



THE HIBISCUS LEAFLET

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A proud member of the National Garden Club, Inc. & the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs

Nightfall and New Beginnings

President's Message

They say time flies when you're having fun, and that has certainly been true for me. I have had so much joy serving as your President for the past two years, and now it's time for all of us to celebrate together at our Fashions and Florals "**Nightfall in the Garden**" event on Friday, April 24, 2026, at the historic Coral Gables Country Club.

This enchanted evening will feature an avant-garde fashion show by designer Julian Chang, alongside stunning floral arrangements, cocktails, an elegant dinner, lively music, dancing, and a silent auction filled with extraordinary baskets and fabulous cruises. Don't miss this opportunity to experience a truly magical evening while celebrating all we have accomplished together over the past two years.

Tickets are \$175 per person, and each member is asked to purchase or sell one ticket. Funds raised will support the new micro-forest planned in collaboration with the City of Coral Gables, as well as the continued habitat restoration of Camp Mahachie. Proceeds will also sustain the many programs the Coral Gables Garden Club champions—educating our members, youth, and the public in gardening, horticulture, environmental stewardship, community beautification, and the art of floral design.

Our club is strong and well positioned to continue making meaningful contributions to both our city and our membership. We have established a Donor Advised Fund with the Coral Gables Community Foundation with an initial contribution of \$50,000. These funds will be professionally invested to earn a higher rate of return than a traditional money market account, while also providing increased community recognition for the Garden Club.

Additionally, we have hired a bookkeeper to assist with reporting, tracking, record-keeping, and ensuring consistency throughout the year and during treasurer transitions. And, of course, we have enhanced our "fun factor" with more workshops, engaging field trips, and expanded opportunities for community involvement.

Please join me as we celebrate our accomplishments, our bright future, and—most importantly—our friendships at *Nightfall in the Garden!*

Warmly,

Bonnie Seipp

President, Coral Gables Garden Club



Club Events Coming Up:

Thursday, March 5th @ 10:00am
Field Trip - Patch of Heaven
Sanctuary Tour & Lunch
 21900 SW 157th Avenue, Miami

Thursday, March 12th @ 5:30 pm
Sip 'N' Snip
 Garden Center, Biltmore Hotel

Saturday, March 14th @ 10:00 am
Fun with Flowers
 Garden Center, Biltmore Hotel

Saturday, March 28th @ 9:00 am
Heritage Garden
 Merrick House

Get Your Tickets for
Fashions and Florals



Member Highlight: *Charlotte Stoker Smiley* *May 25, 1938 - December 7, 2025*

By Michele Dudley

Surrounded by her loving family, Charlotte Stoker Smiley passed away peacefully at her Tallahassee home on December 7, 2025, at the age of 87. Charlotte was born on May 25, 1938, in Detroit, Michigan, to Charles and Doris Stoker. She later moved to Miami with her family when her father, Charlie, founded his residential construction company.



From an early age, Charlotte's dedication and spirit were evident. She earned her Gold Star Girl Scout Award, graduated from Coral Gables Senior High School, and attended and graduated from Florida State University, where she was a proud member of the Sigma Kappa sorority. She later graduated with honors from the University of Miami, earning a Master's degree in Psychology.



Charlotte met the love of her life, Karl Smiley, in 1959 at First United Methodist Church of Coral Gables. They married in 1960 and began their life together in Atlanta where Karl attended medical school. Their marriage was a remarkable partnership of more than 63 years, until Karl's passing in 2023.

Charlotte's professional life reflected her intelligence and commitment to service. She worked at the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta and later at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration in Houston.

Wherever the family lived, Houston, Dallas, or Seattle, Charlotte created a warm, nurturing home while raising her three boys. Eventually they move to Miami where she had her fourth child, the daughter she had long prayed for.



In Miami, Charlotte devoted herself to her family and community. She served as a scout leader, volunteered extensively in her children's schools, and was an active participant in the PTO, always emphasizing the importance of education. Once her children left for college, she returned to her professional calling, counseling at-risk students in the Dade County School System and providing premarital counseling through First United Methodist Church of Coral Gables, helping countless couples build strong foundations.



Charlotte found great joy in life's simple and meaningful pleasures—boating, water skiing, botany, traveling, and especially creating magical family trips to Disney World. Her grandchildren held a special place in her heart, and each summer she lovingly organized what fondly came to be known as "Camp Gramsy," creating treasured memories that will live on for generations.

She was an active and cherished member of First United Methodist Church of Coral Gables, P.E.O. International, the Coral Gables Garden Club, and Montgomery Botanical Center, where she was a Heritage Member. She remained a lifelong supporter of Girl Scouts of America, especially Camp Mahachee, and enjoyed lasting friendships through the Biscayne Bay Yacht Club and Riviera Country Club.



Charlotte is survived by her four loving children: Tom (Betsy), Scott (MaryAnne), Mark (Elizabeth), and Laura (Jerry) Bryant; and her five beloved grandchildren, Kyle Smiley, Brandon (Julia) Smiley, and Jake, Anna, and Isabel Bryant. She was preceded in death by her devoted husband, Karl, and her infant grandson, Christian Jackson Smiley.

Charlotte was a deeply valued and beloved member of our Garden Club. Her kindness, generosity, and joyful spirit enriched the lives of all who knew her. We are grateful for the time we shared with her, and she will be remembered with love and missed by many!

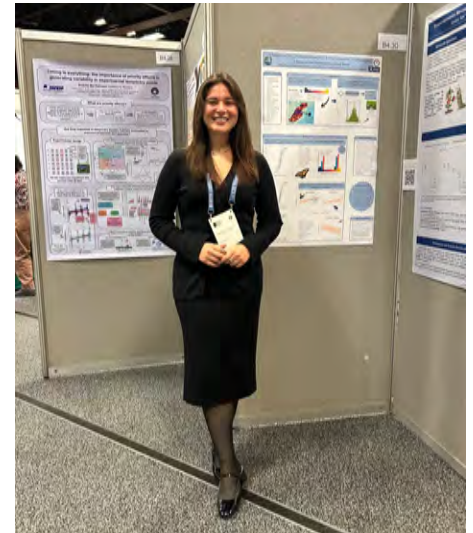


Special Highlight: *Marina Marquis*

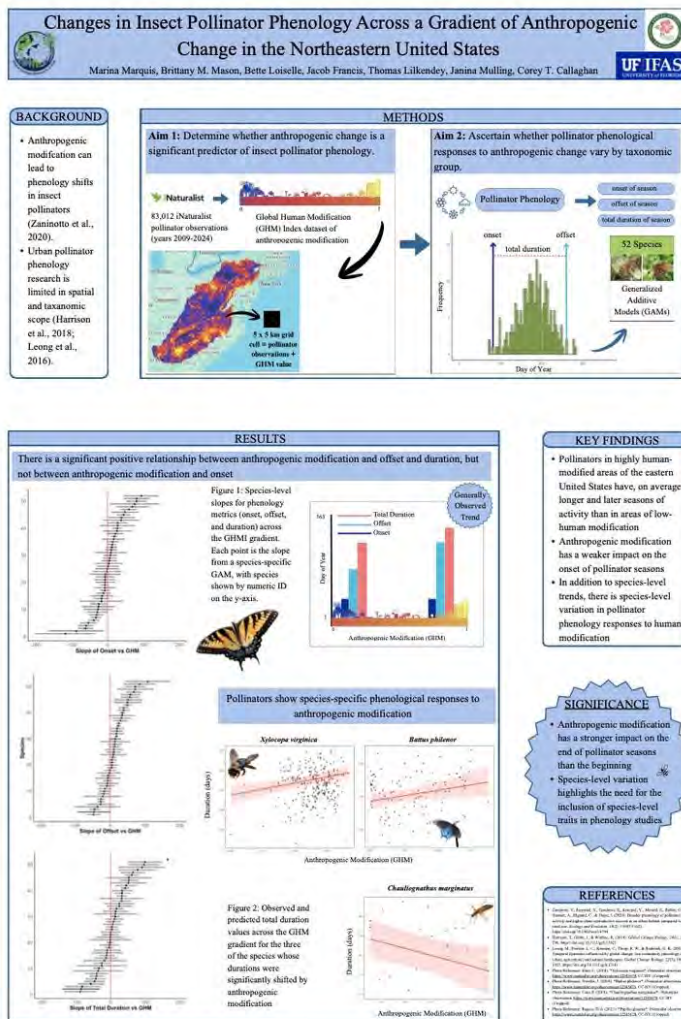
Recipient of the Coral Gables Garden Club Scholarship

By *Marina Marquis*

In December 2025, I presented my pollinator research at the 2025 British Ecological Society (BES) Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland. I am a master's student at the University of Florida, where I study how human-driven environmental change affects insect pollinators. My research is supported by the Coral Gables Garden Club Scholarship, which helps students pursuing higher education in the natural sciences. I first learned about this opportunity through word of mouth and have been fortunate to receive the award more than once. The scholarship supports my ongoing field research and made it possible for me to attend the BES Conference to present my work.



As part of my broader research on pollinators and environmental change, I investigated whether urbanization is altering insect pollinator seasonality. In other words, I asked whether urban pollinators are active at different times of the year. Using a large citizen science dataset, I assessed the seasonality of insect pollinators across an urban gradient in the eastern United States. I found that insect pollinators generally have longer and later seasons in more urbanized areas. This pattern may be partially explained by the urban heat island effect—a phenomenon in which cities are warmer than the surrounding landscape.



These findings have important consequences for urban plants, which tend to flower earlier in cities. If pollinators are unwilling or unable to shift their activity to keep pace with earlier blooms, plants and their pollinators may fall out of sync, potentially reducing pollination of urban plants. Further research is essential to better understand urban plant-pollinator relationships and to help urban communities create environments with thriving plant and pollinator populations.

The 2025 BES Conference drew approximately 1,500 attendees from around the world and provided me with a valuable opportunity to present my findings and gain insight from other pollinator researchers. I am grateful to the Coral Gables Garden Club for its continued support of my research and professional development.



This poster, which I presented at the 2025 BES Conference, summarizes the structure and findings of my pollinator seasonality study.

Garden Wisdom: In Search of Giant Coconuts

By M. Patrick Griffith, Executive Director
Montgomery Botanical Center

I recently came across an article about a large-scale coconut removal project. The name of the place actually invokes palms: Palmyra Atoll. I had heard of it before, and my interest was piqued so I read on; as it turns out, biologists were celebrating the removal of one million invasive coconut palms!

My work centers around collecting and growing plants, so I was quite curious about the coconut removal efforts underway. And that got me looking into the history of that place. Turns out this is one of the most remote spots on our planet, in the center of the Pacific Ocean. This small ring of islets, about 5 square miles in total, was likely visited by voyaging Polynesians but never occupied. The first western contact was in 1802, when the trading ship *Palmyra* wrecked upon its reef – which added the atoll to the naval charts and lent it a name. Her captain saw “no inhabitants” and also “abundant coconuts of very large size” there – the very first two facts ever recorded about the place.

The Atoll changed hands several times in the past 224 years – and received almost no botanical scrutiny over that long period. But one venerable paper stood out in my literature search: an Italian expert had miraculously come into possession of four of these fruits, and named those giants *Cocos nucifera* var. *palmyrensis*, the Palmyra Coconut.

Was this the palm being removed so vigorously in our own times? No answers to be found in libraries, so I had to go there myself! I brought a team there to collect these fabled fruits in November 2024. This was not simple – we had to charter a small jet to land on the WWII-era airstrip, and obtain permission from five different agencies and authorities to study, collect, and transport these specimens.

We were delighted to discover that the fabled Giant Coconuts first mentioned by Captain Cornelius Sowle persisted, and in fact, are still thriving on Palmyra. After two dedicated expeditions we now have a vigorously growing collection at Montgomery Botanical Center – the very first *Cocos nucifera* var. *palmyrensis* grown anywhere except the atoll – and available for students and scholars.

Seeing a botanical treasure like this is a wild experience – emotional, thrilling and invigorating. I am deeply thankful to the US Fish and Wildlife Service and The Nature Conservancy for their dedication and effort to ensure the survival of these unique green gems!



Harvest Kitchen: Growing Basil From Clippings

By Michele Dudley, RDN, Culinary Coach, founder of Barefoot Nutrition®

Basil can be one of the trickiest herbs to grow here in **South Florida**... at least for me! It dries out, turns brown, or wilts before I really get to enjoy it. And once it's in the refrigerator, it never seems to last very long. I really don't like wasting food, especially something as delicious and useful as fresh basil!



Some time ago, after making pesto, I had a lot of basil left over. I decided to treat it the way I treat fresh flowers. I trimmed the ends of the stems and placed the clippings in a glass of water by my kitchen window. I just wanted to see how long it would last. To my surprise... it started rooting! I was beyond excited!

Once the roots were strong enough, I planted it, and again, to my surprise, it took beautifully and gave me delicious basil for months. It eventually died (as plants do), but I've repeated this process several times since then. Most of the time it works! Occasionally it doesn't, and I believe that depends on the quality of the basil and how long it has been cut from the "mother" plant. Even when it doesn't root, this method still helps keep basil fresh longer.

Here's what I do:

🌱 Remove the large leaves.

Taking off excess leaves helps the cutting grow roots, letting the plant spend more energy rooting rather than supporting foliage.

🌱 Clear the lower stems completely.

There should be no leaves where the stems will sit in water. Leaves submerged in water will rot, and so will the cutting.

🌱 Keep the water clean.

Check the water level daily and replace it if it looks cloudy or dirty.

In just a few days (fingers crossed!), you should start to see tiny roots forming, and sometimes even new leaves.

This is such a fun activity to do with kids. Because the roots develop quickly, they can clearly see the process, especially if you use a clear glass container.

I hope you give this a try and enjoy months of fresh basil. Let's grow some plants!

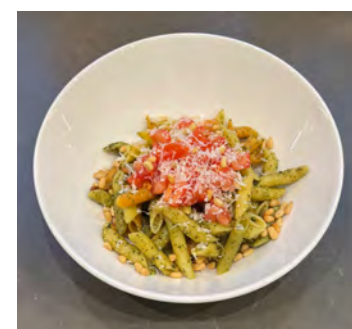


My Easy Pesto Recipe

I use this pesto for pasta, sandwiches (it's incredible on Caprese sandwiches!), and even as a dip.

Ingredients

- 2 cups fresh basil
- ½ cup toasted pine nuts
- ¾ cup olive oil
- 4–5 garlic cloves
- ½ cup shredded Parmesan cheese
- 1 tablespoon nutritional yeast - optional, this adds extra nutrients and a little protein)
- Salt and pepper to taste



Directions:

1. Wash the basil and let it dry completely.

2. Toast the pine nuts: Preheat oven to 275°F. Spread pine nuts on a baking sheet or oven-safe dish. Bake for about 15 minutes, or until fragrant and lightly golden (keep an eye on them — they can burn quickly!)

3. Place the basil, pine nuts, garlic, and olive oil in a food processor (I use a mini one) or blender. Process until smooth.

Tip: You can freeze this mixture *before* adding the Parmesan for later use. Ice cube trays work beautifully!

4. Stir in the Parmesan cheese and nutritional yeast (if using).

Your pesto is ready to enjoy...I love it on pasta, topped with chopped tomatoes, toasted pine nuts and freshly grated Parmesan cheese!

For more tips and recipes go to BarefootNutrition.com

Garden Club Events Highlights:

Board Meeting at Camp Mahachee



Diggin' It Workshop



CPR Class



Garden Club Events Highlights:

Heritage Garden



Fun with Flowers



Garden Therapy at Crystal Academy



Garden Club Events Highlights:

Tour of Kitchens



General and Board Meetings



2026 Club Happenings

2026 Date	Time	Event	Location
03/05 (Thu)	10:00 AM	Field Trip & Lunch	Patch of Heaven Sanctuary 21900 SW 157th Avenue Miami, Florida
03/12 (Wed)	5:30 PM	Sip 'N' Snip	Lamar Louise Curry Park 2665 De Soto Boulevard
03/14 (Sat)	10:00 AM	Fun with Flowers	Biltmore Hotel Garden Cottage
03/28 (Sat)	9:00 AM	Heritage Garden	Merrick House 907 Coral Way
04/08 (Wed)	2:00 PM	Garden Therapy	Riviera Health Resort 6901 Yumuri Street
04/11 (Sat)	10:00 AM	Diggin' It Workshop	Biltmore Hotel Garden Cottage
04/14 - 04/19 (Wed-Sun)	TBD	FFGG Convention	Embassy Suites Kissimmee, Florida
04/24 (Fri)	10:00 AM	National Arbor Day Tree Planting	TBD
04/24 (Fri)	7:00 PM	Fashions & Florals Fundraiser	Coral Gables Country Club 997 North Greenway Drive
04/25 (Sat)	9:00 AM	Heritage Garden	Merrick House 907 Coral Way
05/02 (Sat)	9:00 AM	Fun with Flowers	Biltmore Hotel Garden Cottage
05/06 (Wed)	11:30 AM	Installation Luncheon	Coral Reef Yacht Club 2484 South Bayshore Drive Coconut Grove, Florida
05/16 (Sat)	9:00 AM	Heritage Garden	Merrick House 907 Coral Way

