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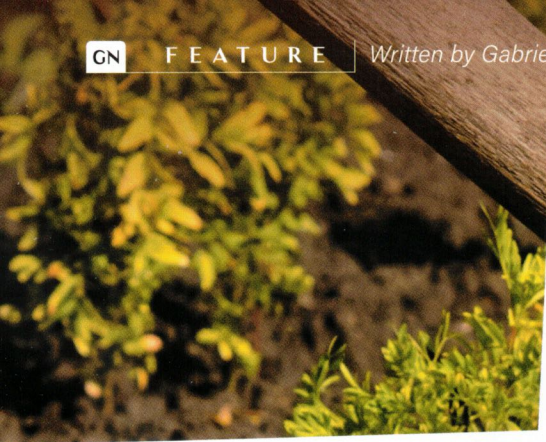


*Fall Horticultural Expo
and Plant Market:*

**WHERE THE WILD
THINGS GROW**

Photo provided by Paula Waterman

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Fall Horticultural Expo and Plant Market:

WHERE THE WILD THINGS GROW



The Fall Horticultural Expo and Plant Market is set to return this season, bringing together gardening enthusiasts, environmental organizations, families, and community members for a full day of discovery, shopping, and hands-on learning. What began as a modest plant sale in 2023 has quickly grown into one of the region's most anticipated horticultural events.

FROM SMALL BEGINNINGS TO A COMMUNITY TRADITION

The idea for the Expo sprouted in October 2023, when UF/IFAS Extension agents Mary Lee Sale (4-H) and Dr. Cynthia Nazario-Leary (Environmental Horticulture & MGVC Coordinator) hosted the first Fall Extension Extravaganza and Food Truck Rally at the Alachua Ag & Equestrian Center. That event featured a small plant sale with about 500 plants—mainly herbs, fall vegetables, and native species—and attracted around 500 attendees.

Though the day was successful, both organizers were unsure if they wanted to take on the workload again. But MGVC Kathy Stephens, who is also a Gainesville Garden Club (GGC) member, saw the potential to build something bigger. She approached Dr. Nazario-Leary with the idea of collaborating with the Gainesville Garden Club, combining the strengths of both organizations to create a larger fall event. Out of that conversation, the Fall Horticultural Expo was born. By adding plant vendors, community partners, and a keynote address from nationally recognized speaker Doug Tallamy, the 2024 Expo drew more than 1,400 visitors—nearly tripling the crowd from the previous year.

WHAT IT TAKES TO GROW AN EXPO

An event of this scale requires careful planning and a lot of teamwork. The Expo is organized by a Steering Committee, which is divided into smaller teams that handle everything from vendor coordination and food trucks to parking logistics and arena design. The leadership and volunteer base is made up of both MGVC and GGC members. On event day, it's truly "all hands on deck," with about 160 volunteers ensuring everything runs smoothly.



Special recognition goes to visionaries Kathy Stephens and Dr. Cynthia Nazario-Leary, whose early collaboration brought the Expo to life. Organizational leaders Becky O'Brien, President of the GGC, along with MGVC Advisory Board Chair Joanne Foss and Co-Chair Barbara Carter, are also key to keeping the event organized and moving forward.

A MISSION WITH ROOTS

The Expo isn't just about plants—it's about education, community engagement, and inspiring people to connect with the natural world. Its goals include:

- Uniting and elevating the region's horticultural, wildlife, and environmental organizations.
- Showcasing innovation and leadership in environmental horticulture.
- Inspiring young people to engage with the outdoors.
- Sharing research-based horticultural knowledge with the public.
- Celebrating gardening and environmental care by "Bringing Nature Home" for one day in an interactive, community-centered format.

PARTNERSHIPS ACROSS THE COMMUNITY

The Expo is built on partnerships with dozens of organizations across the county. Civic groups, Audubon Societies, Friends of Paynes Prairie, scouting programs, and multiple state and county park systems all play a part. Perhaps most notably, the event is a collaboration between the GGC, the Alachua County MGVC, and 4-H, with strong support from UF/IFAS horticultural and environmental departments. From bees to poinsettias, the Expo highlights the diverse and interconnected work being done to support Florida's environment.

PLANTS, SEEDS, AND MORE

For gardeners, the Plant Market is a highlight. Visitors can expect to find fall-blooming plants to brighten yards, vegetable starts for the cooler season, perennial shrubs and trees, wildflower seeds, pollinator pots, strawberry starts, and soil



amendments to enrich the garden. Vendors like Wild Birds Unlimited will also offer supplies to make any backyard more bird-friendly.

This year's theme, "Where the Wild Things Grow," puts a spotlight on Florida's native seed industry. Attendees can learn from growers, seed collectors, and conservation leaders about the challenges and opportunities in creating a sustainable native seed supply to support Florida's ecosystems and biodiversity.

SPEAKERS AND DEMONSTRATIONS

Education is at the heart of the Expo. Keynote speaker Jennifer Jewell, host of nationally syndicated radio's *Cultivating Place*, will present "Sow Wild Wonder" at 10 a.m. and again at 1 p.m. in the Extension Auditorium. Jewell is also the author of *The Earth in Her Hands*, *75 Extraordinary Women Working in the World of Plants*, and *What We Sow: On the Personal, Ecological and Cultural Significance of Seeds*. Her talks will stimulate our appreciation of gardening and seeds, and book signings will follow.

In addition to the keynote, the Arena will feature hourly demonstrations beginning at 11 a.m.:

- **11:00 a.m.** – Terri Chalkley: *Create Your Best Fall Garden*
- **11:30 a.m.** – Angela Wilson: *Pruning Fruit & Nut Trees*
- **12:00 p.m.** – Art Wade: *Our Florida Heritage Roses*
- **2:00 p.m.** – Terry Zinn & Melissa DeSa: *Sow Wild! Seeds That Flower & Feed*
- **3:00 p.m.** – Bruce Cavey: *Capture Wildness in a Vase*

Throughout the day, visitors can also stop by "Table Talks" on topics like Florida-Friendly Landscaping™, propagation, and flower arranging. Several exhibits will demonstrate how seeds are processed for planting, with a focus on local and native varieties.

ACTIVITIES FOR ALL AGES

The Expo is designed to be an inclusive, family-friendly day. Garden clubs from Gainesville and Newberry will showcase creative fall tablescape. In the Kid Zone, the Florida Museum will lead hands-on science projects exploring insects and plant life cycles through art and tactile learning. 4-H will bring goats and cows, host a calf-roping demonstration, and even hold a tack sale in the stables.

Children can also enjoy four additional "Kids Krafts" stations, including:

- Birdhouse decorating with Alachua Audubon.
- Pumpkin decorating with Grow Hub.
- Fun with Flowers with the Gainesville Garden Club.
- Pet rocks and insect education with the Girl Scouts.
- A Community Gathering for Everyone

One of the guiding ideas behind the Expo is to create a space where everyone—families, hobby gardeners, professionals, or the curious—can explore, learn, and enjoy. Admission is free and open to all, making it easy for anyone to stop by, pick up a new plant or packet of seeds, grab a bite from a food truck, or simply enjoy the atmosphere.

HOW TO SUPPORT THE EXPO

The success of the Expo depends on community support. Beyond attending, residents can help by inviting friends and family, spreading the word, or even considering sponsorship opportunities to help underwrite event costs. The Expo is funded in part by Visit Gainesville, Alachua County.

For more information and weekly updates, visit the Expo's official website: www.ggcfl.org/horticulture-expo

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