



Biosphere Buzz

Volume 1, Number 2

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Biosphere Buzz, Number Two!

We will start this, our second newsletter, with a confession: we grow some exotic plants. While we are active proponents of native landscapes and we are active card-carrying members of the Florida Native Plant Society, our focus has been on bioscaping — planting for habitat. We have found some exotics that serve this purpose even better than natives, and if we know they have not shown a tendency to become invasive in natural systems, we grow them.

We also realize that we have to be concerned about the human habitat; making yards as attractive as possible keeps homeowners interested. However, we draw the line at using pesticides. If a plant needs toxins to stay healthy, it just can't live at our place. We still prefer natives for several reasons: they require less water (something we all need to be concerned about), have fewer pests, need less fertilizer, and native wildlife is better adapted to them. All things considered, when you think about our confession, we hope you will forgive us for our compromise decision.

Jim Thomas

Beginning Your Bioscape

Have you noticed new landscapes around town and seen that most consist of the same few species? The same boring patterns for traditional landscaping occur everywhere with only a few species differing. In Central Florida, they are St. Augustine grass, crape myrtles, and Indian hawthorns, with a few sagos or ligustrum trees thrown in for accents. This lack of diversity does not provide habitat for many species (except, perhaps, for mealybugs, whiteflies, and chinch bugs!).

These spaces can be converted to living wildlife habitats by adding plant species that provide food, cover, and nesting areas. Your yard can become a valuable little ecosystem that will encourage and support many species, even in very urban areas. The landscape should not be planned just

to dress up the house -- it should be designed to be productive, and should include as much diversity as possible.

The more people in a neighborhood who do this, the greater the habitat value, because the area becomes a habitat web with corridors for wildlife movement. Just putting out feeders and birdbaths is not sufficient, because it doesn't produce more wildlife, but only attracts them temporarily.

Start with an "Eco-Corner"

If you aren't ready to rip out that thirsty, toxic, high-maintenance lawn to really bioscape in a big way, you can start with a small corner. Plan to install all the requirements: food, cover, water, and nesting sites. Remember, some birds

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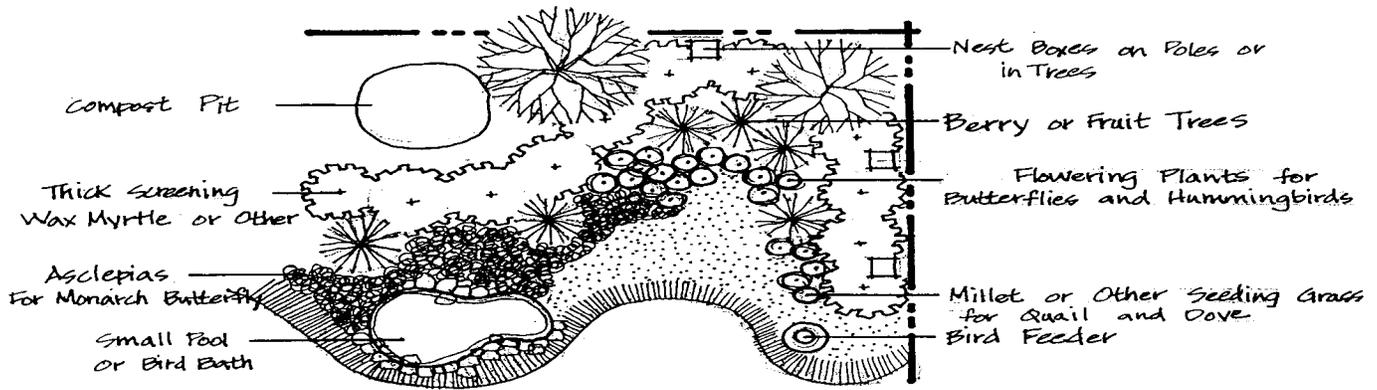
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Nursery open to the public, Saturdays, 9 a.m.—3 p.m., or by appointment.

Suggested Design for Eco-Corner



“Eco-Corner” continued

are cavity nesters and will need boxes, while others build open nests in thick shrubbery or on the ground.

Your ‘eco-corner’ design can be flexible, but our suggested one illustrated here will give you some ideas. Keep a log where you list the animal species you see as you frequently observe the area. A log is an especially good exercise if you have children and get them interested in the project. It will not only be fun and interesting, but will also help build environmental awareness and sensitivity.

Please let us know about your ‘eco-corner’!

It's Not Too late!



You still have time to install bird nest boxes for spring. Give us a call, or come on out to the nursery, and we will help you decide what is best for your yard. You will find a complete list of the nest boxes we offer in last month's newsletter or on our web-site:

BiosphereNursery.com

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April Is the Time to . . .

Prune: The rest of the cold damaged vegetation should be pruned now if you haven't yet done so. Azaleas and other shrubs that have already bloomed can be pruned to prevent the plants from becoming leggy. In our garden, we like to tip the cassia and the tree sunflowers at this time to promote branching and provide more flowers in the fall. If you already have germinating seeds of zinnia, cosmos, and other annuals, which tend to become tall and thin, you can remove terminal buds to give you more flowers.

Plant: Put out seeds or plants of annuals that are important for pollinators, such as zinnia, ageratum, cosmos, coreopsis, Mexican sunflower, giant sunflower, partridge pea, butterfly pea, black-eyed susan, standing cypress, lion's ear, and gaillardia.

Also, flowering perennials that will bloom at different times throughout the year, such as salvias, seaside goldenrod, passionflowers, guara, buddleia, cassia, porterweed, firespike, honeysuckles, and other perennials.

And warm weather vegetables, such as pole beans, okra, summer squash, watermelon, cucumber, and eggplant.

Water: April will probably be another dry month, so correct watering is even more essential than other times of the year. It is better to water thoroughly, soaking the root zone, rather than watering frequently and lightly. Use mulches to help conserve moisture. Remember to abide by the watering restrictions we have throughout Central Florida — water before 10am or after 4pm — to avoid having your spray evaporate before it even hits the ground.

The fight Against Invasives

What is An Invasive Plant?

Florida is being invaded by non-native plants, and they are having major impacts on the natural ecosystems that exist here. Most of the exotic species were purposely introduced for horticultural or agricultural uses, and, because they do not have natural enemies but do have ideal conditions, they grow into populations that are frequently dense and widespread.

Invasives do more than just dominate the native species on which native wildlife depend. They may reduce biodiversity (we will talk about this in a later **Buzz**), cause habitat losses and alterations, alter fire resistance, change soil compositions, cause water quality degradation, and even cause deviations in hydrology. Federal, state, and local governments spend millions of taxpayer dollars each year fighting these invasions.

In Florida, the Exotic Pest Plant Council publishes a list of Florida's most invasive species in two categories:

Category I— Invasive exotics that are altering native plant communities by displacing native species, changing community structure or ecological functions, or hybridizing with natives.

Category II — Invasive exotics that have increased in abundance or frequency but have not yet altered plant communities to the extent shown by Category I species. (We have our own personal category for those species that may not be invasive but are still a pain in the rear!)

We will now highlight an "Invasive Plant of the Month" in the **Buzz**. This first one stands out for obvious reasons!

Brazilian Pepper (*Schinus terebinthefolius*)

This horrible tree is actually fairly attractive, and that is how it got to Florida from its native Brazil and Paraguay. Introduced here in 1892, it was widely marketed as Florida Holly. It is actually related to poison ivy and is

not a holly. It produces numerous red berries which are eaten and distributed by many birds. It can completely dominate large areas, can withstand fire, drought, flooding, and salt spray, and grows back rapidly from the roots when cut. The beastly plants even secrete a chemical compound that prevents other species from growing under them, and they are a real threat to Florida's ecosystems.

Groups of people calling themselves "Pepper Busters" have formed in several parts of the state who go forth and kill as many as possible on weekends. We recommend Garlon, a systemic herbicide that can be painted in a band around the base of the tree, killing roots and all. Call us for better instructions.

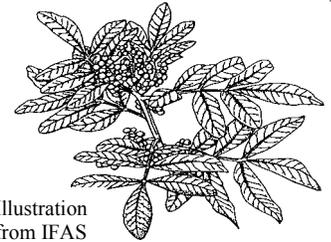


Illustration from IFAS

Plant Shows

Check out **Biosphere's** spring plants at these shows!

Saturday and Sunday, April 27 - 28 — Apopka Art and Foliage Festival, 9 p.m. - 5 p.m. both days.

This show has been a lot of fun in the past and offers something for everyone, including plants, art, crafts, food, and music.

Saturday, May 18 — Butterfly Festival, Seminole Springs Herb Farm. Always a great day, especially if you want to learn about butterfly gardening from some of the local experts. If you have never been to Seminole Springs, take the opportunity to visit north Lake County. Stop at Bertha's Produce Stand on C.R. 46 for the best freshly baked sweet potato pie you have ever eaten!

Remember, **Biosphere** is open to the public for retail sales every Saturday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. We also invite you to visit us on the web at BiosphereNursery.com.

We still need HELP!

It was great to hear from so many of you. **We are happy you liked the Buzz!** Your positive response has kept us rolling right into the second month. If you haven't had the time to respond, however, and would still like to receive the newsletter, please fill out the form below and mail it to us at **Biosphere Consulting, 14908 Tilden Road, Winter Garden, FL 34787.**

Thanks especially to those who sent us your e-mail addresses. If you are willing to receive the newsletter on line, e-mail us at **Biosphere5@aol.com** That would be very helpful in allowing us to continue this service to you. Also, feel free to pass this information, newsletter, or e-mail address on to others you know who may be interested in receiving it. We are still open to all your thoughts and suggestions about the newsletter and our operation. Thanks again for the heartwarming show of support.

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