

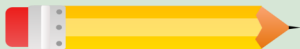


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AUGUST HAPPENINGS

National Water Quality Month



July 29th-Aug 11th
Back to School Sales Tax Holiday!



August 3rd
National Watermelon Day!



August 6th
Lobster Season Opens!
Visit myFWC.com for Regulations

August 8th-11th 27th Annual Key West Lobster Festival
<https://keywestlobsterfest.com/>

August 17th Native Plant Sale
9AM-12PM Key West Botanical Garden— 5210 College Rd,



August 17th
National Honey Bee Day!



Potential New Invader: Pulse Corals

By Shelly Krueger
Sea Grant Agent

There is the potential for a new aquatic invader in the waters surrounding the Florida Keys. Pulse Corals are bright-colored soft corals that are very popular in the saltwater aquarium trade. Common native soft corals in the U.S. are sea fans, sea whips, and sea pens. The Pulse Corals can be identified apart from our native soft corals because the polyps are much larger and the polyps are constantly opening and closing to feed in a pulsing rhythm. Like the invasive lionfish, Pulse Corals are also native to the Red Sea and the Indo-Pacific Ocean. Since the temperatures in the Florida Keys are like their native range, there is good reason to believe if they arrive they could be very successful at spreading rapidly if not controlled at once. Pulse Corals were introduced illegally in Venezuela 20 years ago and the invasion there has devastated thousands of acres of coral reef and seagrass meadows. In the past 2 years, another species has been found in northern Cuba and Puerto Rico. Pulse Corals can smother coral reefs and seagrasses because they grow rapidly and have no known native predators.

Since the early 2000s, there have been numerous outbreaks of Pulse Corals in both the Pacific and Caribbean. The suspected causes of these outbreaks include intentional releases by marine aquarists, illegal aquaculture activities where they were likely grown in the wild to be sold in the aquarium trade, fragments of soft corals attaching to boats, ships, and fishing gear, and possibly spread via ship ballast

Plant Clinics

Wednesday, August 7th

Plant Clinic

9 a.m. to Noon

Key Largo Library

101485 O/S Hwy.
Key Largo

Canceled, will resume October 5th

Plant Clinic

10 a.m. to 1p.m.

Key Deer Refuge Nature Cntr.

30587 O/S Hwy.
Big Pine Key

Saturday, August 17th

Plant Clinic

9 a.m. to Noon

KW Botanical Garden Nursery

5210 College Rd.
Stock Island

Saturday, August 17th

Plant Clinic

9 a.m. to Noon

Marathon Home Depot

4555 O/S Hwy,

Tuesday, August 20th

Plant Clinic

9 a.m. 11 a.m.

Garden Club of Upper Keys

94040 O/S Hwy.

Tavernier

Thursday, August 22nd

Plant Clinic

9:30 a.m. 12:30 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 presented on sponge restoration aquaculture via Zoom to the FWC Restoration Ecology Program team at the FWRI office in Marathon to address information gaps and how to complement FWCs ongoing sponge restoration in Florida Bay by expanding to the Lower Keys following last summer's massive sponge die-off.



- Shelly worked with UF/IFAS colleagues and the public relations manager Lourdes Medero on a press release entitled "Scientists seek public help to prevent spread of invasive soft coral along Florida's coast" that has been featured in many Florida news outlets. Shelly spoke about Pulse Corals, which are a potential new soft coral invasive species that have been found in northern Cuba and Puerto Rico on *Morning Magazine* and wrote an article for *The Keys Weekly*. We are looking for SCUBA divers and snorkelers to report sightings. Researchers ask for underwater help in reporting invasive soft coral species: <https://www.fox13news.com/news/researchers-ask-underwater-help-reporting-invasive-soft-coral-species>



- Shelly and FDEP co-lead Maya Bhalla-Ladd presented at the monthly Florida's Coral Reef Resilience Program team lead meeting about our communications teams' efforts to share information regarding 2023 coral bleaching and preparations for this summer internally to the disturbance advisory committee. Our collaboration with the National Weather Service in Key West has produced weekly updates and forecasts for water temperatures and conditions at the coral reefs from Marathon to Key West.

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!

VISIT OUR OFFICE:

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

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

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

FACEBOOK PAGE:

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

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



Horticulture News



Maria Quirico
UF/IFAS Environmental Horticulture Agent

Maria recently accomplished the following activities:

- Maria Quirico authored a Keys Weekly article, "Essential Tips for Key Lime Tree Care in the Florida Keys," and conducted botany introduction workshops and presentations for the Summer Camp organized by Park and Beaches at the Plantation Key Community Center. Maria coordinated the presentation of the Free Seed Library (FSL) Project on US 1 Radio's Morning Magazine, where Master Gardener Nia Huber presented the project. Additionally, she oversaw Master Gardener volunteers who conducted four plant clinics, with participation ranging from 4 to 15 people at each location, offering valuable learning opportunities about horticulture and environmentally friendly practices.



- Maria organized and participated in several significant events this month. She coordinated the Florida First Detector Workshop with the UF Entomology Department and UF/IFAS Monroe County Extension, attended by 21 participants. She conducted a botany introduction and native tree workshop for kids at the Summer Camp Parks & Beaches, attended by 7 participants. Furthermore, Maria managed a food waste drop-off during the plant clinics at the Botanical Garden, resulting in collecting 20 lbs. of food waste for composting. She also organized a food waste and compost workshop at Coral Isles Church Tavernier, attended by 15 participants.

- In addition to events, Maria undertook field visits and attended essential meetings. She visited the SOS facilities to collect 68 lbs. of food waste for composting at the Key West Tropical Forest and Botanical Garden's demonstration site. Maria attended a meeting with HOTBIN and Monroe County's Recycling Program. She coordinated with the Habitat of Humanity to arrange a Florida-Friendly Landscaping (FFL) talk for new residents.



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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 participates in the Southeast Florida Climate Compact, Climate Leadership Summit conference planning committee. This year's Summit will be held at the Casa Marina in Key West on December 16-18, 2024. Save the date, we are putting together an excellent program



- Alicia spoke on the current and upcoming Florida sales tax holidays. More information can be found here <https://floridarevenue.com/Pages/SalesTaxHolidays.aspx>

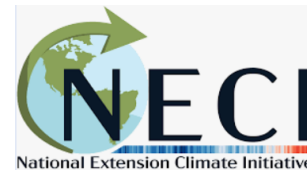
- Alicia worked with the Sustainable Living Series leadership from Purdue, the University of Michigan, and the University of Florida to develop a fall program focused on **the United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)**. This engaging speaker series aims to elevate awareness and foster proactive SDG champions. We will describe the overall purpose of the Sustainable Development Goals and help participants understand how citizens can contribute to making these a reality. **Save the dates below and watch for a registration announcement soon.**

September 18, **SDG #12:** Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

October 2, **SDG #3:** Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

October 16, **SDG #6:** Ensure access to water and sanitation for all

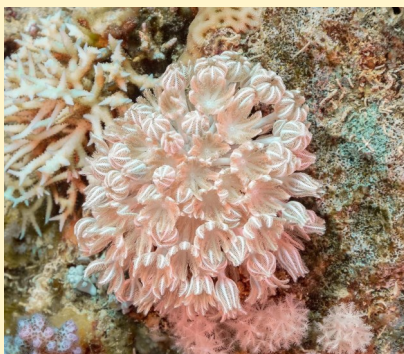
October 30, **SDG #7:** Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all



- Alicia developed a national survey of Extension climate work as part of the National Climate Extension Initiative. **The National Extension Climate Initiative (NECI)** is an anchor for Extension professionals, researchers, and partners to collaborate on climate-related issues, share resources, discuss barriers and opportunities for advancing climate change programming. Since 2020, NECI has a network of over 800 members, an active Executive Committee, six working groups, and monthly professional development and member engagement opportunities

Continued from page 1

water. Due to their asexual reproduction, removal is difficult without fragmenting and accidentally spreading these octocorals to new areas to colonize. As of 2024, invasive soft corals have been identified in Venezuela, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii (2020), Cuba (2022), and Puerto Rico (2023). These soft corals are very popular in the saltwater aquarium trade where they are known by the common names “Pulsing Xenia” and “Pom-Pom Xenia.” This is such a popular saltwater aquarium soft coral because it grows rapidly, can handle a wide range of poor water quality conditions and is easily fragmented and sold online to other aquarists with a high price range for colorful specimens.



*Pulse Coral photo credit:
ECO Latinoamerica*

Soft corals are soft and flexible compared to the hard stony corals that build coral reefs. Soft corals may also be called gorgonians from Greek mythology and the Gorgon Medusa, who had a head of writhing snakes. They are also called octo-corals because each individual polyp has 8 symmetrical feathery tentacles. Hard corals like brain corals, star corals, and pillar coral are

distinguished by having 6 tentacles and secrete a hard calcium carbonate skeleton that creates the 3-dimensional structure of a coral reef.

As we have seen with the invasive lionfish, aquatic invaders are very difficult to eradicate if they are allowed to become established. This is why we are looking for SCUBA divers and snorkelers to keep an eye out and report it if found. If you see it – please do not touch it since small fragments easily break off and float away to regrow in new areas. Please send all reports to the US Geological Survey Nonindigenous Aquatic Species “report a sighting” tool at <https://nas.er.usgs.gov/SightingReport.aspx> or to the Atlantic and Gulf Rapid Reef Assessment (AGRRA) Unomia Learning Exchange portal. Both of these sites have maps to drop a pin with latitude and longitude information and a place to upload photos.

The Monroe County Extension is working closely with both of these partners, and you can always call our office at 305-292-4501 or email monroe@ifas.ufl.edu with reports.

If seen, **DO NOT TOUCH!** Take photos and GPS coordinates if possible and notify the Atlantic and Gulf Rapid Reef Assessment:



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UF/IFAS/MONROE COUNTY EXTENSION

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KW Fax: 305-292-4415

General e-mail: monroe@ifas.ufl.edu
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>



University of Florida (UF)
<http://SolutionsForYourLife.ufl.edu>
<http://ufl.edu>
Electronic Data Information Source (EDIS)



UF/IFAS Extension is
Putting Florida First

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Environmental Horticulture Agent, Maria Quirico along with several University of Florida experts held a First Detector Workshop at the Moree County Public Library Marathon Branch.



Participants were educated through a series of presentations on invasive pests and plant diseases. They also participated in interactive activities and went on an engaging pest walk where they saw these pesky insects first hand and viewed various signs of plant diseases.

Thank you to all who participated in this fun and engaging event!!



UF IFAS
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA



UF/IFAS/MCES QUARTERLY CONTACTS

	May	June	July	Totals
Phone calls	33	46	64	143
Office visitors	23	29	23	75
Email Consultations	156	124	126	406
Learning events	29	25	24	78
Participants	320	464	354	1,138
Media submissions	7	9	8	24
Publications distributed	135	130	89	354
TOTAL contacts	703	827	688	2,218



We are excited to announce that Green Drinks is back again! Join us every 3rd Tuesday with a different theme each month. Let's green talk again!



Host: Sheetal Almas
Organization: City of Key West
Title: Adaptation and Energy Coordinator
Contact: sheetal.almas@cityofkeywest-fl.gov

Next event will be held on August 20th

facebook.com/preserveislandlife/