

PLANT LIFE COLUMN

THANKS

Big family dinners and time with friends are Thanksgiving traditions in America. While political turmoil, disasters and human pain are so prevalent in the news, this is a time to reflect on all we have to be thankful for.

I appreciate all of the Master Gardeners who have learned about Florida gardening so they can help you and others through our Osceola County Extension office. They volunteer in a variety of ways to bring you information based on University of Florida research.

Master Gardeners help answer plant questions each week at the Plant Clinic on Mondays from 2 to 5 p. m. and Thursday from 9 a.m. to noon. Using University of Florida references, volunteers diagnose plant problems, identify samples and help you select plants for your landscape. Call us at (321) 697-3000 or come by the office at the Osceola Heritage Park, between Kissimmee and St. Cloud. You can email your questions to epabon5@ufl.edu.

Master Gardeners play faithfully in our demonstration gardens so you can see recommended plant care practices for vegetables and the landscape. Come visit with them in the vegetable garden each Monday morning or join them in the landscape Wednesday mornings. They are in the garden at 8 a.m. and will gladly answer questions about when to plant what, seasonal chores, planting times, watering, trimming, fertilizing and mulching.

Volunteers help with school gardening projects and give talks to various clubs and organizations. They help judge youth entries at the annual county fair in February and set up educational displays at many events. Call to get on the mailing list for their free quarterly newsletter, "Roots and Shoots" which contains timely gardening tips and planting calendars.

I am thankful for our mild climate, fresh air and the diversity of natural areas we can enjoy near by. We are fortunate to have city, county and state parks located within a few hours drive so we can see, recreate, learn and enjoy our environment.

Birds, butterflies and many wildlife species that take up residence in our landscapes provide hours of enjoyment when you take time to observe them. Our wild friends need food, shelter and a space to live, just as we do. Flowering plants, water features, a mixture of trees, shrubs and groundcovers and variety of plants that produce seeds, nuts and berries are beneficial in attracting wildlife to your landscape all year.

I am grateful for an opportunity to learn. We can study our natural world and develop new wildlife habitat in our own yards. We can create site conditions to mimic one of the many natural plant communities or we can strive to enhance nature's diversity and complexities in our home landscapes by adding native plants that are adapted to our site existing conditions.

When we learn to appreciate natural cycles and interrelationships of plants, we can become more tolerant of minor plant damage caused by insects and disease and other natural occurrences such as drought. Proper plant care and least toxic pest management strategies reduce landscape problems.

As you count your many blessings and give thanks this holiday season, consider others who are less fortunate. Make a phone call, visit someone who is alone or just share a smile to brighten someone's day. Gratitude changes attitude. Share your gratitude and help lift others' spirits during the holidays.

The Osceola Master Gardeners will have a booth today at the Family and Community Educators' Sale-a-

thon at the Agricultural Center. Stop, ask plant questions and shop for plants, University of Florida gardening books and crafts while you are out and about today. Join me in thanking them for their many hours of dedicated community service – gardeners helping gardeners.

Eleanor Foerste
Natural Resources Agent
Osceola County Extension/University of Florida
1921 Kissimmee Valley Lane
Kissimmee, FL 34744
(321) 697-3000
Fax (321) 697-3010
efoe@osceola.org
osceola.ifas.ufl.edu
Date: November 16th, 2000