

By Brynn Morey, Extension Coordinator, and in collaboration with Alicia Betancourt, Shelly Krueger, and Maria Quirico

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UF/IFAS Photo Above by Tyler Jones

## Pumpkins: A Fascinating Crop- Can We Grow it in the Florida Keys?

By Maria Quirico, Environmental

Pumpkins hold significant cultural value worldwide, symbolizing themes of harvest, abundance, and changing seasons. They are versatile in culinary traditions, from pumpkin pies to soups. Beyond culinary use, pumpkins have become iconic in art and folklore, closely associated with creating Jack-o'-lanterns. The Jack-o'-lantern tradition has its roots in Ireland. Initially, it involved carved turnips, beets, and potato lanterns with spooky faces to ward off evil spirits or welcome the deceased. Pumpkins gradually replaced these vegetables as they proved more convenient for carving.

### Pumpkin Origins

Pumpkins are native to the Americas, specifically in regions now part of modern-day Mexico and the southwestern United States. Their cultivation dates back over 7,000 years, with the Aztecs and Native American tribes being some of the first pumpkin growers.

### Nutritional Value of Pumpkin Flesh and Seeds

Pumpkins offer a range of nutritional benefits. Flesh is low in calories and high in dietary fiber. Pumpkins are rich in vitamins A, C, and B. They also provide essential minerals like potassium, calcium, and magnesium. Pumpkin seeds, known as pepitas, contribute healthy fats, including omega-3 fatty acids, and are protein-rich.

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## Plant Clinics

1st & 3rd Saturday of the Month

### Plant Clinic

9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Key Deer Refuge Nature Cntr.

30587 o/s Hwy.  
Big Pine Key

Wednesday, November 1st

### Plant Clinic

9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Key Largo Library

101485 O/S Hwy.  
Key Largo

Thursday, November 2nd

### Plant Clinic

11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Key West Garden Club

1100 Atlantic Blvd.  
Key West

Tuesday, November 14th

### Plant Clinic

9 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Garden Club of Upper Keys

9404 O/S Hwy.  
Tavernier

Saturday, November 18th

### Plant Clinic

9 a.m. to Noon

KW Botanical Garden Nursery

5210 College Rd.  
Stock Island

Saturday, November 18th

### Plant Clinic

9 a.m. to Noon

Marathon Home Depot

4555 O/S Hwy,  
Marathon

Thursday, November 23rd

### Plant Clinic

9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Island Home Nursery

88720 O/S Hwy,  
Islamorada

## NOVEMBER HAPPENINGS

### Key West Veterans Day Parade!

**November 10th 4PM**  
Parade goes down Duval St from United St. to Eaton St. Thank You for Your Service!!!



**November 12th**  
Garden Club of Upper Keys Fall Festival 9AM-4PM  
9404 o/s Hwy. Tavernier

**November 17th & 18th**  
Key West Garden Club Annual Fall Plant Sale and Art Show

**November 23rd & 24th**  
County Offices Closed



**November 26th 9AM-3PM**  
Marathon Garden Club Holiday Bazaar 5270 O/S Hwy.



**November 25th 9AM-3PM**  
Island Art Festival  
31020 o/s Hwy. Big Pine Key

# Sea Grant News



Shelly Krueger  
UF/IFAS Florida Sea Grant Agent

Shelly recently accomplished the following activities:

- Shelly was invited to teach the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Outreach and Communication Advisory Panel and an undergraduate class at Michigan State University about stony coral tissue loss disease, coral bleaching, and the Florida's Coral Reef Resilience Program.
- Shelly also taught 44 5<sup>th</sup> graders about our local fisheries at Gerald Adams Elementary.



- Shelly was 1 of 5 featured bloggers for the University of Florida Blogs.IFAS in October (<https://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/monroeco/author/shellykrueger/>). Shelly's article on "Releasing the gas: these tools can help bloated reef fish" was in The Keys Weekly, <https://keysweekly.com/42/releasing-the-gas-these-tools-can-help-bloated-reef-fish/>.
- Shelly spoke about the new recreational and commercial stone crab requirements to cut a 2 3/16" diameter escape ring on all stone crab traps to US1 Morning Magazine with Joe Moore.



- Shelly is working with Florida Sea Grant and resource managers in Venezuela about a new marine invasive species, Pulsing Xenia, that is common in the aquarium trade that has spread to northern Cuba. We are developing a series of media products for divers and diver shops to be on the lookout to report to SEAFAN.net.

## The Environmental Horticulture Program and Master Gardener Volunteers remain



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

*We have many different ways we can assist!*

**VISIT OUR OFFICE:**

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

**EMAIL YOUR QUESTIONS TO:**  
[mastergardener@monroecounty-fl.gov](mailto: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 Quirico did Creative Works in various areas, showcasing her commitment to horticulture and environmental practices. She wrote an informative article titled "Pumpkins: A Fascinating Crop - Can We Grow It in the Florida Keys?" for the Keys Weekly newsletter, contributing valuable insights to the local community.
- Maria also engaged with the public through the US 1 Radio Morning Magazine, where she discussed the Florida Friendly landscaping segment, spreading knowledge and awareness. Her one-on-one outreach efforts led to fruitful interactions with individuals, as seven plant clinics were conducted, accommodating groups of 4 to 15 people at each location. These events facilitated discussions on horticulture and environmentally friendly practices, allowing participants to gain valuable insights.



- In addition to her written and radio contributions, Maria organized events, such as the "Exploring Florida Keys Biodiversity Through Arts" workshop for children. She met with volunteers, attended conferences, and actively participated in various community events and meetings, highlighting her dedication to promoting environmental awareness and horticultural education.

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 has been co-teaching the Sustainable Living Series to 17 participants. This is a 7-week course developed as a discussion-to-action program that helps people discover ways to take action in their homes and community to reduce their footprint.



- Alicia attended the Florida Association of Community Development Extension Professionals and currently serves as chair of the membership and marketing committee.



CLIMATE SMART  
FLORIDIANS

- Alicia is co-teaching the Climate Smart Floridians program. This state-wide virtual program encourages and engages residents in greenhouse gas emissions reductions in their homes and communities.
- Alicia is the county lead contact on the Climate Pollution Reduction Planning Grant (CPRG). This grant process will allow the 4-county regional Climate Compact to produce a regional GHG inventory and a regional climate action priority list. This process will set the parameters for municipal CPRG implementation grants.

- Alicia spoke on the radio and wrote a blog about the presence of cane or bufo toads. The extensive rain has brought the emergence of these toads which can be hazardous to pets. They can and should be removed humanely if you find them in your landscape.

Learn more here <https://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/monroeco/2023/10/19/cane-toads-bufo-marinus-and-your-pets/>



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### Pumpkin Botanical Features

Pumpkins, members of the Cucurbitaceae family, exhibit distinct botanical characteristics. They are sprawling, vining plants with large palmate leaves. These plants produce male and female flowers, essential for pollination, and often develop tendrils for climbing support. The fruit's shape, size, and color feature rugged, ribbed skin and numerous seeds embedded in fibrous flesh. Pumpkins are classified as climacteric fruits, continuing to ripen after harvest, and are typically grown as annual plants with a life cycle maturing over a year.

### Pumpkin Cultivation

Successful pumpkin cultivation involves a series of techniques:

- Select a sunny, well-drained location with ample space or a structure for sprawling vines.
- Add organic matter like compost to improve fertility and drainage.
- Be consistent with irrigation and use mulch.
- Apply a balanced, slow-release fertilizer.
- Promote pollination through natural bee activity or hand pollination.
- Be vigilant against common pests and diseases.
- Pumpkins can be composted by burying them.

### Florida Varieties

Various pumpkin varieties can be cultivated in Florida, ranging from giant carving pumpkins to more petite culinary favorites. Among the extensive pumpkin options, 'Howden' and 'Jackpot' are favored for Florida growers. Other large varieties well-suited to Florida's climate include 'Big Max,' 'Big Moon,' 'Jack O' Lantern,' 'Spirit,' and 'Funny Face.'

South Florida pumpkin cultivation also includes heat-tolerant varieties, such as Seminole Pumpkins and Calabaza. Seminole pumpkins are resistant to pests and thrive in the heat. They yield smaller, sweet pumpkins similar in flavor to butternut squash, with vines extending up to 25 feet. Calabaza, a tropical pumpkin commonly grown in the Caribbean, has a good taste and can withstand high temperatures and humid conditions.

### Challenges of Growing Pumpkins in the Florida Keys

Cultivating pumpkins in the Florida Keys, given the challenging tropical climate and alkaline soils can be arduous. Raised beds with amended soils and climbing structures for vine support are good ideas for a better chance of success. Raised beds facilitate control over soil quality, including pH and nutrient levels. Selecting adaptable and resilient pumpkin varieties such as Seminole pumpkins and Calabaza is essential for a successful harvest in the Florida Keys.

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 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)  
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<https://ics.ifas.ufl.edu/ufifas-diversity-and-legal-statement/>

### UF/IFAS/MCES QUARTERLY CONTACTS

	Aug	Sept	Oct	Totals
Phone calls	91	56	52	199
Office visitors	35	42	37	114
Email Consultations	189	223	325	737
Learning events	33	25	33	91
Participants	491	408	653	1,552
Media submissions	8	14	6	28
Publications distributed	192	189	196	577
<b>TOTAL contacts</b>	<b>1,039</b>	<b>957</b>	<b>1,302</b>	<b>3,298</b>



SEA GRANT AGENT SHELLY KRUEGER & EXTENSION COORDINATOR BRYNN MOREY TEACH STUDENTS AT GERALD ADAMS & POINCIANA ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS ABOUT AGRICULTURE IN THE KEYS & SUSTAINABILITY! THE PRESENTATIONS ENDED WITH A FUN FISH ID GAME AND SOME TASTY SEAWEED SALAD!

## CPR Training

for Adults, Children & Infants

Friday December 1st

Classes at 9AM & 1:30PM Available

Location: Gato Conference Room 1100 Simonton St. Key West

**Monroe County Extension will be offering two CPR Certification courses in Key West!**



**The course costs \$31 per person and limited spots are available. Stay tuned for more course offerings throughout the keys!**

Please contact our office if you have questions or would like to register for this course (305) 292-4501