

NEWSLETTER

VillageWalk Garden Club
of Bonita Springs

INVASIVE PLANTS AND THE BRAZILIAN PEPPER

The topic of invasive plants has come up at club meetings and has been a constant source of discussion with the volunteer gardeners in the Butterfly Garden. There are over 1400 non-native plants in Florida and most of them are not an issue, but there are some plants that are “bad actors.”

According to the University of Florida /IFAS Invasive Species Council, an invasive plant is defined as:

“A plant species that is non-native to a specific geographic area, was introduced intentionally or unintentionally, and does or can cause harm to the environment, economy, or humans.”

The Florida Invasive Species Council (FISC) classifies invasive plants into two categories.



Brazilian Pepper in VillageWalk

“Category 1: Plants which are altering native plant communities by displacing native species, changing community structures or ecological functions, or hybridizing with natives.” These plants are of severe concern and should not be used in any landscape. In some cases, they are prohibited by law.

“Category 2: Plants that have increased in abundance or frequency, but they have not yet significantly altered native plant communities.” These plants are monitored to determine if they will need to be moved to Category 1. Caution should be exercised with these plants and they probably shouldn’t be used.

The lists of the Cat 1 and Cat 2 invasive plants are available online. <https://www.floridainvasives.org/plant-list/> A prime example of a Cat 1 invasive plant is the Brazilian Pepper (*Schinus molle*) tree/bush. Originally from South America, the Brazilian Pepper was introduced to Florida in the 1800’s as an ornamental plant because of its attractive foliage and berries. The plant gets its name from the ripe red berries that look like peppercorns in color and size. In addition, crushed leaves have a strong peppery smell. Despite its nice-sounding common names like Florida Holly and Christmasberry, it is one of the worst non-native invasive species in Florida. The Brazilian Pepper is a major threat to native vegetation. Wildlife like birds eat and disperse the numerous berries which contain seeds. Most likely for this reason, the Brazilian Pepper is found in scattered locations around VillageWalk including the wild areas near the Butterfly Garden. According to the Florida Dept of Agriculture, the plant also produces chemicals that prevent the growth of vegetation around it which allows it to outcompete native species. The Brazilian Pepper is the most widespread invasive plant in Florida. The sale, transportation and cultivation of the Brazilian Pepper is prohibited.

Some people can have an allergic reaction to the leaves, flowers, fruit, and sap. It is a relative of Florida native plants such as poisonwood, poison oak, and poison ivy so these reactions are not totally unexpected. Thanks to J.B. Schuetz for making contributions to this article.

DAHOON HOLLY - A BRAZILIAN PEPPER LOOK-ALIKE

The Dahoon Holly (*Ilex cassine*) is a Florida native plant and displays distinctive red berries in the Fall and Winter.

It takes the form of a shrub or tree. The Dahoon Holly has been used as a landscape plant in VillageWalk although it does best in wetland areas like the Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. The Dahoon Holly is sometimes mistaken for the Brazilian Pepper because their leaves and berries are similar. On closer examination, there are differences in their leaves with the Brazilian pepper leaves displaying more prominent veins. Also, the crushed leaves of the Dahoon Holly do not smell like pepper. Interestingly, the male and female flowers are found on separate trees (dioecious). To form berries on the female tree, both male and female trees are necessary. Birds, small mammals and deer eat the berries.



Dahoon Holly in VillageWalk



BUTTERFLY FUN FACT

If you are in the Butterfly Garden on a cold morning, you might not see many butterflies flying around. If you do see them, they are immobile. The reason for this behavior is because they are cold-blooded animals, and their body temperature is dependent on the surrounding environment. When it's too cold their muscles do not function well. Monarch butterflies can only crawl when the temperature is at least 41°F (5°C) and they are able to fly when it is at least 55°F (13°C). In general, they are less active when it is colder and more active when it's hotter. To heat themselves up above the ambient air temperature, butterflies will bask in the sun. Like other animals, some butterflies will shiver to increase their body temperature.

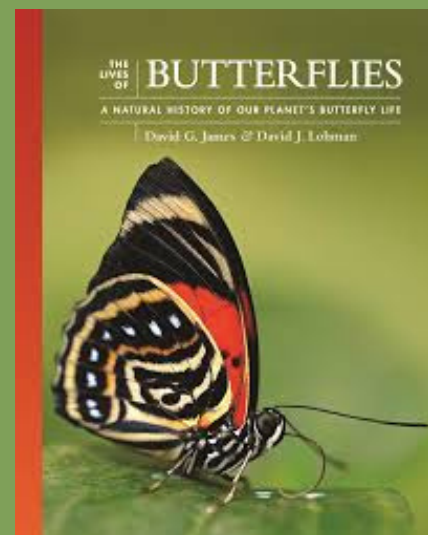
Main Sources: University of Wisconsin – Madison and “The Lives of Butterflies” by James and Lohman.)



NEW BUTTERFLY BOOK

While browsing the Barnes and Noble bookstore in Estero, we ran across a newly published book (2024) on butterflies.

Title: The Lives of Butterflies - A Natural History of Our Planet's Butterfly Life
Authors: David G. James & David J. Lohman



It has information about all aspects of butterflies' lives and is beautifully illustrated with photographs of butterflies from all over the world.

HOLIDAY DINNER PARTY



The Hospitality Committee hosted the annual Holiday Dinner Party on December 5. The theme was "Candy Cane Lane", and the beautiful decorations created a festive atmosphere for the celebration. It was a wonderful event with delicious food, a slide show of the past year's activities, music (keyboard + vocals), a sing-along, great company, and lively conversation. It gets better and better every year!



FUN HAD BY ALL!



Thank
you!

● INSTALLATION OF BUTTERFLY GARDEN TRI-FOLD BROCHURE ●

Dispensers for the new Butterfly Garden tri-fold brochures have been installed on three of the brown wooden informational displays that are located along the sidewalk near Garden 4, Garden 6/Corner Garden, and Garden 10.

Please share the brochure with your family, friends, neighbors, and visitors so that they can learn more about our beautiful Butterfly Garden.



2025 GARDEN CLUB MEETINGS

The 2025 garden club meetings will be at **1:00 PM** on Tuesdays.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>
• January 21, 2025	- CREW Land & Water Trust
• February 18, 2025	- Hibiscus
• March 18, 2025	- Microplastics
• April 15, 2025	- TBD
• May 20, 2025	- Plant Exchange

**All VillageWalk residents are welcome
Bring a friend!**



● TRIPS AND TOURS ●

Jessie's Tropical Fruit Farm - Farm tour, plant cuttings, and fruit tastings, January 23 @ 9:00 am

Shangri-La Springs - Historic tour and organic gardens, February 2025

American Farms - Tour of two farms providing annual & perennial flowers from Orlando to Miami since 1991, March 2025

Island Walk Littoral - Lakes tour & lunch at the Island Walk restaurant, April 2025

The trips depart from the Bocce parking lot.

There's an interest in a Tram Tour with an Introductory Swamp Walk at the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park in February 2025. It's still under discussion.

Important Dates to Remember

- **January 18 - Plant/Bake Sale** 10:00 - 1:00pm (rain date January 19) Bocce Parking Lot
- **January 21 - Garden Club Meeting** 1:00 pm VW Town Center
- **February 18 - Garden Club Meeting** 1:00 pm VW Town Center
- **March 18 - Garden Club Meeting** 1:00 pm VW Town Center
- **March 29 - Butterfly Festival** 10:00am - 2:00pm (rain date is March 30) Butterfly Garden
- **April 15 - Garden Club Meeting** 1:00 pm VW Town Center
- **May 20 - Garden Club Meeting & Plant Exchange** 1:00 pm VW Town Center



PRESENTATION AT THE DECEMBER CLUB MEETING

On December 10, Florida Master Naturalist Gordon Saager presented a talk on “The Fakahatchee Strand State Park Preserve”. Francine Stevens, the president of the Friends of Fakahatchee, also spoke.

For a large part of the 20th century, the logging of old growth cypress trees was a big business at Fakahatchee. Many of the harvested trees were hundreds of years old. Through a series of private and public land acquisitions, a state park was created to preserve the land thus creating the largest state park in Florida at 125 square miles. The new Boardwalk and Interpretative Center was completed in 2023. There are guided tram rides, moon walks, and swamp walks available to enjoy the park.

Fakahatchee has the reputation of being known as the “Orchid Capital.” The preserve has 49 species of orchids and is home to the famous Ghost Orchid (*Dendrophylax lindenii*). In addition, the park has many bromeliads including the rare Nodding Strap Airplant (*Catopsis nutans*) which is only found in this park. In a survey of a 1 square km area in the park, an amazing 415 species of lichens were found.

The animals that live in the park include black minks, black bears, deer, and panthers. Female panthers need 75 square miles and male panthers require 125 square miles to thrive. Since the park is only 125 square miles, the panthers must travel beyond the park. Sadly, many panthers are victims of vehicle collisions. The park also has 150 species of birds including the endangered snail kite. Burmese pythons have been sighted in the park. Due to a warming climate and scarcer food sources, these invasive snakes are moving northward.



Ghost Orchid - Florida Museum/Univ. of Florida



Nodding Strap Airplant (*Catopsis nutans*) - The Field Museum (Chicago)

VILLAGEWALK GARDEN CLUB'S 8TH ANNUAL

PLANT & BAKE SALE

Come and savor a fresh baked item to enjoy with a FREE cup of coffee and buy some plants to enjoy at home!

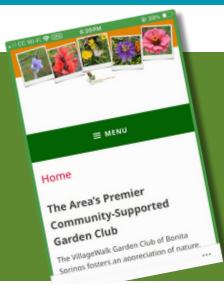
Thanks for supporting your neighborhood Garden Club.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 18

10:00 AM - 1:00 PM

AT THE BOCCE COURT PARKING LOT AREA

Rain date is Sunday, January 19



CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE!

www.villagewalkgardenclub.com

Our website is full of information about the garden club, events and sustainability practices.

