The Role of Master Gardeners in Providing Soil Knowledge for Gardening to the Public

Jo Leyte-Vidal
UF/IFAS Marion County Master Gardener
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA
64% of Florida residents are from “up North”

They say:

“I’m from up North where you can put anything in the ground and it will grow”

“You can’t grow anything in this sand.”

“I live in a gated community. I have to have a lawn”

“My yard man sprays monthly for those bugs and diseases”
The Master Gardener Asks:

“What do you want to plant?”

- This question introduces discussion about living in Zone 9 compared to “up North”.
  - Temperatures: sudden freezes
  - Sun vs Shade tolerance
  - Rain cycles
  - Chill hours
  - Native plants
Soil is a complex living community of organisms that:

- break down organic matter
- mine minerals and transfer to roots
- create manure
- create spaces for air and water
- create sticky exudes
- transport water and nutrients from soil to root

- fight harmful organisms
- neutralize pH 6–7
- release Carbon dioxide
- produce growth hormones
- break down toxic compounds
Florida Soils are

- Florida is a peninsula created by receding waters.
  - North/Central – mainly sandy or clay pockets
  - Panhandle – mainly sand or clay pockets
  - South – mainly thin layer over limerock, high pH

The key is the soil’s water holding capacity and organic content.
What do I do with the sandy soil?

- There are two choices:
  - Choose plants that tolerate the site conditions. Those are native plants.
  - or
  - Build richer live soil by adding organic material.
How Do I Keep the Soil Alive?

- Reduce use of
  - chemical fertilizers
  - pesticides
  - herbicides

Most of it leaches to the water table
Kills off beneficial bacteria, fungi, and insects
As life leaves soil, chemical use increases
As the amount of live organisms in soil decreases the amount of mineral uptake in plants decreases, therefore, reducing mineral content.

“The mineral content of foods will vary according to that of the soils in which the food is grown. “ Dr. David Watts
We Teach About Soils at:

- Extension Plant Clinic
  - Telephone and walk-in contact with residents
- Mobile Plant Clinic
  - Trailer building towed to events
- Homeowner’s Associations
  - Groups that govern group’s gardening practices
- Farmer’s Markets
  - Mobile Plant Clinic appears each week
- Libraries
  - Monthly programs
- Gardening 101
  - 5 day evening seminar
- Grocery store
  - License tag on personal vehicle attracts questions
Seminars at Festivals
- Indoor and Garden site presentations at extension and other locations

Senior Education Series
- Local Hospital’s Senior Wellness programs monthly

Civic Clubs
- Lions Club, Kiwanis etc.

Churches
- Requests for vegetable gardening information and
- Community garden planning

AARP Meeting
- Continuing Education for Seniors

Vegetable Gardening Expo
- Weekend seminars and hands on teaching
Garden Clubs
  ◦ CEU’s for the membership

Local Manufacturers
  ◦ Lunchtime Learning programs

Newsletters

Blog for local Newspaper

Facebook
  ◦ On-line communication addresses acquired at all presentations. Venue for announcements, events, new research, bulletins from University, and answering questions.
Survey Results Show

- 2013 – 18% of participants requested soil tests
- 2014 – 75% of participants requested soil tests

- 14% made known they adopted 4–6 of soil preservation practices taught

- Speakers Bureau shows 9% increase in requests for education programs between
  - March 2014 and March 2015
Thank you for your attention.

QUESTIONS?