

# Educating with Extension



By Brynn Morey, Extension Coordinator, and in collaboration with Alicia Betancourt, Shelly Krueger, and Michelle Leonard-Mularz

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University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS), Monroe County

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## MAY HAPPENINGS

- Mental Health Awareness Month
- Turtle Nesting Season Begins
- American Wetlands Month

**May 8th**  
Happy Mother's Day!

**May 14th**  
World Migratory Bird Day

**Marathon Garden Club**  
Open Nursery  
Every Thursday 9AM-12PM  
5270 O/S Hwy. Marathon

**May 20th**  
Endangered Species Day!  
World Bee Day!

**May 21st**  
Key West Botanical Garden  
Native Plant Sale 9AM-12PM  
5210 College Rd. Key West

**May 30th**  
Memorial Day!  
County offices closed to observe holiday.



## Reports Needed for Dying Long-Spined Sea Urchins

By Shelly Krueger,  
Sea Grant Agent

The long-spined sea urchin *Diadema antillarum* is a keystone species on Florida's Coral Reef. Long-spined sea urchins are the lawn mowers that clean and scrape algae off the reef. This in turn helps baby corals settle, grow, and prevents adult corals from being overgrown and killed by algae. I have been told by long-time residents of the Florida Keys that these urchins were once so numerous that you had to use caution to avoid stepping on them and encountering a painful interaction with their spines. Unfortunately, starting in 1983, a disease of unknown origin decimated populations of long-spined sea urchins in the Caribbean, Bermuda, Bahamas, and South Florida. Since that time, long-spined sea urchin population have declined by more than 97%. The importance of this species and their very low population numbers is why the possibility of a new disease outbreak is very concerning.

Since February 2022, there have been reports of rapid, extensive die-offs of long-spined sea urchins in several Caribbean locations including the US Virgin Islands, Jamaica, Mexico, and Dominica. Unfortunately, Florida has received its first concerning report in Biscayne National Park. Observations indicate that sick urchins first detach from the substrate (for example, the rocks that they often live on) through loss of control of their tube feet, followed by shedding of their spines and tissue loss. Right now, we are asking people to report when and where you see long-spined sea urchins with, and without, signs of disease. Photos are also very useful. Scientists will then survey these sites and collect samples of the urchins, seawater, and sediments.

## Plant Clinics

Every Saturday

### Plant Clinic

9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Grimal Grove

258 Cunningham Lane  
Big Pine Key

Monday, May 2nd

### Plant Clinic

11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Key West Garden Club  
1100 Atlantic Blvd.  
Key West

Wednesday, May 4th

### Plant Clinic

9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Murray Nelson Govt. Center  
102050 O/S Hwy. #244  
Key Largo

Wednesday, May 18th

### Plant Clinic

9 a.m. to Noon

Garden Club of Upper Keys  
94040 O/S Hwy.  
Tavernier

Saturday, May 21st

### Plant Clinic

9 a.m. to Noon

KW Botanical Garden Nursery  
5210 College Rd.  
Stock Island

Saturday, May 21st

### Plant Clinic

9 a.m. to Noon

Marathon Home Depot  
4555 O/S Hwy,  
Marathon

Thursday, May 26th

### Plant Clinic

10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Island Home Nursery  
88720 O/S Hwy,  
Islamorada

# Sea Grant News



Shelly Krueger  
UF/IFAS Florida Sea Grant Agent

Shelly recently accomplished the following activities:

- Shelly has been teaching and planning a series of workshops for stony coral tissue loss disease communication professionals. This ongoing series has featured invited speakers Chris Corpus, the director of conservation at the Dallas Zoo, and Dee Weber with the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium. Our collective goals are to produce communication products that reach a national audience and foster support for Florida's Coral Reef.



- Unfortunately, there is a documented long-spined sea urchin *Diadema antillarum* die-off that started in the US Virgin Islands and has now spread to Mexico, Jamaica, Dominica, and the Dutch East Indies. As the co-lead of the Florida Coral Disease Response communication team, we have been sharing information on these urchins since we already have a disease platform in place and work with all of the partners on the other stony coral tissue loss disease teams. Shelly wrote a blog for more information:

<https://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/monroeco/2022/04/20/reports-needed-for-dying-long-spined-sea-urchins/>

- Shelly assisted a master's student at the University of Miami find an internship with the FWC in Marathon working with sponges!



- Since the season is getting started for boating, Shelly wrote a blog about boater safety and encourages boaters to double-check they have their required safety equipment on board.

<https://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/monroeco/2022/04/19/take-a-boater-safety-course-today/>



**The Environmental Horticulture Program and Master Gardener Volunteers remain dedicated to helping you with your plant related questions.**



**CALL OUR OFFICE:**  
(305)292-4501

**We have many different ways we can assist!**

**EMAIL YOUR QUESTIONS TO:**  
mastergardener@monroecounty-fl.gov

Please include a detailed description of the problem and photos if available

**VISIT OUR OFFICE:**

Email [Monroe@ifas.ufl.edu](mailto:Monroe@ifas.ufl.edu) or  
Call (305)292-4501 to schedule an appointment

**FACEBOOK PAGE:**

Visit our Facebook page for updates, requests, information and so much more!

<https://www.facebook.com/MonroeCountyExtension>



# Horticulture News



Michelle Leonard-Mularz  
UF/IFAS Environmental Horticulture Agent

Michelle recently accomplished the following activities:

- The 2022 Master Gardener class concluded with 20 graduates that completed the 10-week course. The Master Gardener Interns will continue their learning through hands-on volunteer opportunities donating 75 hours each their first year of service.



- Michelle co-hosted a Plant It Proper Lunch-and-Learn with the City of Key West and Keys Energy Services prior to Keys Energy Services tree giveaway to help with proper planting techniques and improve survivability of native plants in the landscape.

- The Environmental Horticulture Program and Grimal Grove have partnered up to offer weekly plant clinics at Grimal Grove. This partnership allows the community access to Grimal Grove to learn about tropical fruit production and maintenance, vegetable gardening in the Keys, and how to grow your own food. Master Gardener Volunteers are maintaining raised bed demonstration gardens to highlight heat-tolerant vegetables that can be grown in our climate.



Be sure to "Like" us on [Facebook](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#)!



## Extension Director's News

Alicia Betancourt

UF/IFAS Family and Community Development Agent and  
Monroe County Extension Director

Alicia recently accomplished the following activities:

- Alicia worked as a technical expert with the Southeast Florida Climate Compact on updating the Public Engagement and Outreach section of the Regional Climate Action Plan (RCAP). The updated RCAP will be completed in June.
- Alicia co-taught a CIVIC training for 19 participants to learn about relationship building and partnerships.
- The Handbook for Municipal Action on Climate Change won an award for long publication from the Florida Association of Natural Resource Extension Professionals.
- Alicia co-taught the Climate Smart Floridians, Train-the-Trainer Program for 12 sustainability directors. This program teaches participants about the program and provides them with the knowledge, skills, and resources to offer the program in their community
- Alicia worked with agents from UF, Auburn, and Purdue to develop a leadership curriculum for non-profit organizations that will be piloted later this year.



- Alicia participated in the Sea Grant Climate Work Action Group to develop goals, objectives, and directions for program development for the rest of the year. In the workshop, we worked on the rollout of the Handbook of Municipal Action on Climate Change.



- Alicia chaired the Public Issues Leadership Development Conference for 173 Extension agents and administrators in Washington D.C. The three-day conference explores the connection across the national Extension system and culminates in visits to legislators on Capitol Hill.

Continued from page 1



### How to identify the long-spined sea urchin

There are at least seven species of sea urchins in South Florida. The long-spined sea urchin is easily identified because the spines are very long relative to their central body, also called the test, compared to the other species. As you can see in the photo on the top right, the largest species in the center is the long-spined sea urchin, and the spines are considerably longer than the other two species pictured: the rock-boring urchin on the left and the two reef urchins on the right. These spines are not venomous but they are good advertising to would-be predators to stay away and “do not touch me.” They are typically a very dark black-purple color, and sometimes white or variegated like the one pictured here. They are nocturnal, but you can usually find them hiding in crevices during the daytime if you are out at the reef. I have seen them in seagrass beds, too.

### Where to report long-spined sea urchins

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) has a reporting tool at [SEAFAN.net](http://SEAFAN.net) or you can call the hotline 866-770-7335. The FDEP SEAFAN network reporting tool can also be used to report stony coral tissue loss disease, another lethal disease of unknown origin that has been infecting stony corals since 2014. In the Caribbean, the Diadema Response Network needs reports of healthy or dying long-spined sea urchins, submit your reports [here](http://here). Call Shelly Krueger, Florida Sea Grant agent in the Florida Keys for the University of Florida IFAS Extension, Monroe County at 305-292-4501 to file a report or for more information.



Photo: K. Marks, AGRAA

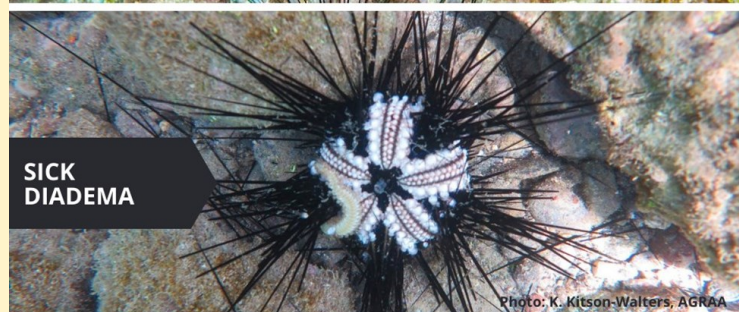


Photo: K. Kitson-Walters, AGRAA

Be sure to “Like” us on [Facebook](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#)!

# UF IFAS Extension

UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA



## UF/IFAS/MONROE COUNTY EXTENSION

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County Extension Director: Alicia Betancourt

Newsletter Editor: Brynn Morey, Extension Coordinator

This newsletter can be accessed online at:

<http://monroe.ifas.ufl.edu/newsletter.shtml>

We're on the Web at: <http://monroe.ifas.ufl.edu>



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University of Florida (UF)

<http://SolutionsForYourLife.ufl.edu>

<http://ufl.edu>

Electronic Data Information Source (EDIS)

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>

Scan this code to go directly to our UF/IFAS Website for more information!



UF/IFAS Extension is  
Putting Florida First

*An Equal Opportunity Institution. UF/IFAS Extension, University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, Nick T. Place, dean for UF/IFAS Extension. Single copies of UF/IFAS Extension publications (excluding 4-H and youth publications) are available free to Florida residents from county UF/IFAS Extension offices.*

<https://ics.ifas.ufl.edu/ufifas-diversity-and-legalstatements/>

## UF/IFAS/MCES QUARTERLY CONTACTS

	Feb	Mar	April	Totals
Phone calls	46	41	47	134
Office visitors	60	70	65	195
Email Consultations	73	121	138	332
Learning events	26	39	33	98
Participants	602	877	546	2,025
Media submissions	6	6	4	16
Publications distributed	338	320	285	943
<b>TOTAL contacts</b>	<b>1,151</b>	<b>1,474</b>	<b>1,118</b>	<b>3,743</b>



**SAVE THE DATE**

**FLORIDA KEYS**

**TROPICAL**

**FRUIT**

**FIESTA**

BIG PINE KEY FL

**GRIMAL GROVE**

EST. 1961

- Tropical Fruit
- Local Vendors
- Kids Activities
- Educational Talks
- Fruit Trees & Plants

**SATURDAY, JUNE 18<sup>TH</sup> 10AM - 2PM**

**Big Pine Key Community Park**

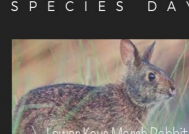
**31009 Atlantis Drive, Big Pine Key**

Interested in being a vendor?  
Contact [monroe@ifas.ufl.edu](mailto:monroe@ifas.ufl.edu)

## MAY 20TH IS NATIONAL ENDANGERED SPECIES DAY!



Key Deer



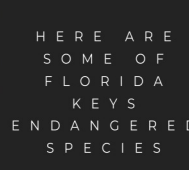
Lower Keys Marsh Rabbit



Smalltooth Sawfish



Miami Blue Butterfly



White-Crowned Pigeon



Sea Turtles



Staghorn & Elkhorn Coral



Key Largo Woodrat