

# UF | IFAS Extension

UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

## Osceola County's

## SOLUTIONS for *your* LIFE

November/December 2015

1921 Kissimmee Valley Lane  
Kissimmee, FL 34744  
321-697-3000  
<http://osceola.ifas.ufl.edu>

**OFFICE HOURS:**  
Monday - Friday  
8 a.m. - 5 p.m.

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### Enjoy Nature Nearby Eleanor Foerste

Fall brings a bit of cooler weather and is a great time to explore the outdoors. Osceola County has a variety of natural ecosystems including dry scrub, open grass prairies, pine woods, oak hammocks, swamps, creeks, and lakes. Osceola County property owners refunded the purchase and maintenance of natural areas for environmental protection and passive recreation through the SAVE Osceola property assessment. To date, more than 2500 acres are accessible to the public for hiking, biking, wildlife watching, camping, paddling, and in some cases, horseback riding. Many residents have yet to discover our natural treasures so close to home and the fall season is a great opportunity to do so. Cherokee Point Conservation Area is the most recent natural area to open, located at 2501 Cherokee Road, St. Cloud, FL 34772 at the end of Kissimmee Park Road, south of St. Cloud on Goblet's Cove on the east side of Lake Tohopekaliga. The 183-acre conservation area protects shoreline and important endangered Everglade snail kite nesting and feeding habitat while providing opportunities for the public to enjoy picnic facilities and catch and release fishing in the pond. (<http://tinyurl.com/CherokeePoint>)

Contact Osceola County's Environmental Lands Conservation Program office at 407-742-0200 or [conservation@osceola.org](mailto:conservation@osceola.org) for reservations and more information on Osceola County's natural areas for outdoor recreation.

UF IFAS Extension sponsors Woods Walks, guided hikes in local natural areas, to help residents become more familiar with nature trails nearby and learn about plants and animals commonly found in Osceola County. Meet others interested in outdoor recreation and discover our natural ecosystems, birds and wildlife. These are great activities for novices or experts, residents and visitors, and we learn from each other as we take a leisurely walk.

If you enjoy morning walks and birding, UF IFAS volunteers are needed to monitor birds utilizing ponds near the Kissimmee Lakefront. Participate in a training walk at the Kissimmee Civic Center Pond on November 3rd at 9 am. Learn how to access the UF IFAS Bird Monitoring website to report what you see. We will take a rain drop walk to follow the flow of storm water from the parking lot to the lakefront and learn about pollution prevention.

Sign up to participate in the Bird Monitoring Training and Woods Walks on the UF IFAS Extension Events website at <http://ocagriculture.eventbrite.com/>

While local natural areas offer opportunities to hike and explore, consider creating wildlife habitat in your own yard. Native plants provide color, shade, and form in home landscapes. In addition, native plants in the right place require less watering and fertilizer, thus protecting our lakes and streams. Learn more about Florida Friendly Landscaping, recommended landscape plants and gardening for birds, butterflies and pollinators by contacting the UF IFAS Extension Service office at 321-697-3000.

### Urban Trees in the Landscape Grantly Ricketts

These days, there is a great conversation going on for a better tree ordinance in Osceola County. I know many people would ask why waste time talking about trees. Stop! In order to understand this conversation we first have to know why trees are important to our environment.

Trees are very important because they cool the environment by providing shade. They add an aesthetic quality to the landscape through leaf color, flowers, fruits, bark colors and textures. Trees can improve air quality by acting as filters in removing some impurities from the air. They help with water quality by assisting in reducing soil erosion, absorbing storm water, and helping filter out pollutants. Trees provide a habitat for birds, squirrels, and other wildlife in an urban environment. They serve as a noise buffer to help reduce traffic noise from the busy streets. Trees can also provide a privacy screen to block an unpleasant view or stop your neighbors from looking in your yard.

Now that you know the importance of having trees in your landscape, I am quite certain that you are interested in planting new trees and taking care of the existing ones. Knowing the following information will help you have healthy tree growth and development: soil characteristics, environmental conditions, planting space, site location, and maintenance requirements. Soil conditions are among the most critical considerations for tree growth and survival. Some of the soil characteristics to consider when selecting a site are: soil texture, soil pH, soil compaction, moisture, and drainage.

Environmental conditions are important to a tree's health. The environmental conditions at the planting site will affect the ability of the tree to grow healthy and enable it to reach full maturity. Environmental conditions to consider are: the amount of sunlight that the site receives and the species that will thrive well in your area due to temperature.

Furthermore, it is very important to put the right plant at the right place. The site location offers clues on potential stresses that may impact tree health and maintenance. Too often the amount of space a tree needs, both for growth of branches and roots, is not fully considered and understood. Trees planted too near buildings will have more stress and need to be pruned on a regular basis. Trees need to be far enough away from buildings to allow for proper crown and root development. Trees that grow large such as oaks should be planted at least 15 feet from a building. When planning a tree planting site you must know the mature height and width of that species.

In new tree establishment, it is very important that trees are properly irrigated for the first month after installation. Placing a mulch approximately 3 feet in circumference around the tree will assist in moisture retention. Be certain not to place mulch directly on the trunk or the root flare of the tree.

For more detailed information on planting trees and other topics related to horticulture contact Grantly Ricketts at 321-697-3000 or email [gricketts@ufl.edu](mailto:gricketts@ufl.edu)

## Holiday Food Safety Gabriela Murza

If you are like a lot of people these days—working, running errands, and taking care of last-minute emergencies--the holidays always arrive way too soon! Whether you are planning a small, quiet evening, or a large event, the first thing we probably think of is the menu.

With food comes the issue of food safety; making sure the meals we prepare are handled, cooked, and stored safely. Food safety considerations are essentially the same for any event or location where food is served, but here are some holiday-specific tips that will answer the most common challenges.

Wash hands with soap and water before and after handling food. Hand washing can eliminate up to 99% of bacteria and greatly minimizes the transfer of dirt and pathogens onto food, equipment, and people.

Meat does not need to be rinsed. This is a myth and can actually cause bacteria to transfer to other surfaces. Simply place the meat on a cutting board and pat dry with a paper towel.

Rinse fruits and vegetables with water before preparing. Do not use soap; it does not make it any cleaner. Soap is not meant to be eaten, and can leave a residue even after it is "rinsed off". Use a vegetable brush to clean produce with a hard rind such as an orange, potato, or melon.

Use different cutting boards for different foods, including fruits and veggies. This helps prevent possible bacteria from transferring from one product to another. If you have one cutting board, sanitize it before using it for the next food item. Wooden cutting boards are just as safe as plastic ones; it's just that cracks develop over time in wooden boards which can harbor bacteria.

Sanitizing solution: 1 tablespoon of bleach per 1 gallon of water; or 1 teaspoon of bleach per 1 liter of water. Spray or rinse items and equipment after washing, and let it air dry.

The safest and most recommended way to thaw meat is to defrost it in the refrigerator the night before. Place it on a plate or in a container on the lowest shelf to prevent possible leaking.

Large meat such as a turkey will not thaw in one night, so there are several ways to handle this: buy it fresh from the store about two days prior and store in the fridge; thawed meat can safely stay in the refrigerator for up to two days after being thawed. If it is frozen, allow 24 hours of thawing time for every five pounds. It can also be thawed in cold water, making sure the water is changed every 30 minutes (calculate 30 minutes per pound). Meat must be prepared immediately when using the cold water method.

What about leftovers? The amount of time that leftovers are safe to eat depends on whether it was prepared at home or in a restaurant. Food prepared at home will stay fresh for up to four days; leftovers from a restaurant will stay fresh for two to three days. Store any leftovers in

the refrigerator within two hours of serving. Hot food does not need to sit on the counter to cool down; the refrigerator does the job at a faster and safer rate. Any food that was made in large quantities such as soup needs to be divided into smaller containers and placed in the refrigerator to allow for faster cooling.

If you have questions, call Extension Services at 321-697-3000 or send an email to [gmurza@ufl.edu](mailto:gmurza@ufl.edu).

## Predation and Backyard Agriculture Ashley Fluke

You may have seen incidents on the news of coyotes sneaking into neighborhood yards and taking pet cats and small dogs. Or perhaps you've heard the stories of alligators grabbing dogs by ponds and creeks. As urban growth encroaches on the natural habitat for wildlife, these animals explore other opportunities for food sources. While acts of predation may be less common in urban areas, but nonetheless very real, they are a major threat to several agricultural operations and occur on a regular basis. There are considerations to take when dealing with livestock, pets, and predators.

Along with the threat to common pets that many people have, chickens and rabbits have become a popular addition to urban areas that allow them and are a top choice to coyotes, raccoons, birds of prey, snakes, and even neighborhood dogs. A growing trend to raise our own food and better understand food systems has led to an increase in backyard chickens and other animals. Consequently, opportunistic wildlife pose a threat to these backyard animals. Housing and facilities are a critical factor for small food animals. Keeping the chickens in is important, but so is keeping predators out. Sturdy wood as opposed to thin, rotted, or cracked is recommended. Also, strong, small wire will prevent raccoons from reaching inside to grab chickens and snakes from slipping into the cage. Perimeters should go underground or a bottom should be installed to keep any predator from digging in. Rabbits are best protected when cages are several feet above ground. Some type of roofing helps keep owls, hawks, and eagles out. Even if poultry and rabbits are let out during the day, they should be monitored and put in a safe, protective structure during night hours. It is also important to keep in mind that animals like chickens, ducks, and rabbits naturally attract predators and a pet owner should also be sure to protect small dogs and cats. Yard fencing and close monitoring should be implemented.

On farm operations, certain predators also pose a major threat and can have a significant economic impact. Loss of livestock on a commercial farm or ranch means loss of profit. Small ruminants like sheep and goats are common prey to coyotes. The newly born are at risk of falling prey to large birds. Calves on cattle operations have even been taken by coyotes. Some of these threatening creatures are quite elusive and can be hard to control. Again, fencing and housing are crucial and another option is guard animals. Guard dogs, llamas, donkeys, and others have been used to protect at risk animals. There are sound devices that deter birds that can be used. This also helps for blueberry and peach producers as birds often snatch their fruits.

Predation is a challenge for urban and rural agriculture. It is important that anyone raising animals for food take into consideration this threat. It can be addressed by location of animal facilities, quality and design of such facilities, management of animals, and monitoring. While it is virtually impossible to completely eliminate the possibility of a predator attack, proper measures will greatly decrease the risk. Raising our own food and to experience the entire process is a wonderful opportunity and should be explored if one is interested. It provides a learning experience and awareness for youth who may be out of touch with the food industry. As with all new ventures, all the necessary considerations should be taken and good planning will help with success of raising animals. If you have questions about raising backyard poultry, rabbits, or something else feel free to contact the Osceola County Extension Office for information.

## Help!! There are Bees on my Property! Jessica Sullivan

Honey bee colonies can show up anywhere, and people often call us when bees are discovered. There are many misconceptions surrounding honey bees, so I'd like to share some facts about dealing with feral (wild) honey bees that could save you money, pain, or even your life.

### **African honey bees**

In the 1950's, a Brazilian scientist imported a type of African honey bee to South America that would function better in a tropical climate than the European honey bee (the kind kept by beekeepers here). This bee was very defensive, so the scientist began working to breed out this behavior. During an experiment, bees were accidentally released. Eventually, African honey bees came to Florida on international cargo boats. African honey bees are now established throughout South and Central Florida and are very common in Osceola County.

If honey bees appear on your property, they are very likely to have African genetics and behaviors. African and European honey bees look identical, but African bees present some additional complications for humans. First, they establish their nests in a much wider variety of places that are inconvenient for us: hollow architectural columns, under sheds/mobile homes, in playground equipment, grills, irrigation controller boxes, or other hollow spaces. Secondly, African bees are more defensive of their nests. Any honey bee will defend and may

sting if it feels that its hive is threatened, however, African bees are agitated more easily, within a longer distance from the hive, and will defend in greater numbers than European bees. Incidents involving many bee stings are much more likely to occur with African honey bees. A bee sting or two commonly causes intense itching and swelling, but only about 1% of humans have actual life-threatening allergies to bee venom. Receiving hundreds of bee stings from an angry colony is much more serious for anyone though. Hint: if you are stung by a bee, scrape out the stinger, don't pull out the stinger. (Pulling out the stinger squeezes additional venom into your skin!)

### **Preventing bee problems**

Fortunately, there are many actions you can take to avoid conflicts with bees.

Remove or seal potential nesting sites: old tires, empty containers, chimneys, roof eaves, building vents, clothesline poles, any holes in buildings, etc. Silicone and 1/8-inch hardware cloth can take care of sealing most entrances.

- Monitor regularly or before use: barns, water meters, power boxes, lumber piles, infrequently used vehicles/tractors/mowers/trailers.
- Only keep bird nesting boxes up during bird nesting seasons.
- Be alert in all outdoor situations (hunting, hiking, landscaping, doing home repair, picnicking...)
- Teach respect and caution of bees.

### **If you encounter bees**

Foraging bees- Bees buzzing around flowers in your yard are focused on finding and bringing food back to the colony. They will typically ignore other living things and pose no threat.

Bee swarms- A bee swarm often looks like a softball-sized mass of bees that is hanging out in a peculiar place, like a tree branch or a fence. These bees have just left their old hive; they are focused on finding a new nest location and following the queen. They have no home or babies to defend. They will probably relocate within a day and are not defensive.

Established bee colonies- These are bees that have been in a nest location long enough to build honeycomb, and have babies to defend. If threatened, they will defend.

You can't always observe the difference between a swarm and an established colony. For this reason, you should stay away from any group of bees that you may encounter. Tell anyone who may be coming to the property (landscapers, contractors...) to stay away until bees are relocated. Do not attempt to control bees yourself. There may be 50,000 bees in a colony. Without appropriate protective gear, equipment, and knowledge of bee control, you put yourself and others at risk. If humans or animals are in close proximity to a feral bee colony, leaving the bees on your property may become a liability to you. A survey of bee attacks revealed that half of all attacks occurred when people knew a nest existed, and did nothing about it.

If you need a bee colony removed from your property, call a professional who is trained to deal specifically with honey bees (we have a list, 321-697-3000). As with any other pest issue, it is the responsibility of the property owner to deal with it; there is no government assistance available for bee control. Depending on the situation, bees may be relocated to a beekeeper's apiary, or may need to be eradicated if they are too defensive or if removal is too risky or inaccessible. An important part of bee removal is the removal of honeycomb; a wide variety of pests will soon infest it once bees are gone.

Farmers, landscapers, utility workers, and land-clearing equipment operators should be especially aware of the potential for encountering bees. At highest risk from bees are people who can't run fast, chained animals, and people who don't know what to do.

If bees are chasing you: Cover your face with your shirt or hands and run into a secure building or vehicle. If there are none around – RUN FAST, RUN FAR. Absolutely DO NOT wave arms and scream, DO NOT stand still, DO NOT jump into water (bees will wait until you resurface, sting your face, fly into your mouth, and you will probably drown).

If someone else is being attacked by bees- call 911. Without a bee suit, you are just as likely to become a victim.

### **Can a beekeeper take away the bees for free?**

This is the most frequent question that I receive. Many people have heard of the decline of honey bees. They assume that beekeepers would want to save any bee colony. It's not that simple. Since most feral honey bee colonies are African and can be defensive, they will need to be re-queened with a European queen, and they often won't stay in a new hive. Furthermore, beekeepers who are not also Pest Control Operators may not have insurance to cover bee removal, may not remove honeycomb if they cannot access it, and may not be familiar with safety protocols for removal.

# Extension Services Calendar of Events

Registration for any class is required! You can register at [www.tinyurl.com/ufclass](http://www.tinyurl.com/ufclass)

<b>NOVEMBER 2015</b>		
Wed. Nov. 4	12:30pm-2:00pm	HCE County Council Meeting, UF/IFAS Extension Osceola County, OHP
Wed. Nov. 4	2:00pm-3:00pm	HCE Leader Training, UF/IFAS Extension Osceola County, OHP
Thurs., Nov. 5	8:00am-3:00pm	CEU Day, UF/IFAS Extension Osceola County, OHP <a href="http://occeu.eventbrite.com">http://occeu.eventbrite.com</a>
Thurs., Nov. 5	6:00pm-8:00pm	Homeowner Irrigation, UF/IFAS Extension Osceola County, OHP <a href="http://ocagricultureeventbrite.com">http://ocagricultureeventbrite.com</a>
Fri., Nov 6	8:45am - noon	Lighting and Human Health- A Workshop on Managing Public Lighting - Does it Affect Public Health? <a href="http://ocagricultureeventbrite.com">http://ocagricultureeventbrite.com</a>
Wed. Nov. 11	All Day	HOLIDAY—OFFICE CLOSED
Tues. Nov. 17	9:00am-5:00pm	ServSafe Food Manager Certification, UF/IFAS Extension Osceola County, OHP Must pre-register with UF Food Safety/Quality Program at (352) 846-2270
Thurs. Nov. 26	All Day	HOLIDAY - OFFICE CLOSED
Fri. Nov. 27	All Day	HOLIDAY—OFFICE CLOSED
<b>DECEMBER 2015</b>		
Wed. Dec. 2	11:30am-2:00pm	HCE Holiday Party, UF/IFAS Extension Osceola County, OHP
Tues. Dec. 8	6:00pm-8:00pm	You Can Do It! Food Preservation Class, UF/IFAS Extension Osceola County, OHP. Pre-register at <a href="http://www.ocfcs.eventbrite.com">http://www.ocfcs.eventbrite.com</a> . Cost \$10
Thurs. Dec. 24	All Day	HOLIDAY—OFFICE CLOSED
Fri. Dec. 25	All Day	HOLIDAY—OFFICE CLOSED

When removing colonies, a beekeeper who is not a licensed Pest Control Operator cannot legally use pesticides if bees turn out to be too defensive to relocate. Additionally, many situations involve bees that physically cannot be removed, or “bees” turn out to be other types of stinging insects. In these cases, the beekeeper has wasted her/his time, and they can’t do anything to help.

Like Florida’s many other exotic species, African honey bees are highly adaptable and are here to stay. Everyone has a responsibility to learn how to live with them and prevent harm to people, pets, and property. More information: <http://www.AFBEE.com>

## Agriculture Education: The Importance of Teaching Youth about Agriculture Jessica Sprain

What do you think of when you hear agriculture? Most people think of cows and corn. But did you know that you can’t get ready in the morning without agriculture? Or drive down the road? Or play sports? The primary purpose of agriculture is to produce the food we eat. However, the parts of plants and animals that are not edible are used to make additional products we use every day. In addition to food, agriculture provides fiber, housing and biofuels (Agriculture Issues Revealed). In fact, agriculture connects to your life every single day.

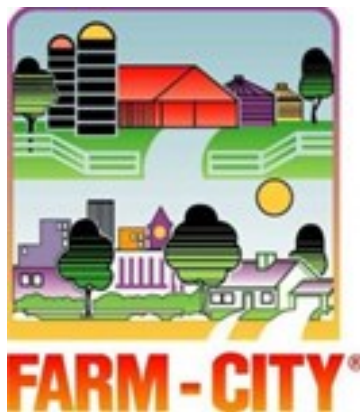
Agriculture and agribusiness contributes more than \$100 billion to Florida’s state economy and employs 1.9 million people in a diverse array of jobs. It is the second largest industry in the state (Ag in the Classroom). Agriculture is a not only a major part of Florida’s economy, but also Osceola County. Osceola County is the number one beef producing county in Florida, with selling \$91 million worth of agricultural products annually (USDA Ag Census). The agriculture industry plays a big role, which is why it is growing. However; as the industry grows there are fewer youth interested in going into the industry.

The U.S. faces a shortage of scientists that are “ag literate.” With fewer youth going into agriculture, the long-term future of the agricultural industry is in question. 25,700 new jobs for management and business, and 14,600 new jobs in agriculture and science and engineering, are created annually (Bureau of Labor and Statistics). Unfortunately, there currently aren’t enough graduates to meet the needs (USDA survey). This is the issue facing all of us today. So, what is Osceola County 4-H doing about it?

Osceola County 4-H is holding their annual Osceola County Farm City Day November 20th. It is an event that teaches 4th grade students and their teachers the role Florida’s agriculture plays in their daily lives. Students and teachers visit “stations” led by local and state partners who teach youth through interactive discussions and hands-on activities. According to a study done by Dyer, Lacey, & Osborne, students who are exposed to agriculture at a young age are more likely to decide to participate in Ag Ed. Programs in the future, along with choose a degree related to agriculture. We are giving youth an introductory experience to agriculture with the goal of getting them into the profession.

By getting youth interested in agriculture at a young age, we will help to achieve the goal of having “ag literate” scientists/professionals ready to fill the 14,600 new jobs in agriculture that are created annually. Therefore; we will help produce informed citizens who are able to participate in establishing policies that will help support a competitive agricultural industry in the United States and abroad (National Academic of Science’s Committee in Agricultural Education). Getting youth interested early in agriculture will change the future of professionals in agriculture in our state.

If you are interested in helping youth learn more about agriculture, please contact Jessica Sprain at [jsprain@ufl.edu](mailto:jsprain@ufl.edu). We would love more volunteers for Farm City Day!



**Did you know?** Employment opportunities exist across the board in agriculture. It is not just your grandma and grandpa’s farm anymore. Many career choices include: farm production, agribusiness management, agriscience, food science, banking, education, landscape architecture, urban planning, energy, tourism and many other fields (Agriculture Council of America).

## Poinsettias are Not Only for the Holidays Eva Pabon

As we approach the holiday season we see more and more poinsettias for sale. With this in mind, I would like to share some facts about poinsettias, as well some tips for prolonging their life cycles.

Joel Poinsett, a botanist who brought the plant from Mexico, introduced poinsettias to United States in 1825. Poinsettias are commonly called the “Christmas Eve Flower” feeding into the idea that they are only for the holiday season; also, they have been cataloged as *Euphorbia pulcherrima*.

Poinsettias are not typically poisonous, although some have allergic reactions to the latex in the plant sap. The original flower is very small and clustered in the center; the colorful and showy flowers that the populous usually calls poinsettias are actually modified petals called bracts. Today we have poinsettias in numerous colors, shapes, and forms. During the holiday season the plant is used for decoration indoors, although, there is no restriction to growing the plant outdoors. It is possible to enjoy the beautifully colored bracts year round. While the plant is indoors it is important to make sure it is in an area that has bright light, and lacks cold drafts. You will need to water the plant regularly, although it is important not to over water, only when the soil is dry, also, make sure the soil has good drainage. It is important to remove the decorative foil wrapper found at the base of the plant’s container, as neglecting to do so will cause water to build up at the bottom, which will cause the roots to rot, killing the flower. It is advised to gently spray the poinsettias with a mist of water, or place them in gravel trays. There is no need to fertilize the plants for over fertilization will cause the quality of the plant to deteriorate.

Once the holidays are through and the average temperature rises a few degrees it is time to plant the poinsettia outside. The poinsettia will grow into a lush green bush. Before the plant makes the transition to the outdoors it is beneficial to trim the fading bracts, leaving four to six inches of bare stem on each branch. Move the plant to a fairly shaded area to prevent the plant from burning up. Since the plant has been inside for an extended period of time it will take a week or two for it to adapt to direct sunlight.

Location is key-to the health of a Poinsettia-a spot that has the sun hitting all day is ideal. However, the plant requires 14 hours of complete darkness each day for 6 to 8 weeks to be able to flower, if the dark periods gets interrupted the flowering can be delayed or never flowers. For example, don’t plant the Poinsettia close to a window or in the front yard where there is artificial light. Poinsettias should also be planted in moist, well-drained, fertile soils. They won’t grow well in wet areas. After the plant is established fertilization, irrigation, and pruning are also essential. Once outside, it is now appropriate to fertilize, in moderation of course.

### **Woods Walks Resume with Cooler Fall Weather**

Woods Walks are free outdoor interpretive walks at local **natural** areas. Walks are moderate paced at a “saunter” on unpaved trails. Participants meet others interested in the outdoors and learn about plants and animals in our local parks and preserves.

Sign up online at <http://ocagriculture.eventbrite.com/>



# Family & Consumer Sciences Presents

## First Time Home Buyer Educational Course

Thursday, January 7, 2016 6pm – 9pm

Thursday, January 14, 2016 6pm – 9pm

Thursday, January 21, 2016 6pm – 9pm

Thursday, January 28, 2016 6pm – 9pm



Registration begins at

8:30am

December 1, 2015

Enter in the web page below to register. Course Fee: \$10

[www.tinyurl.com/myochome](http://www.tinyurl.com/myochome)

A blue ink signature of James Fletcher.

Osceola County Extension Director

James Fletcher