

## Horticulture Hints September 2019

Fall is on the way, folks! Or as I like to call it, Summer 2.0. (Or Hurricane Month if you prefer.) With the wet weather, mildew is rampant in the yard. The native monarda (bee balm) that I planted in spring has reached nearly six feet in height, and narry a flower bud to be seen. Still could happen, though. In case you haven't noticed, the narrow leaf sunflowers in the area are way less than the six to eight feet tall that they have been in some previous years. I've noticed in other years that they grow taller with dryer weather, but this year, their lack of size is quite pronounced. I do, however, expect that the flowers will be no less beautiful. My fuzzy leaf tibouchina has decided on an out-of-season bloom; it usually shows up around Christmas or right after. Only one flower spike, but such a spectacular glowing purple! Each flower on the spike opens with a red throat, then fades to white.

Everyone's favorite Gardener Gal (Lesley Derrenbacher) did an informal survey a couple years ago, and it was decided that Citrus County's "most hated weeds" are chamberbitter (*Phyllanthus urinaria*) and stinkvine (*Paederia foetida*). Chamberbitter is that palm-looking thing that comes up wherever the soil has been disturbed. But what I'd like to talk about here is stinkvine. Other common names you may be familiar with: sewer vine, skunkweed, or Chinese fever vine. I couldn't agree more with the assessment. But it appears that pollinators (particularly bumble bees) love, and I do mean I-o-v-e, the flowers. For this reason, I have in previous years allowed it grow in one place. But after reading more about the subject, I may have to re-think that. It was first introduced to this part of Florida in the last part of the 1800's as a possible fiber plant. That particular use didn't pan out, but by 1916 it was already becoming a "troublesome weed". It's a perennial that dies back in the winter only to reappear in the spring, and each year, it gets bigger and produces more flowers. Those flowers that the bumble bees love are followed by a green-then-brown fruit containing two seeds each. The seeds are likely then spread by birds, and can ultimately change the face of native habitat. This makes the vine a *Category I* invasive. And the most insidious part of the vine is its delicacy. You cannot pull it off the plants around which it has entwined itself. It only breaks off, leaving most of the vine, and of course, the root, intact. According to Connie Bersok, UF/Leon County Extension, it requires great care and patience to get rid of it. It's best to deal with it before the flowers form. Carefully untwine it from its host plant, down to the ground. From ground level, pull up the root. Then dispose of the vine and root in a closed plastic bag. Do NOT compost it, and don't leave it loose for trash pickup.

Speaking of invasives, a little research was called for on the subject. The Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council (FLEPPC) is the group that compiles the lists of invasive plant species. Professional botanists and others perform exhaustive studies to determine invasive exotic plants to be placed on the lists. There are two classes of invasive plants: *Category I* invasives are those that alter native plant communities by displacing native species, changing community structures or ecological functions, or hybridizing with natives. According to the FLEPPC, this definition does not rely on the economic severity or geographic range of the problem, but on the documented ecological damage caused. *Category II* invasive exotics have increased in abundance or frequency but have not yet altered Florida plant communities to the extent shown by *Category I* species. They may become *Category I* if ecological damage is demonstrated. The above-mentioned stink vine (*Paederia foetida*) is listed as *Category I*, therefore has already been documented to have displaced native species or changed community structures or ecological functions. These lists are re-evaluated every two years. You may visit their website for more detailed information, and copies of the most current list: [fleppc.org](http://fleppc.org)

The Japanese have a concept of living that, I believe, goes well with a love of gardening. It is wabi-sabi, noun, a concept, an aesthetic, and a world view that focuses on finding the beauty within the imperfections of life, and accepting peacefully the cycle of growth and decay. Doesn't that say it all? Imperfection, growth and decay, all beauty-full in their time.

Happy gardening, friends!