to us about keeping your name on the list to receive **Biosphere Buzz**, please fill out the form below and mail it to us at **Biosphere Consulting, 14908 Tilden Road, Winter Garden, FL 34787**.

Or better yet, email us at **Biosphere5@aol.com** if you are willing to receive the newsletter on line, which would be very helpful in allowing us to continue this service to you. Also, feel free to pass this on to others you know who may be interested in receiving it. We are still open to all your thoughts and suggestions about the newsletter and our operation. Thanks again for the heartwarming show of support!

Yes! Please continue to mail me your free newsletter!

Name _____ E-mail _____

Mailing Address _____

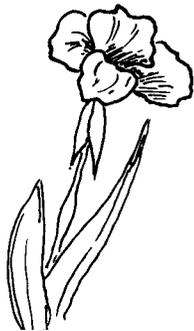
has the root-shoot tendency of *incarnata*. The butterflies utilize it a great deal. Unfortunately, it is susceptible to a viral problem that quickly kills the plant.

P. 'Amethyst' is a hybrid of unknown origin and one of our favorites. The lush vine produces many large lavender flowers with recurved petals and sepals. It is as hardy as any of the *Passiflora*, and the butterflies seem to like it. It does not spread like *incarnata*.

We also grow *P. edulis* (famous for its fruits in other countries, but not here), *P. pfordtii* and *P. quadrangularis*, but cannot recommend them yet. We have also learned that the red passionflower, *P. coccinea*, while beautiful in flower, is actually lethal to butterfly larvae. Don't grow it!

Another interesting note: of the two butterflies we propagate on passionflower, the Gulf Fritillary seems to prefer full sun locations while the Zebra Longwing, a woodland butterfly, prefers plants in shaded locations. This has been very obvious to us as we observe the maypops at Oakland Nature Preserve. The Zebra Longwing is the Florida State Butterfly.

For the Lakeshore: Native Canna



The native canna (*Canna flaccida*) is found throughout peninsular Florida and west to the central panhandle. It grows in swamps, along pond and lake margins, in ditches, savannas, and hydric pine flatwoods.

It is our favorite plant for use in lakefront restoration for the area just above normal high water where the soil is moist but not routinely inundated. It can withstand inundation for long periods if the water rises.

Numerous hybrids occur with *C. flaccida*, and many have escaped into the wild. Fortunately, most do not make viable seeds like *flaccida*, but spread through growths of underground rhizomes. It is illegal to plant any hybrid in a jurisdictional wetland.

We like to use this favorite hardy hybrid with orange and yellow blooms in the landscape, above normal high water, around retention ponds, etc. They stay in bloom most of the year.

In late summer, the canna skipper butterfly (*Calpodestethlius*) is attracted to most cannas, where the larvae eat the leaves, causing the edges to roll. We just let them eat, then cut the whole plant down to about four to six inches and let it grow back. If you must spray, use a bt product (a bacterial product approved for organic vegetables effective against only worms), not a chemical pesticide.

The fight Against Invasives

Exotic Lantana

There are several native lantanas, the shrub verbenas, but they are not found in central Florida. The common one here is *Lantana camara*, a beautiful but very invasive Category 1 species. The plant produces clusters of attractive flowers in varied shades of pink, orange, and yellow that form purple, berrylike fruits with many seeds. While the plant serves some wildlife benefits (butterflies nectar on the flowers, and birds and small mammals eat the fruits), the plant is so aggressive it soon forms a monoculture by completely dominating all native species. Even if you like it, kill it!



How to Get to Biosphere

From Orlando, go west on Colonial Drive (Hwy. 50) to Winter Garden. Turn south on Hwy. 535 (7-Eleven and Walgreen's on corners) and go about 3 miles. Look for Tilden Rd. on the right (west side) just past the Banana Bay subdivision. Turn right (west) on Tilden Rd., go about 1 mile. The nursery is on the left. Look for our tall chain link fence with gates.

Printed on recycled paper
With environmentally friendly soy ink

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

Biosphere Buzz
Biosphere Consulting, Inc.
14908 Tilden Road
Winter Garden, FL 34787