



SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- EARTH DAY 2011
- SWEETGRASS PLANTING SUCCESS
- NEW POLLINATOR NESTS
- FIELD NOTES



School children digging potatoes from the People's Garden during the Earth Day Celebration

PMC IMPACT

APRIL 2011

THE SUNSHINE STATE'S

Brooksville PMC Celebrates Earth Day

On April 20th, the Brooksville PMC hosted its 2nd annual Earth Day Event. Exhibitors included the Hernando chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society, Audubon Society, Fish and Wildlife Commission, the Florida Division of Forestry, Hernando and Sumter County Extension, NRCS Mobile Irrigation Lab, and MLRA Web Soil Survey staff.

Carlos Suarez, Florida State Conservationist, and Greg Hendricks, State Resource Conservationist, gave the opening remarks to a crowd of roughly seventy people, including 40+ kids. Mimi Williams discussed the pollinator demonstration garden and led several school groups in

planting this year's seedlings of purple lovegrass, softhair cone-flower, manyflower beardtongue, blue mistflower, goldenmane coreopsis, hyssop skullcap, Indian blanket, blackeyed susan, dotted horsemint, tall ironweed, and beach sunflower.

Other children's activities included wildlife tattoos, painting frog-houses, building soil profiles that looked like our Myakka state soil, and the grand finale of digging in, elbow-deep, into the People's Garden to harvest potatoes, onions, and cabbage. This harvest was then donated to The Way Family Farms, a non-profit that provides training and technical assistance to

beginning and existing farmers, at-risk youth, and non-violent former offenders.

Presentations given throughout the day included Greg Hendricks' discussion of our ongoing longleaf pine restoration and exotic plant eradication, an exhibition of antique farm equipment by Steve Melton, and a discussion of our Xerces Pollinator Study with our popular wildflower give away.

It was a beautiful day; and our deep appreciation to all our NRCS staff who volunteered to help make this another successful Earth Day!

Treatments to Improve Sweetgrass Establishment

At the request of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Charleston District, the PMC released Sea Islands Germplasm sweetgrass (*Muhlenbergia sericea*) in 2009. The Corps has been contracting with commercial nurseries to produce Sea Islands plants to plant in coastal restoration projects. They were doing so to provide accessible populations

of sweetgrass for the Gullah/Geechee community to harvest for use in their basketry. However, survival of these plants was poor.

In 2010, the Corps provided funding to the PMC to trial different greenhouse growing treatments and determine the effect of these treatments on survival in the field.

The greenhouse treatments consisted of three different container sizes, including a 38-count tray with short cells, a 50-count tray with deep cells, which both held almost the same volume of potting soil, and a 4-inch azalea pot, which provided about 5 times the space for root growth. Each pot size was either given a fertilizer treatment or was

Sweetgrass Establishment continued



Greenhouse propagation treatments and planting sweetgrass on Daufuskie Island, SC

not fertilized. The plants were grown in the greenhouse for six months. A destructive sample to determine root and shoot growth was taken from each treatment monthly.

The field study was planted on Daufuskie Island, SC on

three sites, two along the coast and one inland. Field planting treatments consisted of planting all greenhouse treatments with or without polymer gel and with or without fertilizer. Each treatment was planted at three distances from the water on the coastal sites.

The PMC received vital assistance from the Corps of Engineers, the Daufuskie Island Homeowners Association and South Carolina NRCS State Office and Field Office staff in carrying out this field planting and conducting evaluations.

New Pollinator Nests

The PMC built new government housing for tiny creatures that like to drink, dance, and mate. Yes, we are talking about nesting habitat for solitary native bees! The new digs are designed for leafcutter and mason bees who like to frequent the flowers in the nearby Xerces pollinator garden and People's Garden, for nectar and pollen.

There are 4,000 native bee species in the US, and 90 percent of that population are solitary bees. The majority, 70 percent, live in underground burrows; but roughly 30 percent still require tunnels and cavities in dead trees. Due to habitat destruction: the removal of snags, covering of bare ground, mowing untidy corners of grass, it is necessary for producers to create simple structures or areas where bees can successfully nest.

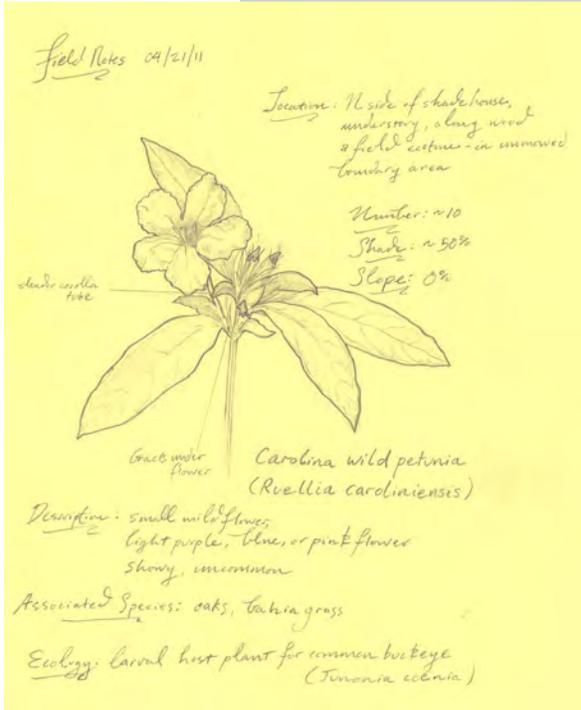
Making nests is easy, but there are a few things to remember. The nest should face east, to allow bees to warm-up in the morning; the inside of the holes should be smooth, solid-backed, roughly 4-6 inches deep, and represent a range of sizes; and the nest should have a protective roof to shield it from rain.

For more information regarding specifications for nest construction please see the Xerces publication: *Attracting Native Pollinators, 2011*, by Eric Mader et al.



Bee nest designed for mason bees using recycled materials, PVC, and bamboo.

Field Notes



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