



THE HIBISCUS LEAFLET

Cultivate. Educate. Create. Inspire.

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

A Message of Gratitude and Pride

President's Message

As I write my final President's message, I am filled with deep gratitude and tremendous pride; gratitude for the friendships I have formed, the joy of serving this extraordinary organization, and pride in all we have accomplished together. It has been a true honor to serve as your President during such a historic chapter in the life of the Coral Gables Garden Club.



When I assumed the presidency as a relatively new member during our Centennial year, I could not have imagined what an incredible journey these past two years would be. Together, we celebrated our first 100 years while planting seeds for our second century—honoring our rich history while continuing our mission of beautification, conservation, education, and community service.

This year, we proudly concluded many of our Centennial initiatives, including the installation and unveiling of the Coral Gables Garden Club and Xavier Cortada Planting Pollinators Centennial Sculpture at the Coral Gables Library. Our historical exhibition boards were displayed at the library throughout January and were also added to the Miami-Dade Public Library digital collections, preserving the rich history of our club for generations to come.

Our members continued to make a meaningful impact throughout the community by supporting environmental stewardship, horticultural education, and civic beautification projects, including:

 A five-year, **\$25,000 donation to Camp Mahachie's "Plant It Forward" Campaign**, continuing the restoration of the camp's historic landscape through the planting of native trees.

 A **\$25,000 initial contribution to the Coral Gables Micro-Forest Project**, part of our Project Canopy initiative in partnership with City of Coral Gables, which will create a dense native urban forest and leave a lasting environmental legacy.

 Our **4th Annual Fashions & Florals – "A Nightfall in the Garden"**, a beautiful evening of fellowship and fundraising featuring designer Julian Chang, which raised more than \$50,000 to support our mission.

 A meaningful **Arbor Day celebration** in partnership with City of Coral Gables, including speeches by Garden Club members and the planting of five native Dade County Pine trees in Fewell Park—an investment in our city's future canopy.

 Inspiring **field trips** to Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, Nixon Smiley Pineland Preserve, and Patch of Heaven Sanctuary, where members connected with nature and one another.

A Message of Gratitude and Pride - cont.

President's Message

🌿 A joyful **Camp Mahachee Tree Planting Day**, where members literally got their hands in the soil—planting trees, nurturing the land, and strengthening our long-standing connection to this treasured community resource.

🌿 Our talented **Designing Divas**, created stunning floral arrangements for the “Inking History” event benefiting the Coral Gables Community Foundation Historic Preservation Fund, the Fashions and Florals event, and the Ronald McDonald House Mother’s Day event, showcasing how floral design can be both art and service.

As we look ahead, I am excited about the projects already taking root for the coming year:

🌿 A redesigned **Butterfly Garden at the Coral Gables Library** surrounding our Planting Pollinators sculpture, designed to provide habitat for pollinators while educating visitors of all ages about the importance of native plants and biodiversity.

🌿 Expanded support for **Camp Mahachee**, including hands-on gardening and environmental education programs that will inspire the next generation of young environmental stewards through the Girl Scout badge program.

🌿 A partnership with Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden as **Citizen Scientists** in their exciting new **Million Orchid Project/Balcony initiative**, allowing members to contribute directly to important scientific and conservation efforts.

As we close our 101st year, I am excited to pass the gavel to our new President, Barbara Reese, whose longstanding commitment to the club and leadership experience will guide us beautifully into the future. She will be joined by an outstanding board, including six returning members from the 2025–2026 Board, ensuring both continuity and fresh ideas for the years ahead.

Serving as your President has been one of the greatest honors of my life. Thank you for your support, your dedication, and your love for this remarkable club. Together, we have planted seeds that will continue to grow and flourish far into the future.

With heartfelt gratitude,

Bonnie Seipp

President, Coral Gables Garden Club



Member Highlight: **Susan Rodriguez**

By JoAnne Matthews

We have been a VERY busy club since 2021, and the energizer behind a lot of that activity has been Susan Rodriguez. Susan joined our club in 2008. Prior to joining the Executive Board in 2020 as First VP and Communication Chair, she focused her involvement on the Jr Gardener Project, the Edible Garden Committee, and Environmental Chair. In 2019, she turned her attention to fundraising and community with a special floral design event. She revamped our website, and has been instrumental in keeping it up to date and user-friendly since.



She became President and Communications Chair in May 2021, on a festive ZOOM installation amidst the CoVid pandemic. The headline in the first newsletter after her installation: "Garden Club enters 97th year with energy and gusto". The shutdown did not deter her; she came up with the idea of a Photo Contest (which spread beyond our membership and continued for three years) to create a fun way to enjoy the outdoors, to raise funds, and to promote the club. The photos were used for other fundraising, publications, etc.

As administrator, she maintained her role in Public Relations. She inspired us with new ideas and modeled a promotion of pride, holding the Club above any self-importance. She also modeled hard work! ... often the first to pick up a shovel or spend long hours planning our "next".

She kept a close eye on fundraising to support our projects and spread confidence that we could produce the first "Fashion and Florals" event at the Biltmore Hotel. Who can say "no" to Susan?—not Barbara Reese or JoWanda Peterson, and we all enjoyed fashions from Lilly Pulitzer, with 260 community/members in attendance. In 2023, she inspired the co-chairs to do it again: this time with a pre-sale and fashions from Johnny Was; we maxed the ballroom capacity. In 2024, all hands on deck—Susan encouraged us to "shake it up". The gala, with those two same selfless co-chairs and fashion creations from eight local designers, was held at the Coral Gables Museum. Sharon Trbovich and others didn't say no to add an NGC flower show at the same venue; more than 400 passed through the show and many were newcomers to a flower show. Thanks to sponsorships and attendance and gifts-in-kind, profits grew each year, to \$28,000.



As the end of her two-year term as president approached, we were headed into our Centennial celebration; so, upon request, she stayed on for a third year. She had already committed to being District Director, so – she wore both hats for one year and sprinkled her inspirational energy throughout the district for that two-year term. She used her position as President and District Director to promote collaboration (funds, resources and labor) beyond just our membership: City and County officials, staff and publicity channels, DERM environmental representatives, with university and local schools, the Coral Gables community foundation, firefighters, Girl/Boy Scouts, students and more.



Member Highlight: *Susan Rodriguez - cont.*

By JoAnne Matthews

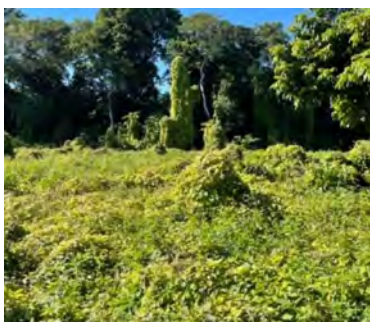
In preparation for our Centennial year, Teresa Zohn did not say no and headed up a dynamic committee and big plans. As part of that celebration in 2025, Susan orchestrated a collaboration with the City for "Century In Bloom" at the Merrick House on a beautiful February afternoon. After a lot of publicity and hard work by many, the question was: will anyone come? Many member volunteers and over 400 attendees enjoyed the event which showcased our 100 years of community service. Susan's appreciation for our history has been so meaningful as she steered us into our centennial year. She assembled 26 display boards of our history for this event, which were later displayed at the Coral Gables library for one month. In addition to the display boards mentioned earlier, she authored a very beautiful 48-page book of our history that was given as gifts to the attendees at our Centennial Luncheon, it won an FFGC Award for Publication.



Her first year as president saw the theme of "Pollinators in the Garden" and those efforts have prevailed during her leadership. She's spearheaded several pollinator plant sales, including at our local Farmers Market beginning 2022, online via our website, and at general meetings. She had oversight for the planting of eight pollinator gardens at local schools as part of our Centennial grants.

As a leader, Susan listens for opportunities to serve. As part of the broader efforts to support tree canopy restoration, she has promoted mangrove restoration, and tree restoration in West Matheson (where she gathered other district clubs to plant 300 trees), and a huge project in collaboration with Girl Scouts of S FL at Camp Mahachie. Her leadership was honored by the Girl Scouts.

And for her dedication and service, she was recognized by the FFGC with the Blanche Capel Covington Leadership Award, by the Deep South Garden Clubs with the Member Award of Honor, and by the National Garden Clubs in recognition of the 2025 Member of Honor Award. With an eye to the past and also to the future, Susan is definitely a fine example of outstanding leadership and service.



Thank you Susan!



Garden Wisdom: Do You Remember Backyard Citrus!

By Betsy Tilghman - Horticulture

My lucky day! Several weeks ago, I opened an envelope and found a nice little check made out to my husband and me. This small windfall was the unexpected final installment of the citrus canker eradication class action lawsuit in Miami Dade County. Between the years of 2000-2006 nearly 800,000 backyard citrus trees were destroyed by the State. This check was a reminder of one of my saddest days and of a terrifying time for those of us with backyard fruit trees.

Twenty odd years ago the Florida Department of Agriculture sent a crew to our house to cut down our healthy citrus trees. The crew was led by a woman, a fact that still jars my sense of, I don't know, maybe something maternal. In an afternoon they chain sawed and pushed through their chipper our many disease-free mature fruit trees in an ill-conceived effort to save the commercial citrus industry. Citrus canker is a bacterial disease, causing lesions on the skin (making them unsightly to sell as whole fruit) and eventually over years weakening the tree, however the juice is unaffected, at least for many years. After the record-breaking hurricane seasons of 2004 and 2005 the government terminated the program, realizing that there is little containment of an airborne disease in a hurricane.

Our property was likely part of Solomon Merrick's citrus plantation and I like to believe that our old navel orange and pink and white grapefruit trees were part of those groves. The fruit was heavenly! We had a variety of newer trees too, including a couple of prolific key limes, a Persian lime, calamondin, honey bell, tangerine and tangelo. So much of my life as a young mother of two boys was tied to our garden of fruit trees. The boys helped harvest the fruit with their small plastic wheelbarrows, separating the "yucky" ones from those ready to peel and enjoy. Sometimes I thought that our youngest son acquired his love of citrus from all the fruit I consumed while eating it at the kitchen sink waiting for his arrival. And we shared! There were so many pink grapefruit in the tree in our front yard that we leaned a picker on its trunk for neighbors to take some for breakfast.

Citrus canker is still around, but I understand it has become a disease of management. Currently the real villain is citrus greening, or Huanglongbing (HLB), a bacterial infection which enters the plant's vascular system and can kill a tree in a few years. It is spread by the Asian citrus psyllid insect and this bad actor has played a major role in the 90 % citrus industry decline here in Florida. Indeed, the good old days for the citrus industry are gone. In just a few decades this backbone of Florida commerce has succumbed to citrus greening, urban sprawl and extreme weather. The vision of countless acres of citrus groves covering the gently rolling land of our central counties and the way the trees perfumed the air with their blooms is only a memory now. And I suppose our Florida license tags are only a reminder of what was.

You may ask if it is currently possible to grow citrus as a backyard fruit. The answer is yes, but to be successful you need to do your homework. UF/IFAS Home Citrus is a good place to start. It seems that growing citrus in large pots surrounded by fine netting offers success – but the esthetics of a beautiful inground tree are lacking. Also, there are now some HLB tolerant (though not totally resistant) varieties. There are no easy choices right now, but I hope that someday through scientific research our kids will once again park their plastic wheelbarrows under bountiful citrus trees, and that the joy of backyard citrus will return.



Special Highlight: *Awards, Awards, and More Awards!*

By Bonnie Seipp and JoAnne Matthews

The Coral Gables Garden Club is proud to celebrate an extraordinary year of recognition—honoring both one of our exceptional members and the remarkable accomplishments of our Club.

First and foremost, please join us in congratulating our own **Susan Rodriguez** (Club President, 2021–2024), whose outstanding leadership, dedication, and service have earned her multiple prestigious honors.



Susan received the **Blanche Covell Covington Award for Leadership**, the highest leadership honor presented by the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, recognizing her as the top leader among all Florida members. She was also selected as the **overall leadership winner for the Deep South Region**, representing excellence across Florida, Georgia, Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee.

Adding to this remarkable achievement, Susan is only the **second member from District XII** to receive the Blanche Covell Covington Award—the first being our own **Betsy Adams** (Club President, 1989–1991), who received the honor in 2009.

Susan was also awarded the **National Garden Clubs Medal of Honor** and the **Deep South Garden Clubs Member Award of Honor**, recognizing her exceptional commitment to garden clubs and service to the broader community.

These distinguished honors reflect Susan's passion, visionary leadership, and tireless dedication to gardening, conservation, civic beautification, and community engagement. We are deeply proud of her accomplishments and grateful for her continued service.

Club Awards and Achievements

In addition to Susan's individual honors, the Coral Gables Garden Club received an impressive number of awards recognizing the breadth and impact of our work throughout 2025. While we are proud of every project we submitted, it is especially meaningful to be recognized among more than 150 clubs statewide.

🏆 Deep South Horticultural Achievement Award

The Florida Federation of Garden Clubs honored our outstanding horticultural programming and excellence in promoting the study and practice of horticulture. This award was advanced to the Deep South level, where we earned **two additional honors: First Place, Large Club**, and **Overall Winner** in Conservation.

🏆 Edible Landscape Garden Award

Our beloved **Merrick House Heritage Garden** received recognition for its educational value, public accessibility, and thoughtful inclusion of edible flowers. Special thanks to **Maria Teofilo** and **Joanne Meagher**, who chaired this wonderful project.

Centennial Celebration Honors

Many of this year's awards stemmed from our extraordinary **Centennial Celebration**, a year-long tribute to 100 years of service, beauty, and community impact.

Our celebration began with a commemorative logo and historic club photo and continued through the spectacular **November 2024 House & Garden Tour**, featuring six historic homes and a vibrant marketplace at Granada Church.

For these efforts, we received the **Florida Federation of Garden Clubs Community Service Award**. Special thanks to **Teresa Zohn** and **Kristal Meyer**, our Centennial Co-Chairs, and to every committee member whose dedication made the year unforgettable.

Special Highlight: *Awards, Awards, and More Awards! - cont.*

By Bonnie Seipp and JoAnne Matthews

We also received **Publication Awards** for two outstanding projects:

🏆 **Our Centennial Anniversary Book**, beautifully compiled by Susan Rodriguez and presented to guests at our Centennial Luncheon. Judges praised its “excellent public outreach” and celebration of our Club’s rich history.

🏆 **“South Florida Butterflies and Other Pollinators,”** a delightful educational coloring book created by **Betsy Tilghman** and **Beth Werner**, distributed widely throughout the community—from our Farmers Market to school pollinator gardens, Merrick House, the Library sculpture unveiling, and Pollinator Palooza.

🏆 Our **“A Century in Bloom” Celebration at Merrick House** earned another **Community Service Award**, recognizing the February 2025 event that welcomed more than 400 guests for a day of floral, environmental, and historical education.

🏆 Our **Centennial Luncheon at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden** further celebrated our legacy, honoring community sponsors, supporters, and past presidents while receiving a City proclamation.

In December, the community gathered at the **Coral Gables Library Butterfly Garden**, which our Club installed and continues to maintain, for the unveiling of **“Planting Pollinators,”** a public art installation commissioned by the Club and created by renowned environmental artist Xavier Cortada. Following the installation, our 36-panel Club history exhibit remained on display at the library for a month, extending our celebration to the wider community.

Education and Conservation Awards

🏆 Our **School Pollinator Garden Grants Program** earned the **Wildlife Garden Award** from the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs. During our Centennial year, eight local schools received \$1,000 grants to establish pollinator gardens, supported by Club-provided plants, design expertise, and volunteer guidance. Judges especially noted the emphasis on Florida-friendly landscaping and protecting the endangered Miami Blue Butterfly.

🏆 We also received the **Council of Garden Club Presidents Best Program Award** for our innovative collaboration with Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden on a future initiative to create balcony plantings in vertical communities. And as the perfect finishing touch, the Club was awarded a **National Garden Clubs Certificate of Commendation** in recognition of our distinguished work during 2025.

Thank You!

These awards are a wonderful reflection of the passion, creativity, and commitment of our members. Together, we continue to honor our rich legacy while cultivating an even more impactful future.

Congratulations and heartfelt thanks to everyone who contributed to these extraordinary achievements—and a very special thank you to **Awards Chair JoAnne Matthews**, whose dedication and hard work in preparing and submitting our award applications made this exceptional year possible.



The Conscious Kitchen: Choosing Between Organic, Conventional, Local, and Regenerative

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

Shopping for produce today can feel confusing. With labels like organic, local, conventional, and regenerative, many people wonder which option is best. The truth is that each has its own benefits, and the right choice often depends on your priorities.



 **Organic food** is grown without synthetic fertilizers or most synthetic pesticides.

Compared to conventional farming, organic agriculture uses **far fewer approved chemical products**. Some studies suggest organic produce may contain higher levels of antioxidants and beneficial plant compounds, while others show little nutritional difference between organic and conventional foods. Research overall has not identified a clear nutritional winner. However, studies consistently show that organic produce tends to contain **lower pesticide residues**. Some recent research also suggests that people who eat more organic foods may have lower rates of obesity and certain health conditions. Still, researchers caution that these findings may partly reflect healthier overall lifestyles among people who buy organic foods.

 **Local produce** offers a different set of advantages. According to the USDA, local food is grown within the same state or within 400 miles of the consumer. Local produce is often **fresher** because it spends less time in transport and storage, which may help **preserve nutrients and flavor**. Buying local also **supports** nearby **farmers**, strengthens **local economies**, improves **food security**, and reduces transportation-related environmental impacts.

 **Regenerative agriculture** focuses on **restoring soil** health and ecosystems through practices like cover cropping, reduced tilling, biodiversity, and integrating trees and livestock. Studies suggest regenerative farming may **improve** soil **quality** and produce crops with **higher** levels of certain **vitamins, minerals**, and beneficial compounds. However, regenerative does not always mean organic, since some regenerative farms still use synthetic chemicals. Products labeled “regenerative organic” combine both approaches.

Ultimately, conscious shopping is about balance and accessibility. **Ideally, locally** grown **organic** or local **regenerative** organic produce may offer the **greatest environmental and freshness benefits**. But any step toward supporting healthier food systems matters. Whether choosing organic, buying local, or simply washing produce carefully, **small** everyday **decisions** can positively **impact** personal **health**, local **communities**, and the **environment**.

Washing Produce: Three Simple Methods to Reduce Pesticide Residue

These are three methods to wash produce according to the Environmental Working Group (www.ewg.org):

 **Rising in tap water:** Hold produce under running water, rubbing and rotating it with your hands gently. For firmer items, like potatoes or carrots, you can use a produce brush. Rinse for at least 20 seconds.

 **Soaking in tap water:** Fill a large bowl or clean sink with tap water. Soak produce for 10-15 minutes. Take produce out of the water rather than pour it out, so dirt can settle to the bottom. Rinse under water to remove any remaining residue on the surface.

 **Soaking in baking soda or food-grade vinegar, such as distilled white vinegar:** In a large bowl or basin, mix a teaspoon of baking soda for each cup of water or mix 1 part vinegar to 3 parts water. Soak produce for 5-10 minutes. Take the produce out of the soaking water rather than pour it out, so dirt can settle to the bottom. Rinse under running water to remove any remaining residue and baking soda or vinegar on the surface.

For more tips and recipes go to BarefootNutrition.com

Garden Club Events Highlights:

Fashions & Florals



*An
Unforgettable
Evening!*



*Special thanks to **Barbara Reese** and **Jo Wanda Peterson**
for putting together a truly incredible event!*

Garden Club Events Highlights - cont.

Heritage Garden



Fun with Flowers

March 14th



April 18th



Sip n' Snip



Julian Chang Boutique Shopping

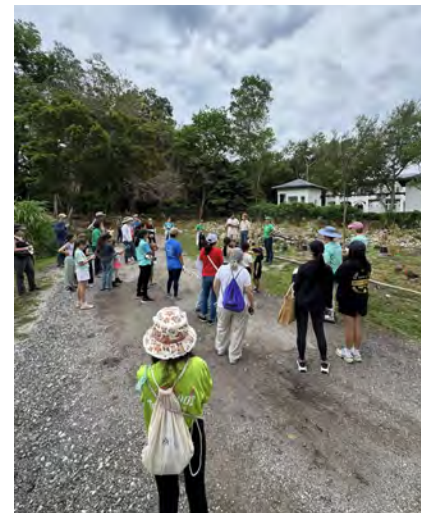


Garden Club Events Highlights - cont.

Arbor Day Celebration



Tree Planting at Camp Mahachie



Garden Club Events Highlights - cont.

Installation Luncheon



*For more pictures of all our
Club Happenings go to the
CGGC Private Member Group
on Facebook*

***See You in
September!***

