PLANT LIFE COLUMN

OSCEOLA COUNTY FAIR

It's time for the Osceola County Fair & Livestock Show! Not only does this year's fair offer fun rides and delicious food, it also has many exciting events and exhibits that are supported by the Osceola County Master Gardeners and 4-Hers, including two demonstration landscapes, a vegetable garden, arts and crafts, and livestock shows.

The Osceola County Extension's Florida Yards and Neighborhoods (FYN) program has a demonstration garden and information center at the fair. This exhibit presents a "Florida friendly" landscape to the attendees. It demonstrates a number of key principles that can save you time and money, while maintaining a beautiful site. The FYN landscape will feature the principles of watering efficiently, mulching, attracting wildlife, right plant - right place, collecting storm water runoff, and composting. It includes a butterfly garden, a container water garden, a rain barrel, vermicomposting (composting with worms), native plants, and beautiful bromeliads.

The FYN exhibit is manned by the Osceola County Master Gardeners. They will be on hand to answer questions about the demonstration landscape, your landscape, or any other plant questions you may have. For example, if you have a sick plant, the Master Gardeners can diagnose its illness. Numerous publications from the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences will also be available free of charge at the exhibit. These comprise of various topics, including lawn care, vegetable gardening, and attracting wildlife.

The Master Gardeners have also been busy getting their outdoor demonstration gardens in tip-top shape for the festivities. These gardens include a beautiful xerioscape landscape filled with drought tolerant plants, a gazebo to rest your weary legs, and a wonderful vegetable garden, displaying herbs and cool season veggies. The Master Gardeners are in the gardens, ready to give you the VIP tour. So, stop by the gardens while you are at the fair. They are located by the Red Barn. Learn how to grow your own fantastic landscape and vegetable gardens.

The Osceola County 4-Hers are also present at the fair. They are there showing off all their hard work that they've been working on since last year's fair. This includes their artwork, woodwork, plants, bake goods, clothing, and animals. They will show their livestock, such as hogs, sheep, and cattle, at numerous times during the fair. The 4-Hers also have a food booth at the fair. If you find yourself wanting a hot dog or cookie while at the fair, support your county 4-Hers, and purchase food items from their booth located by the barns.

So, in between that corn dog and funnel cake and before that ferris wheel ride, find time to visit the Osceola County Master Gardeners at their demonstration gardens, go for a stroll through the vegetable garden, and show support to the 4-Hers by visiting their exhibits. You'll be amazed what the kids of this county can do!

The new Master Gardener training class has begun with twenty-six eager and ambitious students. These students are learning all about landscape plants, insects, citrus, vegetables and turfgrass. After eleven weeks, or sixty-six hours of training, they will be certified as Master Gardeners and will be available to assist you, the citizens of Osceola County. As part of the program, the Master Gardeners agree to provide the county with fifty hours of volunteer service each, per year, in exchange for their training.

Members of the dedicated 2002 Osceola County Master Gardener Class are Belinda Anderson, Kathleen Apsley, Joan Bellizzi, Cathy Benson, Jackson Bronson, Diane Brown, Georgia Dillion-Stewart, Katherine
Ervin, Hector Ferrer, Gerald Hultslander, Lillian Johnson, Linda Knight, Diana Murosik, Angela Otero, Marilyn Parker, Nancy Pfister, Janet Robinson, Arthur Ruth, Evelyn Shockling, Lisa Stockley, Nancy Stebbins, Richard Stebbins, Sandra Stebbins, Terry Swearingen, Vickie Tallon, and Dee Van Kay. Join me in welcoming these fine people to the Master Gardener program and thanking them for all their hard work they are giving to the community.

Beginning Landscape Design classes are coming in March. They are free of charge and will be held at the St. Cloud, Poinciana, and Central libraries. Call for more information.

Know anyone that may be interested in 4-H? Believe it or not, you do not have to live on a farm or be from a rural area to be a member of 4-H. There are events and projects in 4-H for everyone. Please call the Osceola County Extension Service at (321) 697-3000 to find out about clubs in your area.

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