PLANT LIFE COLUMN

4-H YOUTH

School starts Monday in Osceola County but summer fun doesn't stop if you are a 4-H member. Young people continue to enjoy such activities as trips to the local springs to swim, and learn about nature, hikes through local nature trails, making bug collections, tracking animals from their prints and creating art from natural materials. Fun is year round if you are involved in 4-H.

4-H is the youth organization sponsored by state universities and Cooperative Extension offices throughout the country. In Florida, the University of Florida's Extension provides leadership and develops curriculum and activities. Extension Agents serve as local coordinators recruiting volunteers to provide a variety of fun experiences. Volunteers are the fabric that holds the program together.

The fun is not only for the kids. Adult volunteers stay young as they share their passions, hobbies and love with local youth. Sometimes they get involved in 4-H because they were in 4-H as they grew up. Some discover the fun activities through their children's friends. Others have an internal desire to help our youth have good, positive experiences in troubled times. Youth volunteers build skills in organization and child development as they plan activities for younger children.

Enrollment in 4-H is ongoing throughout the year. Now is a great time to get involved as new clubs are forming in many neighborhoods and new volunteer training is beginning. It only takes 5 youth to form a club. Youth ages 5 to 18 are invited to join the fun. Clubs are open to boys and girls in the same club, a major convenience for busy families. The youth enjoy making new friends. Home school families like the opportunities for interaction with others.

Many clubs are in need of additional fun-loving adult volunteers. Do you know what animals live in your neighborhood? Take local kids exploring and look for foods and homes that are suitable for our feathered and furry friends. You're love for birds or interest in our natural world is something many youth would love to learn. Maybe you have woodworking skills and could help make bird houses. Would you like to learn more about our environment? Why not learn with the youth? If you are looking for fun activities for your children or grandchildren or if you want to have fun while helping youth, consider joining the 4-H team.
There are more than 40 projects with guided experiences that make learning fun. The "cows and cooking" days of 4-H have expanded to include many more subjects. My new natural resource responsibilities allow me to continue to work with 4-H youth and adult volunteers. Some of my favorite natural resource projects include wildlife, entomology, ecology, marine science, aquariums, water conservation, recycling and forestry.

Our shooting sports program provides youth opportunities to learn safety and develop marksmanship with archery, pistols, rifles and shotguns. There is a lot of individual skill involved and excitement and personal satisfaction from hitting the center of the target.

Hands-on activities make learning fun. Planting a butterfly garden, shooting an arrow into a target, building a bird house or setting up an aquarium are a few of the fun activities. Trips to various ecosystems allow youth to play in the mud, observe animals in natural settings, discover interrelationships and study the diversity that surrounds us. Awareness leads to appreciation. When we understand the environment, we are more likely to take care of it.

The 4-H program provides opportunities for our youth to develop leadership and citizenship skills through a variety of activities. They serve as club officers planning monthly activity meetings and community service projects. They learn public speaking skills by sharing at club meetings. They learn as they teach others through show and tell demonstrations or presentations.

The 4-H motto is "To Make the Best Better". Help our youth develop to their fullest potential through a variety of fun activities. Call Joy Borgman, 4-H Coordinator at (321) 697-3000 or email her at jbor@osceola.org to find out about a club near you.

How can you get more home for your money?

Home shoppers and home buyers are invited to attend the High Performance Housing classes offered by The University of Florida's Osceola County Extension at local libraries. Participants will learn how technology and design save money on your electric bill every month. Mortgage incentives for energy efficient construction will be discussed. Home buyers, builders, mortgage lenders and realtors are also invited to interact with potential home buyers.

The next program is offered August 9 at the BVL library at 7p.m. and bilingual speakers will present information in Spanish. Call (321) 697-3000 or email Eleanor Foerste at efoe@osceola.org to reserve a seat or get information on other classes being scheduled.

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