DIVERSITY

Aren’t you amazed at the diversity that surrounds us? There are many migratory birds that visit us. We have fruits, vegetables and landscape plants from around the world. We also have many people that come here to vacation or to make our area their new home.

Newcomers may not know about the many educational programs the University of Florida/IFAS Cooperative Extension Service has to offer for youth and adults. Here are a few examples.

I know from my experience as a visitor in another land, it is so great to find people with similar interests and experiences. If you are from another area, we want to help you feel at home here. We have offices in every county in Florida so you are never far from help. If you have not found us yet, call 321-697-3000 or go to http://SolutionsForYourLife.com and we will give you directions to the nearest office.

We have useful tips to help you with questions relating to gardening and landscaping in this new climate and soil. Our University of Florida faculty and staff as well as Master Gardener volunteers offer assistance in identifying plants and pests in your yards. They will help you learn about landscape plants for our area. Let the Master Gardeners help you select plants to decorate your indoor living areas also.

Trying to figure out that complicated timer that waters your plants? Maybe you just need to know if you should water at all. UF/IFAS Florida Yards and Neighborhoods is a program to help you learn more about lawn and landscape care. It includes irrigation, fertilizing and other recommended care while reducing impacts on our environment.

Jennifer Welshans, UF/IFAS Osceola County Extension faculty in horticulture is offering a class on care of citrus trees in your yard. Call Cindy Rutherford at 321-697-3000 to register for this free class and get some great information on how to care for the many different types of oranges, grapefruits, tangerines and other juicy citrus. The class will be held at the Osceola County Extension Office at 1921 Kissimmee Valley Lane, Kissimmee, FL 34744 on Tuesday, February 5 beginning at 6:30 pm.

Faculty in Family and Consumer Science teach classes and has information relating to nutrition, health and family financial stability. Learn how reading food labels can help you with your weight loss goals or meet your doctors’ orders to reduce fat or cholesterol. Find out how to stretch your food dollars or deal with financial stress before it is too late. Learn how to save for retirement or plan a budget so you don’t run out of money before you run out of month! Find out the ins and outs of home buying or preventing foreclosure. These difficult economic times lead to stress in the household so we offer information on stress management. We are a phone call away.

Anyone who prepares foods should learn about food safety. Keeping hot foods hot and cold foods cold is important so your family does not get sick. Find out how long you can leave food out of the refrigerator before it spoils. Learn how to teach your family to wash their hands. Keep your family well by handling and cooking food properly.

Some newcomers have raised farm animals or grown vegetables to feed the family. There are many regulations to protect your health and the health of your neighbors. You need to know what they are if you want to be a farmer. Farm fresh eggs and fresh picked vegetables are the best. So where do you find locally grown foods? What if you grow more than you and friends and family can possibly eat? Be sure to contact our agricultural faculty to find out what to do next?
Our Home and Community Education members teach each other lessons they learn at the UF/IFAS Extension office in various home and family topics. Learn, share and meet others with similar interests through interesting meetings on a variety of topics.

Trained adult volunteers and teens become leaders and guide activities for youth ages 5 to 18 in our 4-H program. Other countries have similar adult lead activities for youth. Families really appreciate these activities which help youth build skills in leadership and citizenship. You will see many of our youth at the local county fair.

4-H clubs are neighborhood based, sometimes meeting at a local community center or home. The program offers a variety of activities to help children learn life skills. Whether making nutritious snacks, selecting a safe bicycle helmet, or caring for a pet, 4-H has many fun activities. It is a great way to meet other children in a supervised setting.

Our community diversity is changing and we are getting more and more residents from around the globe. UF/IFAS Extension is a great resource to help families new to the area. Please help us spread the word to newcomers in your neighborhood.

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