Spring has Sprung!

Although the azaleas didn’t flower much this spring, what a show everything else put on! The red buds, dogwoods, spirea (bridal wreath) and lorapetalum were gorgeous! I really enjoy all of the flowering trees and the wildflowers that bloom during the year in Bradford County, and I know many of our readers do too. Because there is so much interest in wildflowers, Master Gardener Margie Stone, who completed the Master Gardener course in 2009, has written our Featured Plant article on native Rain Lilies and will be writing regular articles about wildflowers that can be found in Bradford County. Now is the time to get out in the garden and the plant calendars on pages 2, 3 and 4 will help you figure out what to plant and when to plant it. Master Gardener Wendy Helmey-Hartman has written an article (page 5) on the giant swallowtail butterfly. People often bring in the larvae of this beautiful butterfly thinking it is an alien creature! Attracting Wildlife, the fifth of the nine Florida Friendly Landscaping Principles has lots of tips to help you attract, care for and enjoy the critters that visit your yard. You will find these tips on pages 6 and 7. And finally, for anyone who has suffered from pollen this spring, there is an article on page 8 about oak trees and the pollen they produce. Happy Gardening!

By Master Gardener Laurie Compton

Rain Lily (Zephyranthes spp)

All along SR 100 and CR 18 through Bradford County, you may have noticed these darling white flowers popping up, especially given the rain we have had recently. Of the Florida native rain lilies, Z.atamsco thrives in the moist flatwoods that are found in Bradford County. They grow in full to part sun, are pest resistant, and require little care. These factors make them an ideal addition to our Florida gardens. Some gardeners use these plants in water gardens. The flowers emerge in early winter and die down in late spring. The bulbs can be split by dividing off the bulblets from the parent bulb. It may take several years, however, for the new plant to flower. Zephyranthes, like other bulbs, adapt to drought and cold by losing leaves until rainfall. In gardens, the moisture in the soil is usually enough to maintain the plant. The blooms usually only last a day or two, but the plant continues to bloom often. Source: Ifas publication ENH1151: Rainlily, Zephyranthes and Habranthus spp.: Low Maintenance Flowering Bulbs for Florida Gardens,

By Master Gardener Margie Stone
New varieties of **Annual** coleus do well in sun or shade and provide vivid colors and patterns for months. Louisiana iris is a **Bulb** that thrives in most soil types and makes a beautiful cut flower. This is the last month to plant annual flower **Seeds** that need to germinate before hot weather returns. Try zinnia, strawflower and salvia. Continue planting warm season **Vegetable** crops, such as bush, pole and lima beans, cantaloupes, collards and sweet corn. Mulch well to prevent weeds and provide irrigation if there has been a lack of rainfall.

*Source: [http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/lawn_and_garden/calendar/](http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/lawn_and_garden/calendar/)*

**In the Garden: What to Do in April**

Monitor landscape plants weekly for **Pests**, like aphids, on tender new growth. It is a good idea to “scout” for pests on a regular basis; the sooner the pests are discovered, the sooner damage can be controlled. Divide clumps of **perennials and bulbs** to expand garden beds or pass-along to friends. Many **Lawn Problems** mimic insect damage. Confirm the damage is being caused by insects before applying a pesticide. Replant **Caladium** bulbs that were dug last fall and stored for the winter. Planting season for **Shrubs** is here and there are a wide variety of shrubs that can be added to the landscape now. Some to try: dwarf crape myrtle, gardenia and bottlebrush. **Mulch** conserves moisture during dry weather and minimizes weeds in landscape beds.

*Source: [http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/lawn_and_garden/calendar/](http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/lawn_and_garden/calendar/)*

**Wildlife Calendar: April**

- Bobwhite quail nest now through September.
- Watch for hummingbirds feeding on blooms of columbine, buckeye, and others.
- Black bears begin moving after winter's inactivity.
- Endangered Gray Bats return to Florida caves to raise young.
- Plant extra parsley for black swallowtail butterfly larvae to eat.
- Blooming wildflowers and pitcher plants blanket the wet savannas of the Apalachicola National Forest.

*Source: [http://www.wec.ufl.edu/extension/wildlife_info/happenings/](http://www.wec.ufl.edu/extension/wildlife_info/happenings/)*

**Did You Know?** The extremely short legs of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird prevent it from walking or hopping. The best it can do is shuffle along a perch. Nevertheless, it scratches its head and neck by raising its foot up and over its wing.

**In the Garden: What to Plant in May**

Plant **Annuals** that can take summer heat: salvias, torenia, wax begonias, and ornamental peppers. Surrounding the plants with a two to three inch layer of mulch will help retain water and keep the roots cool. Planting early, mid, and late blooming varieties of daylily **Bulbs** will insure months of color from these low maintenance plants. Plant heat loving **Herbs**, including basil, Mexican tarragon, and rosemary. **Vegetables** to plant now are okra, southern peas and sweet potatoes.

*Source: http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/lawn_and_garden/calendar/*

**Wildlife Calendar: May**

- Painted Buntings nest through summer in northeast Florida.
- Bald eagles begin migrating north.
- Breeding begins for many resident and summer songbirds.
- The last of the cedar waxwings and goldfinches head for their northern breeding grounds.
- Alligators begin to court and make loud resounding 'bells'.
- Soft-shell and alligator snapping turtles complete egg laying.
- American lotus bloom at Paynes Prairies State Preserve.

*Source: http://www.wec.ufl.edu/extension/wildlife_info/happenings/

**Did You Know?** The American lotus (Nelumbo lutea) is an emersed native. Its leaves may be emersed above the water or floating on it. The plant can be found in muddy, shallow waters such as lake margins, or in water as deep as 6 feet. In some areas, it can be invasive!

*Source: http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/node/10*
In the Garden: What to Plant in June

Annuals that can take full sun during the increasingly hot summer months include celosia, portulacas, vinca, and some coleus. Summer’s warm, rainy weather is the perfect time to plant Palms. Plant heat loving Herbs, including basil, Mexican tarragon, and rosemary. Rosemary is an excellent herb for the Florida garden. It thrives in dry, sandy soil and is also salt-tolerant. Not just edible, this shrub can grow up to six feet and is sometimes shaped into topiaries. Vegetables to plant now are okra, southern peas, lima beans, and sweet potatoes.

Source: http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/lawn_and_garden/calendar/

In the Garden: What to Do in June

Monitor the garden weekly for harmful insect Pests. Knowing which insects attack a plant can aid in identification and treatment. June is normally the start of the rainy season, but if rainfall has been spotty, monitor lawns for drought stress and Irrigate as needed. Now is a good time to produce more plants by Propagation. Try air layering, grafting, division, or cuttings. Watch for nutrient deficiencies or environmental problems with Palms and Cycads and correct by using an appropriate treatment. Many summer flowering shrubs, like hibiscus, oleander, and crepe myrtle, benefit from frequent light Pruning during the warm months. Rejuvenate Lawn Areas where grass doesn’t grow well, by replacing with versatile ground covers. Lawn insects are very active during the warm months. Check frequently for Lawn Problems and keep insects in check with early treatment.

Source: http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/lawn_and_garden/calendar/

Wildlife Calendar: June

- Mockingbirds may attack pedestrians who wander too close to nesting sites.
- The Southern Flying Squirrel is starting its breeding season.
- It's the height of the Gopher Tortoise breeding season.
- Snook begin moving into inlets and passes.
- Tarflowers bloom in flatwoods.
- June 1, 1952 First sighting of cattle egrets in Florida.
- June 14, 1969 Last sighting of Ivory-billed woodpeckers in Florida.

Did You Know? Gopher tortoise populations are scattered throughout the coastal plain of the south eastern U.S. Most are found in north-central Florida and southern Georgia. The species has been severely reduced along Florida’s southeast coast and throughout much of the Florida Panhandle. In Florida alone, gopher tortoise populations have dwindled to an estimated 30 percent of their original numbers. Source UF/IFAS
What's Buggin You? For this edition, I will discuss a beautiful insect you may find in your garden: the giant swallowtail. This butterfly is very common throughout Florida as well as the rest of the Americas. It may be more difficult to observe during January and February in northern Florida, but it is active throughout the year in most parts of the state. Although the adult “butterfly” stage of this species is usually welcome in the garden, the larval “caterpillar” stage can cause damage to many citrus trees.

The adult giant swallowtail is easy to identify due to the distinct coloration on the wings. This butterfly species has wings that are mostly black with a yellow diagonal bar on the topside, while the underside of the wings is yellow. This butterfly’s eggs, which are cream to brown in color and may have an orange coating, can be found individually on the upper surfaces of leaves on host plants. The caterpillars (also known as “orangedogs”) typically resemble bird droppings and range from black and white to brown and cream in color.

Adult giant swallowtails feed upon nectar from many different types of flowers and can be frequently found in butterfly gardens. They are known to feed on plants such as azalea, Japanese honeysuckle, bougainvillea, swamp milkweed, and goldenrod. The caterpillars typically feed on citrus and can defoliate small potted citrus plants. These caterpillars can be hand-picked from a plant if they become a problem.

In summary, the giant swallowtail is an easily recognizable, attractive visitor to your garden whose caterpillar stage may cause some damage to small citrus trees. Enjoy this guest in your yard and remove the caterpillars if they cause a problem. 

By Master Gardener Wendy Helmey-Hartman

Florida is a state renowned for its diverse and unique ecosystems. But rapid development, particularly in coastal areas, is continuing to destroy wildlife habitat. As our communities expand, we rightly lament the loss of native birds and other animals. But did you know there is much you can do at home to create a safe haven for these displaced Floridians?

By following the simple tips in this article, your Florida-Friendly lawn and garden can become a sanctuary for wildlife, as well as part of a migratory passage between one wild space and another. Animals need to move from place to place, just like people. They have trouble traveling in heavily urban and suburban landscapes, but you can help them by joining your Florida-Friendly yard with others in the neighborhood to create a “natural corridor”—a safe, traversable route between woodlands, wetlands, or other wild areas. Use a variety of plants in your yard’s design to attract many different species of animals, from birds and butterflies to snakes and squirrels. Your home landscape will become a refuge for critters in need of shade, rest, food, and water. In return, your landscape will become a living, lovely part of Florida. Talk with your neighbors and community organizations about Florida-Friendly Landscaping™, and encourage others to make their yards as hospitable as yours.

Try a few of these ideas to lure wildlife to your yard:

**Provide food.** Select plants with seeds, fruit, foliage, or flowers that butterflies, birds, and other wildlife like to eat. Berries, fleshy fruits, nuts, and acorns are all treats for many animals

**Supply water.** Any water you provide will attract wildlife. You could have running water in the form of a natural feature, such as a pond, creek, or other body of fresh water, but a fountain or birdbath will also beckon wildlife. Empty and clean your birdbath every few days. Do not clean it with soap or bleach—just physically scrub all surfaces with a brush or scouring-type sponge. Change the water regularly to prevent mosquito breeding and bacterial contamination.

**Leave snags.** Leave snags, which are the trunks of dead trees, in place if they do not create a hazard. Many birds use snags for perching, nesting, and feeding.

**Manage pets.** If you permit pets to harass or kill wildlife, you will only hinder any efforts you make toward attracting wildlife.

**Reduce insecticide use.** Each time you apply an insecticide to your landscape, you reduce insect populations, which form an important food source for birds.
Some chemicals can also poison birds and other animals that feed on affected insects.

**Reduce the amount of mowed lawn area.** Unmowed areas can contain more plant species than mowed areas, providing more potential food sources and habitat for wildlife. Reduce the mowed area around your house, especially in low-traffic areas, such as corners of the yard.

**Increase vertical layering.** Plant a variety of plants in different sizes and heights to provide more cover and feeding opportunities for diverse species of wildlife.

Source: [http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu/handbook/Attract_Wildlife_vSept09.pdf](http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu/handbook/Attract_Wildlife_vSept09.pdf)

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**Snags have great appeal for various woodpeckers.**

**Layers of vegetation entice wildlife and add visual interest.**

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To attract specific types of animals or insects to your yard, think about their needs.

**Bats:** A small bat house in your yard can provide a roost for bats. An individual bat can eat thousands of insects in a night and bats also serve as important pollinators for many flowering plants, including fruit trees. Bat houses aren’t complex structures and designs are easy to find in books and on the Internet. Your bat house should be tall, shallow, and hung at least twelve to fifteen feet above the ground on the south or southeast side of a tree, pole, or building. The site should be fairly open and easy for bats to see.

**Birds** Design planted areas that include a tree canopy, smaller understory trees and shrubs, grasses, and flowers. Allow grasses and flowers to go to seed on occasion—this is a real draw for birds.

**Butterflies:** A combination of both larval (caterpillar) and nectar plants will attract a variety of butterflies to your yard. Nectar plants provide food for adult butterflies, while larval plants are food sources for the caterpillar stage. If you want to attract butterflies to your yard, expect a certain level of damage to certain plants from hungry caterpillars. See the plant list online at [http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu](http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu) for help with choosing species that attract butterflies.
This spring has been hard on the allergies, and one of the main culprits is oak pollen. One way of knowing the oak trees are blooming is when you see yellow pollen on your car or in standing water. The oak trees don’t really drop pollen just to make us miserable (although I had my doubts about that this spring!). Some plants have showy flowers, and they are showy for a reason: they have to attract insect pollinators to transfer their pollen. Oaks do not have showy flowers; they depend on the wind to spread their pollen, and it is these oaks, along with cedars, pines, hickories, grass and the infamous ragweed that makes us suffer from allergies.

Windblown pollen is produced in massive quantities and can be carried for miles on the breeze. After oak trees bloom, the oak flowers, (catkins), drop to the ground and become a nuisance by gathering by your back door, waiting to come into your house. (They also find a way in the house on the tails of long haired cats pets). If pollination has been successful, the result is the development of acorns.

Oaks can be divided into two broad categories: the red (sometimes called black) oaks and the white oaks. The main difference between the groups is the time it takes for the seed, or acorn, to mature. Although red oaks produce flowers each spring, the acorns of these trees take two seasons to mature after they are formed, leading to the designation as biennial oaks. The leaf lobes on red oaks are usually pointed or tipped with a small spine (bristle) at the tip of the leaf. Examples of red oaks include the laurel oak, Southern red oak, turkey oak and water oaks. Water, laurel and turkey oaks grow rapidly but have a relatively short life span (25 to 50 years), resulting in a tree that breaks apart just as it grows to a desirable size. The Southern Red Oak has a long life span relative to most other red oak species and a slow growth rate. White oaks are generally longer lived than their red cousins, with some living hundreds of years. Some examples of oaks in the white group include the live oak, post oak and the swamp chestnut oak. White oaks generally have a rounded leaf tip and rounded lobes without bristles. Their acorns are sweeter than those of the bitter red oak group, making them more palatable to both humans and wildlife. After pollination the white oak acorns grow and mature in only one season. Oaks that have acorns that mature in the year they are formed are designated as annual oaks.

Although they can make us miserable in the spring, oaks provide valuable food for wildlife in the form of acorns. White-tailed deer, squirrels, mice, rabbits, raccoons, opossums, foxes, and wild hogs eat acorns. Birds also feed on acorns, including wild turkey, bobwhite quail, wood ducks, mallards, woodpeckers, crows, and jays. And who doesn’t love sitting under a beautiful old oak tree with a glass of iced tea, admiring your handiwork in the garden?

By Master Gardener Laurie Compton