



NEWSLETTER

A BEAUTIFUL WINTERTIME VISITOR

During the winter months, Southwest Florida is treated to the sight of [painted buntings](#) which are considered one of the most beautiful birds in the world. The male bird with its multi-colored plumage is the star of the species. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology (the scientific study of birds) says the “male painted buntings seem to have flown straight out of a child’s coloring book.” The female painted bunting is also an attractive bird with lime green plumage. Because of their beauty, painted buntings have been illegally captured as cage pets.

These birds winter in Central America, Mexico and southern Florida. Their summer breeding grounds include Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Louisiana, and along the Atlantic Coast in Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina. In the VillageWalk Butterfly Garden area, they can be seen in the grassy and brushy areas where they feed on the seeds of grasses. They are also seen at the Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary in the brushy woods along the boardwalk and at the bird feeder near the visitor center. The painted buntings are often the “star of the show” at the bird feeder resulting in a gathering of bird watchers and photographers.

[Main Sources: Cornell Lab of Ornithology, The Daniel Island News, Audubon Society]



Male Painted Bunting in the Butterfly Garden

Important Dates to Remember

- **March 18 - Garden Club Meeting** 1:00 pm VW Town Center - Microplastics
- **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 - Bromeliads
- **May 20 - Garden Club Meeting & Plant Exchange** 1:00 pm VW Town Center

GARDEN CLUB MEMBERS HELP AT THE CAFE OF LIFE

Kristi DiCecco, Candy Minnick and Nina Iraggi have organized a group of mainly Garden Club members (Sally Golightly, Maureen Paonessa, Elizabeth Henry, Linda Greendyke, Dolores Damiano-Szafran, Cheryl Gedris, Terry Galloway, Barb Salatto, Carol Zeek, Barb Van Esler, Bernice Anzures, Marsha Davis and Kathy Bartles) to make and serve home-cooked meals for 80 to 100 people in need at the [Cafe of Life](#) in Bonita Springs once a month. Over the course of three days, the volunteers shop, prep, cook, and finally serve the meals. This activity is certainly a great example of “many hands make light work”!



Serving home-cooked meals at the Cafe of Life

BUTTERFLY FUN FACT



Have you ever wondered why you don't see tiny baby butterflies that grow into larger adults? The reason is that butterflies are already full-sized adults when they emerge from their chrysalises, and they do not grow any larger. There is, however, some variation in the size of butterflies of the same species. The size of the caterpillar that transforms (metamorphosizes) into the butterfly determines the size of the butterfly. Smaller caterpillars result in smaller butterflies and larger caterpillars become larger butterflies.

The factors that influence the size of caterpillars and therefore the size of butterflies are nutrition, genetics and sex. With regards to the sex, generally males are larger than females, but there are exceptions.

[Main Sources: The Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University, Journey North, Monarch Watch]

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

THE SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE NEEDS YOUR HELP!

HELP WANTED
A FEW GOOD MEMBERS
INTERESTED IN INCREASING
THEIR KNOWLEDGE IN:
RECYCLING, NATIVE PLANTS
OR IRRIGATION OR ALL 3

NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY, PAID WITH ENHANCED
KNOWLEDGE AND AN OPPORTUNITY TO MEET NEW MEMBERS.
IF INTERESTED CONTACT EITHER DOLORES OR CHERYL



If you are interested, contact Dolores Damiano-Szafran at dszaf37@gmail.com or Cheryl Gedris at cherylgedris@gmail.com.

GROUP TOURS OF THE BUTTERFLY GARDEN

Two large groups toured the Butterfly Garden in the past couple of months. On January 29, twenty-seven members of the Alva Garden Club visited our gardens. Linda Blaise, Kristi DiCecco, and Amy Swanson were the tour leaders. Since it was the regular group workday for the Butterfly Garden volunteers, many gardeners were on hand in their gardens to help with the tour. Afterwards, the Alva group had lunch at the VW Grill.

On February 6, Julia McCandlish, a member of our Garden Club, organized a tour for the Women's Cultural Alliance of Collier and Lee counties. Twenty people from the Alliance attended. Linda Blaise and Kristi DiCecco led the tour. Like the Alva group, the Alliance members visited the VW Grill for lunch. It's nice to share our beautiful gardens with others who appreciate them.



Alva Garden Club



Women's Cultural Alliance

TRIPS AND TOURS

Island Walk Littoral Plantings - Lakes tour & lunch at the Island Walk restaurant, April 10, 2025; meet at 9:15 at the Bocce parking lot

Trips and Tours Committee

The Trips and Tours committee is looking for 1-2 new members! We start planning for the next year in March by brainstorming and gathering ideas. We don't meet May through October, but we continue doing independent research. Most trips and tours take place from January through April or May.

During our VWGC monthly meetings, committee members sit at the Trips and Tours table to sign up members and collect payment for upcoming events. We have a bulletin board with pictures, dates, and pricing for each tour. Committee members take turns updating the board.

If you are interested in joining the Trips and Tours committee, stop by the table at the next garden club meeting or contact Leslie Bischoff at tapdancer1950@yahoo.com.



VillageWalk Garden Club Cookbook!

A VWGC cookbook can be an excellent spin on fundraising. We can engage all members by having them contribute their favorite recipes. It can create a meaningful keepsake that represents our VWGC community. If you're interested in contributing recipes and/or working on the project, contact Jackie Fegan at jfegan49@gmail.com or Terry Galloway at tgallows@gmail.com. We'll also have a sign-up sheet at our March 18th meeting. Start digging through those family recipes!

“AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT...” - MONTY PYTHON

Garden 10 grew to almost a quarter of an acre over three years under the guidance of Tom Ingrassia. Tom had a zest for finding new specimen plants and planting, planting, planting! By 2023, the collection of plants plus the pre-existing grasses, shrubs and trees had grown together to create a jungle that masked the layout crafted by Tom and Don Blackwell.

Linda Blaise directed outside labor in a large “clear-out” project in Fall 2023 that brought needed sunshine and pathways to the expanse. Don picked up the ball from there and has been working to bring more definition to the plant presentation. That can be a tough battle during the rainy season in South Florida, as we all know, when everything grows quickly.

Herb Hoffman has been working with Don since late Summer 2024 in Garden 10. The large space is a tall order for two people to maintain, particularly in the heat of Summer (which lasts about five months here). While thinking about ways to reduce maintenance and bring some more order to Garden 10’s layout, Don came up with an idea: Starting with a fraction of the total garden space, let’s dramatically reduce the plant density and create a “sub-garden” that has a focus other than plant color or multiple varieties.

This idea became a plan to create a simplified garden vista inspired by Japanese garden techniques. Don has long admired the Japanese garden designs emphasizing a careful arrangement of nature with subtle variations of plant structure to create a serene setting. The “classic” design form is a garden that appears as a tiny world comprising foreground plants to establish a point of reference, a strong middle-distance feature (water, sand or rocks), background planting to frame a distant hill or forest (which is thus brought into the garden) and finally an enclosure of greenery to block undesirable neighboring views.

Don enjoyed touring many garden sites during a trip to Japan in 2018. He recently visited Morikami Gardens in Delray Beach, which triggered his plan for Garden 10. Lacking a multi-acre area for a canvas, he is creating a miniature version of the foreground-middle-long focal point structure in the eastern half of his garden. With some adaptations for practical installation and maintenance:

- The middle-distance features will be two Panama Rose plants trimmed in a bonsai fashion, rather than boulders or a pond.
- The ground feature will be rings of mondo grass centered upon the middle plants, rather than raked sand or pebbles.
- The “distant” focal point (about 40 feet away) will be a pair of Saw Palmettos ringed by pine needle mulch.
- The greenery enclosure is a ring of plain green bromeliads backed by a few Muhly Grass clumps, as the desire is not to block the surrounding view but to suggest a special area.

The sub-garden is meant to be viewed from a stone bench off the western edge but can also be enjoyed from a stroll around the perimeter on a mulched path.



Don Blackwell,
article author and
head gardener for
Butterfly Garden 10



**Beginning of the Japanese garden in
Butterfly Garden 10**



Morakami Japanese Gardens



Morakami Japanese Gardens

Creating the new sub-garden has been a multi-week project, starting with the removal and relocation of existing plants to create a blank canvas. Construction is now complete. The only remaining task is bonsai-trimming of the Panama Roses, which has been left for last to give the transplanted roots time to take hold.

Please visit and enjoy!

LITTORAL PLANTINGS IN VILLAGEWALK

The initiative to introduce littoral plantings to VillageWalk began with the Sustainability Committee in May of 2023 and now it's becoming a reality. Advanced Aquatic, our new lake management company, gave a presentation entitled "Littoral Shelves and Plants" to the entire VillageWalk community in February. The meeting room was full, and more chairs had to be brought in to accommodate everyone. It's great to see such a strong interest in this important improvement to the health of our water resources.

Their presentation began with the benefits of introducing selected plants into the littoral shelves which the University of Florida broadly defines as "The shallow down-sloping shelf of a lake or pond."

- Erosion control – stabilizes the soil using plant roots and rhizomes
- Nutrient absorption and filtration - removes excess fertilizer, biological waste products, etc. to make the water cleaner and clearer
- Wildlife habitat - provides cover, nesting spots, and food
- Additionally, the shorelines will look more beautiful.

Planting in the littoral shelf area will start in March 2025. In the initial phase, limited test areas will be chosen where the erosion is the most severe and where there will be the greatest visual impact. Unwanted plants like torpedo grass will be removed before the desired plants are introduced. The planting phase of the project will take several years, and continued maintenance will be needed.

The focus is on using native plants and the following examples were shown.

- Swamp lily (*Crinum americanum*) - native, white blooms with fragrance in summer
- Blue flag iris (*Iris virginica*) - native, blue/purple flowers, spreads by rhizomes
- Duck potato/lanceleaf arrowhead (*Sagittaria lancifolia*) - native, 3 white petals and 3 green sepals
- Golden canna (*Canna flaccida*) - yellow flowers open in the morning and close by midday, host plant for the Brazilian skipper butterfly and dragonfly larvae
- Gulf Coast spikerush (*Eleocharis cellulosa*) - most common littoral plant, spiky leaves
- Pickerelweed (*Pontederia cordata*) - blue/purple flowers, attracts bees and butterflies



Pickerelweed at
Audubon Corkscrew
Swamp



Gulf Coast Spikerush -
Bruce A. Sorrie, North
Carolina Botanical Garden



Blue Flag Iris – 6 Mile Cypress
Slough



Golden Canna - Wild South Florida



Duck Potato/Lanceleaf
Arrowhead at CREW Bird Rookery



Swamp Lily at Audubon
Corkscrew Swamp

More information on the Littoral Plantings is available on the garden club website in the Stop Erosion section of Sustainability (<https://villagewalkgardenclub.com/stop-erosion/>). Also note that there will be a littoral lakes tour at Island Walk and lunch at their restaurant on April 10th. Thanks to Dolores Damiano-Szafran and J.B. Schuetz for providing feedback on this article.

JESSIE'S TROPICAL FRUIT FARM



Garden club tour group

Here are some other plants of note:

- [Loquat](#) (*Eriobotrya japonica*) – leaves for tea and sweet/sour fruit
- [Moringa](#)* (*Moringa oleifera*) – edible leaves
- [Lemon grass](#) (*Cymbopogon citratus*) – provides a lemony taste to dishes
- [Brazilian grape](#) (*Plinia cauliflora*) – fruit grows directly on the trunk and branches
- [Aunt Lilli's South Sea salad tree](#) (*Abelmoschus manihot*) – leaves for salad and edible hibiscus-like flowers, salad on a tree!
- [Aloe](#) (*Aloe barbadensis*) – sap can be used as a natural rooting hormone
- [Finger lime](#) (*Microcitrus australasica*) – lemon/lime flavor from “pearls” of pulp
- [Guava](#) *(*Psidium guajava* L.) – leaves for tea and fruit

*Note that moringa and guava are on the invasive list and extra care is needed to prevent these plants from spreading.

During the walk around the grounds, fruits and leaves were sampled fresh from the plants. Stem cuttings were also given to take home for planting. The farm works with an apiary to have bees available for pollination. Honey is harvested from the hives and sold in the store. After the walk, a visit to their store included a tasting of other fruits including longan, passion fruit, milk fruit, etc. Before leaving, everyone lined up to purchase fresh fruits, freeze dried fruits, sorbets, jams, and seeds. Jessie's does ship their fruits and other food items which makes for a unique gift. Also, plants are available for purchase for home gardens.



Moringa edible leaves



Sugar cane



Dragon fruit



Jessie discussing and preparing the fruit for sampling



Sugarloaf pineapples



Jessie by a papaya tree



Dragon fruits, milk fruits, guavas, key limes, hami melons, and ube tubers



Bananas, mamey, jackfruit, and jam



The long check-out line!

HIBISCUS PRESENTATION - QUEEN OF THE TROPICS



Special hibiscus hybrids on display at the meeting

Beth Meehan from the American Hibiscus Society gave a presentation about Hibiscus plants and she brought many gorgeous flowers to display. According to the Florida Friendly Landscaping Program, Hibiscus is a large shrub that can grow 4- 12 feet high and 2-10 feet wide. The genus Hibiscus has about 250 species and the speaker focused on one species named [Hibiscus rosa-sinensis](#). The Hibiscus plant was originally brought from Mauritius to the Americas in 1881. Through the years, many hybrids have been created. The new hybrid plants that were developed have many different types of flowers - single, double, and some as large as 8 inches in a variety of colors.

An information sheet was distributed regarding the care of hibiscus plants. Some key takeaways for plant care are:

- Plant in a wide and shallow hole using well-drained soil.
- The soil should be supplemented with manure and peat moss.
- Add mulch around the plant but not near the stem.
- Hibiscus plants like full sun or partial shade like under a tree.
- To produce many blooms, Hibiscus plants can be fertilized with low potassium fertilizer.
- If using a container, make sure that there is a hole in the bottom for drainage.
- Hibiscus plants can be pruned to produce a nice shape, however, avoid pruning during December to February.
- Hibiscuses are susceptible to pests such as aphids, mealy bugs, white flies, thrips, spider mites, and gall midge.
 - Gall Midge: treat with Imidacloprid
 - Thrips: spray with Spinosad
 - Spider mites: use Abamectin very carefully because it is potent

The members also had the opportunity to buy some special Hibiscus plants at the meeting after seeing the flower display. Unusual hibiscus plants can be found at the Berne Davis Gardens near Ford Edison Estates.



CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE!

www.villagewalkgardenclub.com

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

