

BUGS & SHRUBS BUZZ

Walkable Groundcovers

—Doug Caldwell

I'm always looking for interesting groundcovers, with say, a maximum height of six inches or so. Ideally, this groundcover would cover the larger open areas in the landscape. This is commonly referred to as the lawn area. It must tolerate moderate foot-traffic and not need mowing more than a few times a year and be able to tough-out dry and cold periods without losing its attractiveness.

Lately, many neighborhood grass lawns ('*Floratam*' St. Augustinegrass) are sickly and thinning due to large patch disease, take-all root rot, insects, drought and neglect. '*Floratam*' has been the "workhorse" groundcover since it was released in 1973 by both the University of Florida and Texas A&M (get it, 'FloraTAM?'). But the stuff is not barefoot friendly. It is comparable to walking on Brillo pads! Plus there must be some alternatives which don't require as much water. Yes, usually the problem is the PEOPLE who overwater, but St. Augustinegrass (St. Aug.) is known to require more water than other turf grasses.



Centipedegrass growing at the Extension Service Office at 14700 Immokalee Road

<http://turfpath.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/BMPmanual.pdf>

(See Page 13).

There is no arguing the need to conserve water. And, for me, less maintenance (time) is of keen interest. Therefore, the quest!

I see two main camps in this lawn groundcover issue. Camp A is the vertical monospecies purists who want the outdoor carpet look. The Camp B folks just want it green, but tidy. The species mix is not critical; those in Camp C are the type who do not understand curbside appeal (a big deal in this buyers' market!) and pretty much ignore their yard (and armpits and may have goats on their rooftop as in the Hormel TV commercial; why did his name have to be Doug?).

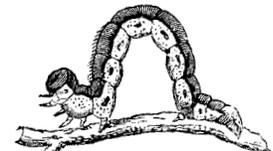
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SeYlgD2YjIE>

Camp C is a special project group and will be excluded for now.

The options for Camp A folks seem to be grasses only. Are they obsessive-compulsive? And it must be a monoculture of a given species. It appears lawn purity has its roots in Levittown, Long Island. Back in the mid-1940s, Abe Levitt initiated the first gated community and coined lawn maintenance axioms for his

postwar, suburban development. "A fine carpet of green grass stamps the inhabitants as good neighbors, as desirable citizens." In fact if you didn't mow your lawn once a week, Levitt sent a mowing crew out and billed the homeowner. Eww, the social stigma is hatched!

All the Links in this Newsletter are LIVE. Just Click on Them and They Will Lead You to More Information and Downloads



Three grass species with lower water requirements than St. Augustinegrass (in home lawn situations) are centipede grass, bermudagrass and bahiagrass. Centipede grass grows like a miniature St. Augustinegrass. It is a light green shade but very low maintenance. A new, darker green variety is *'Hammock'* centipede grass. There are some newer varieties of bermudagrass which could be maintained at two inches or less with a rotary mower, one is *'Celebration'* bermudagrass. However, these grasses don't tolerate shade very well, so if you need a sod under the ole oak tree they won't work. Although centipede grass is the best choice of the three above. I'm skipping zoysiagrass as I'd classify it as high maintenance.

Certain varieties of St. Augustinegrass are slower growing than *'Floritam'* and will tolerate shade better, such as *'Seville'* and *'Delmar'*. But, some in the landscape maintenance industry claim these varieties don't seem to live more than 2 or 3 years. Not all agree on this, however.

All of these monocots have unique pest or cultural issues which should be studied before planting. More information is available at:

http://hort.ufl.edu/yourfloridalawn/turfgrass_selection.shtml

Back to Camp B. The choice is limited, unfortunately, to plants which are available commercially, and that is rhizomal peanut *Arachis glabrata* *'Ecoturf'* or *'Needle Point'*. This groundcover will take a few years to fill in. The flavor of the flower reminds one of peanut butter! Imagine that! According to Craig Hutchinson, President of Landscape Florida, you may need to look out for rabbits wanting to nibble the peanut flower and plants as well. The other type of peanut plant you will find on the market is stoloniferous, which may fill in faster (aggressive runners), but it requires more water and is prone to mites and winter-kill.

<http://tinyurl.com/3fbylsu>



Be sure to use the rhizomal type peanut for a groundcover



Muehlenbeckia axillaris 'Nana'.

A new introduction called wire vine (*Muehlenbeckia axillaris 'Nana'*) is another fine textured plant which may work well as a lawn species. It may be too aggressive though! Stay tuned for more on this one.

Within Camp B is a subset group of individuals who just want their lawn area to be green and aren't worried about the uniform texture thing (Camp A individuals may call it a chopped spinach or patchwork quilt look). One way

PHOTO CREDIT: American Farms Website

this typically may work: new plants which migrate into my (for example) thinning St. Aug. yard are evaluated to see how compatible they may be as a ground cover. However, I can't seem to find too many people who like this approach. Number one is my wife. And why do I keep finding marketing cards from landscape companies stuck in my door proclaiming they can help me solve my yard "problems"? Am I stuck in a world of vertical monocot obsessive compulsives?

So, some examples of typical lawn settlers (encroachers?) are Mexican "clover", which is also known as large-flower pusley (*Richardia grandiflora*) and threeflower



*Mexican clover also known as large-flower pusley (*Richardia grandiflora*) attracts bees and butterflies.*

beggarweed (*Desmodium triflorum*). During times of drought or irrigation failure, I have seen St. Augustine-grass lawns go brown and the *Richardia* was in full bloom and not stressed. The *Desmodium* is also drought tolerant and makes a neat, fine textured groundcover. I cannot for the life of me understand why my father is determined to kill this legume species in his dwindling Bahiagrass lawn. Even the Camp A people might envy a solid stand of this very fine textured gem. Why look a gift horse in the mouth?

Another broadleaf plant, green shrimp plant (*Blechnum pyramidatum*), is invading yards in my neighborhood. It is a coarse plant if left alone, but finer textured when mowed. I rather like it, but I seem to be in the minority. It was set back by cold temperatures these last 2 winters (2009-10 and 2010-11), but it rebounds faithfully by mid-May. There are some plants I won't accept. One is the yellow flowering sheep sorrel (*Oxalis spp.*) which



*Threeflower beggarweed (*Desmodium triflorum*) is a fine textured mat-forming legume.*



*This lawn is mostly green shrimp plant (*Blechnum pyramidatum*), the host for the malachite butterfly.*

has those little okra shaped seed pods which explode, throwing seeds all over the landscape beds.

For more plant ideas, go to:

http://miami-dade.ifas.ufl.edu/Pubs_LnG2.shtml#ground

and see ground cover articles by Dr. John McLaughlin. This last web site is a treasure chest of horticulture info.

Worried about being ostracized or fined by the HOA landscape monitors if you experiment? Not to worry! Senate Bill 2080, which passed in early 2010 states that a deed restriction or covenant may not prohibit any property owner from implementing Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ on his or her land and states a local government ordinance may not prohibit any property owner from implementing Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ on his or her land. It also states local governments must use the Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ standards and guidelines when developing landscape irrigation and Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ ordinances.

To see the bill, click here:

<http://tinyurl.com/3nctnzy>

Of course if one is doing a major overhaul, you are better off getting your community architectural review board approval of what you have in mind. You need to use the right plant for the right place and sometimes St. Augustinegrass is not the right plant if it requires extra fertilizer, pesticides and water to survive. Broaden your perspective and remember there is green sustainability (water conservation) and less maintenance (you can read more or go to the beach!) if you can accept multiple species in your lawn. Consider that selecting drought tolerant groundcovers, that is, lawn diversity, will lead to sustainability!

If you have some other walkable groundcover ideas (no synthetic turf or gravel please) or feedback please email me. ■ dougbug@ufl.edu

July Fruit Tree Class Reaped a Big Turnout



David & Jenny Burd – Two of the experts who made the class entertaining and a resounding success.

The Fruit Tree Class was held on Friday July 23 at the Extension office. We had 80 people in attendance.

Speakers were Dr. Bob Rouse (peaches, plums, nectarines & citrus greening update) & Billy Hopkins (grafting and propagation) plus a mango tasting and growing tips from mango experts David and Jenny Burd. Hopkins Tropical Fruit Nursery provided free strawberry trees (Muntingia calabura) and other fruit trees for purchase. See Michael Spencer's Naples Daily News article about the event:

<http://tinyurl.com/3kelc43>

New Pest Alert! Rugose Spiraling Whitefly

(AKA, the Gumbo Limbo Spiraling Whitefly)

—Doug Caldwell

PHOTO CREDIT: Holly Glenn UF/IFAS



The new rugose spiraling whitefly makes a unique spiraling pattern when it deposits its eggs on the undersides of leaves.

Gumbo limbo is a native tree, more commonly known as the “tourist tree” due to its reddish peeling bark. In some horticulture circles one hears that native plants have fewer pests than other ornamental plants. This may have been true 50 years ago, but with all of the international trade and commerce, we constantly have new foreign pests, some have a hunger for our native plants. A new whitefly, this time it’s a pest from Central America or Mexico, which hasn’t reached our county (as far as I know! as of August 2011), but it is in Monroe and Dade (in March 2009) counties, is the rugose spiraling whitefly (aka, the gumbo limbo spiraling whitefly or *Aleurodicus rugioperculatus*).

This is a large whitefly, about 2.5 mm and a slow flyer. It deposits eggs in a distinctive spiral pattern which is highlighted by the white waxy substance it also leaves behind. One person called me from Key Biscayne, an outbreak area, and exclaimed that there were so many whiteflies and wax in his landscape that it was almost like snow! These insects also produce significant amounts of “honeydew” which is the liquid waste it excretes. This “honeydew” is then colonized by a black fungus and called sooty mold. This sticky “honeydew” can accumulate on objects beneath infested trees and slow moving pedestrians.

This insect has a host list that would make the spread at the Golden Corral look sparse! Some of the 38 hosts besides gumbo limbo include: copperleaf, Norfolk Island pine, periwinkle, cocoplum, buttonwood, mango, live oak, coconut, areca, Christmas and sabal palms. Also see:

<http://tinyurl.com/3qnc2dz>

What To Do

Fortunately, this whitefly isn’t as damaging as the ficus whitefly. Some good bugs have been found attacking it, a parasitic wasp and lady beetles. So avoid spraying with long residual pesticides as the good attack bugs may end up as co-lateral damage. Some “softer” pesticides which have only a few days residual are horticultural mineral oils and insecticidal soaps. But be careful with our hot, muggy weather now those “soft” pesticides could cause some foliage damage. So wait until things cool (?) and just spray a branch or two to see if there will be foliage damage. If you suspect an outbreak of this new whitefly, please call or e-mail me! If you need some other options refer to this article by Dr. Catharine Mannion:

<http://tinyurl.com/3qmwpmk>



PHOTO CREDIT: Carol Sweat

This 'Stop Light' croton is infested by the damaging croton scale which also attacks gumbo limbo. The large females on the twigs are sometimes overlooked as they resemble plant buds. The males on the undersides of the leaves stand out more.

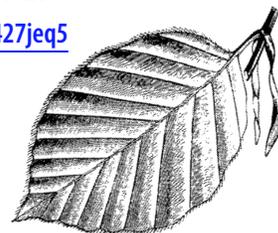
New Pest Alert!

[continued]

Another new pest which attacks gumbo limbo and crotons and firebush is the, for lack of a better common name, croton-firebush scale. Master Gardener Carol Sweat alerted me to have everyone check their crotons for this killer scale. ■

More details are at:

<http://tinyurl.com/427jeq5>



Collier County Fertilizer Ordinance

The Board of Collier County Commissioners approved an ordinance based on the 2010 FDEP Model Ordinance (see link) on July 26, 2011.

<http://tinyurl.com/3s5r5fq>

You will also need to refer to refer to DACS Labeling Requirements for Urban Turf Fertilizers Rule, Rule 5E-1.003(2), see:

<http://tinyurl.com/4ykkhjc>

This allows more flexibility with no calendar black out period (no applications during storm or flood warnings) and fewer restrictions on the type of fertilizer. This change all came about rather unexpectedly in response to a July 25 letter from John Costigan, the Deputy General Counsel of the Florida Department of Agriculture and

Consumer Services. The Department was concerned that the earlier proposed fertilizer ordinance may have been in conflict with recently enacted legislation which purportedly preempts the entire issue of fertilizer composition and sale. The State will work with local governments in an attempt to obtain statewide uniformity on this issue. The earlier proposed changes to the Model Ordinance may be reviewed following further communications with the State. The effective date is 8/9/11. The commercial applicators are supposed to have an individual in their organization trained within 180 days. This time next year all businesses will need a licensed individual to get their County business license renewal. This Landscape Fertilizer BMP training is conducted at Rookery Bay at 300 Tower Road. ■

See training schedule at:

<http://tinyurl.com/3aq8mcs>



PHOTO CREDIT: Renee Wilson, Rookery Bay

Doug Caldwell has been assisting with the on-going Landscape Fertilizer BMP training since 2006

CLASSES • All Classes Are Free!!!

Our Fall series of horticulture classes for the public and professionals will be held at Naples Botanical Garden at 4820 Bayshore Drive. Please call the Extension Office to reserve a seat at least 3 days before the class.
Phone: 353-4244

At the Botanical Garden

- October 14** Flowering Trees with Stephen Brown 2:00 to 4:00
County Extension Director
& Horticulture Program Leader
University of Florida/IFAS
- October 21** Proper Pruning by Doug Caldwell 2:00 to 4:00
- October 26** Taking Care of Turfgrass & New Cultivars
Dr. Lee Berndt 2:00 to 4:00
Vice President, Research and Development
Environmental Turf, Inc.
- November 16** 16 Annuals and Perennials for Color
by Dr. Kim Moore (UF/IFAS-Ft. Lauderdale)
and Jim Pugh, American Farms

Pesticide Training: Limited Commercial Landscape Maintenance ("Round up")

"Round up" or LCLM classes (test preparation and required 6 hours). Please call DACS (Dept. Agriculture and Consumer Services) Bureau of Entomology and Pest Control to get your application packets (850-617-7997).

Call the Extension Office (353-4244) to reserve a seat and get a study guide. Be early to make sure you have the correct documents. You will also need a passport size photo to put on your application. The dates are:

- October 8** (Spanish) starts at 8:00 am.
November 4 (English) starts at 8:00 am

SW Florida Yard & Garden Show

- October 29** 9:00am to 4:00pm
October 30 9:00am to 3:00pm

<http://tinyurl.com/3cqqq46>

You Can Further Your Education by Watching these YouTube Videos

Black Olive Caterpillar
<http://tinyurl.com/43a06fj>

Brown Patch Lawn Disease
<http://tinyurl.com/3cjvdy2>

Florida Wax Scale
<http://tinyurl.com/3e97yxf>

Japanese Blueberry/ Lobate Lac Scale
<http://tinyurl.com/3avmj9j>

Snowbush Caterpillar
<http://tinyurl.com/4315sg4>

Sod Webworm
<http://tinyurl.com/3clgf2c>

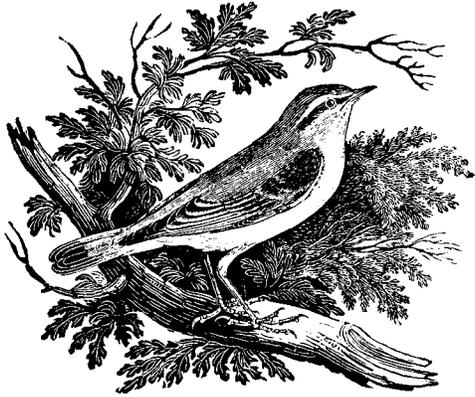
Tree Pruning For Health And Safety
<http://tinyurl.com/3npqncy>

Tree Pruning For Hurricanes
<http://tinyurl.com/4yr9ycr>

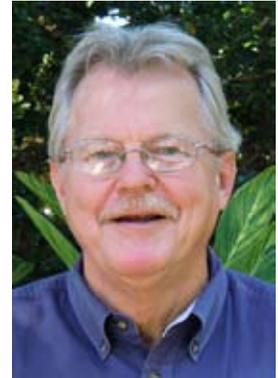
Yard & Garden Show
<http://tinyurl.com/3v2p2q4>

Ag Tour Video
<http://tinyurl.com/3eycspu>





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Beautify your
Landscape and
Protect the
Environment!”*



Information Links:

Dr. Gilman has tons of wonderful information and research updates. The Great Southern Tree Conference proceedings from 2006 to 2010 are also also posted. <http://hort.ufl.edu/woody/over-mulching.shtml>

Want details on cultural habits and new plants, see: <http://floridafriendlyplants.com>

Diagnosing woody ornamental nutrient problems: <http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/nutdef/index.shtml>

For diagnosing palm problems, see: http://flrec.ifas.ufl.edu/palm_prod/palm_diseases.shtml

Ornamental Outlook, has free on-line CEUs (don't take any more than one year old): <http://www.ornamentaloutlook.com/index.php>



THE FINE PRINT

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BUGS & SHRUBS BUZZ

*A Quarterly–Or So–Newsletter Containing
the Latest Dirt for Commercial Landscapers
& the Home Gardener*

Doug Caldwell, Ph.D.
University of Florida
Collier Co. Extension [A Public Services Department]
Commercial Landscape Horticulture
Landscape Entomologist
14700 Immokalee Road
Naples, Florida 34120

Phone: (239) 353-4244 ext: 203
Cell Phone: (239) 273-0073
Fax: (239) 353-7127
Email: dougbug@ufl.edu

<http://collier.ifas.ufl.edu/CommHort/HomeCommHort.shtml>

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