



The Garden Club of the Upper Keys

News & Notes

December 2021

Inside this issue:

PRESIDENT'S Message	2
Volunteers Needed for Garden Walk	3
A Note From the Editor...	4
Notes From the Directors	4-6
Plant of the Month	7
Gardening Best Practices	8
Gingerbread Craft Market Photos	9
Out and About at the Francis Tracy Gardens	10
Notable Dates and Birthdays	11

Holiday Gathering in the Garden

Francis Tracy Garden Center

TUESDAY DECEMBER 14, 2021

11:30 AM

MEMBERS ONLY

LUNCH AND BEVERAGES WILL BE PROVIDED

White Elephant Gift Exchange

Bring One Get One (\$10.-15.)

RSVP TO PATTI GRAHAM BY DECEMBER 10

PHONE OR TEXT 757.771.2963



~~~~~  
*Looking forward  
 to seeing what the  
 2022 year brings!*  
 ~~~~~

From the desk of President Kathy Janco ...

It's December!

How did this happen?

Sending warm wishes for the holidays from my home to yours. Stay safe and enjoy what makes your life full and joyous.

Thank you to all our wonderful members who helped and did so much work during this past year getting the clubhouse and gardens looking beautiful and all spruced up.

Everything looks wonderful!

Looking forward to seeing what the 2022 year brings. HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Sincerely,
 Kathy



The Garden Club
 of the
 Upper Keys, Inc.
 at
 The Francis Tracy
 Garden Center
 94040 Overseas Hwy.
 Key Largo, FL 33037

Mailing Address
 P.O. Box 373
 Tavernier, FL 33070

Board of Directors

President - Kathy Janco
 V-President - Laurie Brooks
 Treasurer - Anne Makowsky
 Secretary - Laura Hartner
 Directors of:
 Fundraising - Kathy Holmes
 Hospitality - Betty Ann Gear
 and Fran Reig
 House - Christine Hudson
 Membership - Charlene
 Regenhart
 Program - Patti Graham
 Property - Vacant
 Publicity - Pat Uhl

**The GCUK Board of Directors gratefully
 acknowledges the following generous gifts
 sent in with membership renewals this past month:**

Moonflower ~ Patron of the Garden Club

- Donna Hanson

Lignumvitae ~ Benefactor of the Garden Club

- Lonell Rice
- Christine and Craig Hudson



Volunteers Needed for Garden Walk!

Garden Walk is the largest and most popular of our premiere fundraising events and it takes our entire membership to hold a successful event. Kathy Holmes has established a list of committees necessary for success. A few committees already have chairpersons assigned, but many still need volunteers. In addition to the chairperson, many of the committees need additional support, most significantly, the Garden Host who needs a House Captain and a team of volunteers at each featured property on the day of the event.

Please call Kathy Holmes to volunteer. A sign-up sheet will also be available at the Holiday Gathering in the Garden on December 14. In addition to the support listed below, we need members to bring in baked goods for the free refreshments offered at the clubhouse.

Tickets: _____

- 6 ticket outlets already confirmed
- Responsible for delivery and pick up of tickets
- Dates for outlet ticket sales 1/3/22 to 2/18/22
- The day of the GW tickets will be sold at the Gardens and the Clubhouse

Garden Host: _____

- Responsible to get (and work with house captains) table, chairs, small cooler for water for volunteers at each house
- In charge of House Captains who will oversee the volunteers day of the GW
- Day of the GW be available to get any supplies (tickets, programs) to the Gardens

House Captain 1: _____

House Captain 2: _____

House Captain 3: _____

House Captain 4: _____

House Captain 5: _____

- Leads morning and afternoon shifts of 3-5 people (depending on property size) to sell tickets, hand out programs, answer questions, and help direct parking at the property.



- Ensure that pictures are taken at their property and shared with publicity

Hospitality: Betty Ann Gear & Fran Reig

- Handle the refreshments
- Set up clubhouse
- Available the day before to receive baked goods

Vendors: Evelyn McGlone

- Responsible to contact the vendors
- The morning of the event, position vendors, make sure they do not park on or in front of the property

Publicity: Pat Uhl

- Publicize event
- Ensure a team is created to take pictures of the event
- Connect with GW chair about the banner at the clubhouse and banners to hang in the community

Program: _____

- Sell adds
- Work with GW chair about content and design

Set Up Crew: _____

- In charge of setting up the flags and tents at the Garden Houses and Clubhouse (initial setup the evening before, flags setup the morning of the event)

Parking: _____

- Staff the south "private road" to make sure no one parks there for the duration of the event
- Set up along the north side of the road 3 spaces for handicapped parking

Master Gardeners: _____

- Help identify plants at the Gardens to assist with property descriptions for the program and/or create plant lists for the properties
- Serve as docents at the properties and FTGC grounds

Yard Crew: Charlene Regenhardt

- Ensure the FTGC grounds are looking their best on the day of the event

Clean Up Crew: _____

- Put away any tables, chairs, etc. that were used
- Take the trash out
- Make sure the clubhouse is cleaned up

A note from the editor...

I'm looking forward to seeing everyone at the ***Holiday Greetings in the Garden!*** We don't have a speaker this month, so that will give all of us time to socialize. Many of our part-time residents are back, and it's been fun to catch up with them —welcome back!

I was chatting with some of our master gardeners a few weeks ago and asked if they had any suggestions for the Plant of the Month for December. Laurie suggested Christmasberry (a native plant that I wasn't familiar with). She got one for our club and planted it in the new Coastal Garden along the stone walkway. Lonell volunteered to write the article, which you can find on page 7. Laurie also wrote a Gardening Best Practices article about melaleuca mulch (see page 8). Thank you for the plant and articles, I love learning from you!

As you'll see in the notes from the directors below, a lot has been happening this fall with more things to come. Our Gingerbread Craft Market was loads of fun! Kathy Holmes did a fantastic job organizing it and, with help from many members, it was our most successful fall fundraiser ever! A few pictures are shared on page 9.

Thanks to DeeDee and Richard Barreto, we got the Buttonwood bed cleaned up and added some new plants

right before the event. Deb and Rich Riolo adopted the Front Berm and spruced up that garden as well. I also sweet-talked my brother into pressure-washing the walk around the Peace Garden, which was black with mildew. The grounds are looking better with each project, and I'm happy to announce that Betty Ann Gear adopted the Buttonwood Bed. A few pictures of the gardens are shared on page 10. Thank you all for your help in making our property shine for the craft market and for our future events!

Speaking of future events, Garden Walk is our premier fundraising event and it's only 2 months away! Page 3 outlines the support that Kathy Holmes will need from all of us to make the event a great success. She needs ALL of our support!

Last but not least, don't forget to pitch in for our turn to cook for God's Kitchen on December 30 (see announcement on page 5). Cindy Davis and Betty Ann Gear need your help and will have a sign-up sheet at holiday luncheon.

Happy Holidays! I look forward to greeting everyone at the holiday luncheon in a few days!

Cordially,
Charlene Regenhardt

Notes from the Directors...

HOSPITALITY CO-DIRECTORS Betty Ann Gear and Fran Reig need volunteers for upcoming meetings at the clubhouse. Assistance includes helping to set-up and clean-up refreshments at monthly General Membership meetings and special events. You can volunteer for specific months or for the entire club year. It's a great way for new members to connect with others and be active. If you are interested in helping out, please call Betty Ann or Fran.

HOUSE DIRECTOR Christine Hudson continues to ensure all of the indoor equipment—from fire extinguishers to AC units—are functioning properly and efficiently. Please let Christine know if we are running low on any clubhouse supplies, if something gets broken or if anything needs special attention.

VICE-PRESIDENT AND DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND EDUCATION Laurie Brooks continues to set up meetings for the Florida Keys Native Plant ID class with Jim Duquesnel. We skipped November and there will be no December meeting. The next class will be January 18 from 5:30 to 7:00 PM with Duane Kolterman.

Laurie continues to participate in the Workdays for the REEF gardens, as well as the workdays for the clubhouse gardens. The latest workday was December 5 to prepare for the REEF Christmas Party. The next workday will be January 16 (3rd Sunday of the month) from 10 to 11 AM, followed by a workday session at GCUK from 11 AM to noon.

Laurie also continues to support the Ocean Studies Charter School's gardens and is currently working on a committee to create an outdoor classroom (trails, kiosks and signage) for the Hammock. The eco-environment planter gardens in front of school are doing well as is the water garden in back. She and other Ocean Studies Charter School representatives will be meeting with Monroe County on December 17 to determine what the school can do on the property.

The Master Gardener Plant Clinics continue to be held at our clubhouse on the third Wednesday of the month. The next one will be December 15. Plant Clinics have resumed at the Murray Nelson building as well and the latest one was December 1. The next one will be January 5 from 9 AM until noon.

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

Laurie recently created lending and reference libraries on book cases in the sunroom of the clubhouse. The reference library book shelf will be used to house the Master Gardener plant clinic box and materials. She also added a catalog and magazine exchange shelf on the lending library side and will request books to be ordered by Master Gardeners for the Reference Library.

Laurie also asked KLI to order Melaleuca mulch and wrote an article for our newsletter about why we should use this instead of cypress (see page 8). Just over a week after KLI took delivery of the mulch, Reef Tropical, the landscaping company up at Ocean Reef in North Key Largo bought the entire lot of it. Hopefully KLI will order more!

Laurie encourages everyone to continue to send her ideas for community outreach/in-reach – particularly ways to partner with youth in our community.

PROPERTY DIRECTOR: Laurie Brooks, Kathy Janco, and Charlene Regenhardt continue to oversee responsibilities for property management until a new property director is assigned. Property workdays are typically scheduled on the first Tuesday (9-11 AM) and the third Sunday (11 AM-12 PM) of each month. The next scheduled workday is Sunday, December 16.

We have two new volunteers for the Adopt-a-Bed program! Betty Ann Gear has adopted the Buttonweed Bed (with a little help from Charlene Regenhardt) and Deb and Rich Riolo have adopted the Front Berm Bed. Many thanks to our newest volunteers!

The workdays and Adopt-a-Bed initiative has lightened the load for the Property Director position, but we need a volunteer who is willing to ensure the property is cared for. Please contact Laurie or send a message to gardenclubupperkeys@gmail.com if you are interested in serving as Property Director.

PROGRAM DIRECTOR Patti Graham has been lining up speakers for our General Membership meetings. This month's General Membership Meeting is our annual Holiday Luncheon on December 14 at 11:30 AM. We will not have a speaker at that event. Our January presentation on the Biology and Ecology of Mangroves will be presented by Janice Duquesnel. There will be no speaker in February as we will focus on final preparations for Garden Walk at the meeting.

Cooking for God's Kitchen

Thursday, December 30, 4:00 PM

Cindy Davis and Betty Ann Gear are now coordinating our club's support to Burton Memorial United Methodist Church. The church operates both the Daily Bread food pantry and a meal service on Thursdays called God's Kitchen.

GCUK provides home cooked meals in months when there is a fifth Thursday. Volunteers are needed to cook food (preferably in disposable containers such as foil pans) and deliver it to Burton Memorial between 4 and 4:30 in the afternoon. A few additional volunteers are needed to help in the kitchen with cooking side vegetables (if needed to maintain freshness) and to package the meals to distribute to community members.

Cindy and Betty Ann will have a sign-up sheet at the December 14 Holiday Luncheon. Please sign-up to help make the following menu items:

- Meatloaf (3 pound size)
- Mashed potatoes
- Vegetable
- Dinner rolls (store-purchased)
- Dessert items

Thank you for helping! Many hands make light work!

Patti has several prospects for the March meeting, which will be held March 15. She is working on lining up properties for our Members Garden Walk, tentatively scheduled for March 16 and would like anyone interested in featuring their garden to contact her.

The speaker at the April meeting will be Isabella of Keez Beez. The May meeting will include the installation ceremony for new officers and will not have a speaker.

We will not have a Garden Get-together in December and will resume them in January. Patti is looking for various Garden Get-together activities to be held at the clubhouse for January through May.

(Continued on page 6)

The next Garden Get-together is scheduled for January 12 at 10 AM to make garlic baskets. See the short article below for details. Another potential option for later this spring is making printed leaf tea towels (We hope to make enough to have extras so that we can sell them at next year's Gingerbread Craft Market).

Patti continues to work on planning potential programs and field trips. One of the trips that is being planned is a visit to the Green Turtle Hammock, which is the new home of Florida Bay Forever, a non-profit dedicated to protecting and preserving Florida Bay through education and advocacy.

PUBLICITY DIRECTOR Pat Uhl has been working with Kathy Holmes and Patti Graham to support publicity efforts for upcoming meetings and fundraisers. She posts information and photographs regularly on our Facebook page and works with Lonell Rice and Amy Jorgenson on website updates. Twenty-nine posts were made to the GCUK page during November 2021. She also created a Monthly Meeting Invitation Flyer for future use to invite the public to our meetings.

Pat has been actively involved with preparing fliers and e-mail blasts for supplemental fund raisers and is working on plans to update and supplement the club's existing brochures. She is also working with a committee to update our sign along US-1.

FUNDRAISING DIRECTOR Kathy Holmes shouts out a HUGE THANK YOU to the Garden Club board and membership for a wonderful Gingerbread Craft Market. The weather was wonderful, the garden was full of happy patrons, the live music was festive music and the varied vendors sold their wares. The club house looked amazing with holiday decorations and was filled with yummy baked goods for sale. Many thanks to those who baked and volunteered. It was a fun event. Thank you!

Sweetest Knights

Deadline for online sales is Valentine's Day

Sweetest Knights is a company in Key West that makes fudge (among other goodies). To order, go to www.sweetestknights.com and click on the BUY FUDGE tab. **Choose the Garden Club of the Upper Keys as the charity.** You can order online until Valentine's Day. Those who order online will have their orders shipped to them or at any address they want domestically. The club will receive 30% of all online sales (excluding shipping & handling).

Don't forget our fudge fundraiser! You can order online at www.sweetestknights.com and click the charity link for the Garden Club. It will be up on their website until Valentines' Day.

Now we turn our focus to the Garden Walk. We need ALL of our members to participate. Page 3 of this newsletter provides a list of the committees positions that need to be filled. There will be signup sheets at the club house for garden hosts and captains. Contact Kathy Holmes with any questions.

Kathy continues to look for effective ways to support fundraising. If anyone has fundraising ideas, please connect with her.

MEMBERSHIP DIRECTOR Charlene Regenhardt continues to process membership forms. A big "Thank You" to those who promptly submitted their dues! As of December 5, 75 members have submitted their membership forms. If you have not yet mailed yours in, please take the time to do so today, as they are now overdue.

Garden Get-Together

The next Garden Get-Together will take place on Wednesday, January 12, 2022 at 10:00 AM outside at the Francis Tracy Garden Center. Our project will be your choice of a twined "garlic" basket that hangs or sits on a surface. Although designed for garlic, you can find other uses for this basket. For this project, you will need to bring:

- Wire cutters or scissors,
- A towel for your lap,
- #2 (1.75mm) and #3 (2.25 mm) round reeds, and
- A bucket or dishpan for soaking your reeds.

Please contact Laura Hartner by Tuesday, December 28 if you wish to participate. Laura will bring a basket to show you at the December 14 Holiday Luncheon.

She can provide you with the reed you will need to complete this project for a nominal cost, or can recommend an on-line vendor if you wish to purchase the reeds yourself.



Plant of the Month

Christmasberry (*Lycium carolinianum*)

by Lonell Rice

Christmasberry is a small shrub native to the Keys although it is also found throughout the southeastern US along salt marshes and mangrove edges and on dunes in Florida's coastal counties. Laurie Brooks just found a small plant for our Francis Tracy Garden Center, which she planted in our new Coastal Garden along the walkway between the Cactus and Pine Rockland Gardens.

This plant is not to be confused with the highly invasive Brazilian pepper plant, which is often called Christmas berry pepper. Both produce small red berries that birds love and both have berries harmful to humans. The similarities end there.

The native Christmasberry, when mature, is a beautiful plant with gracefully open and somewhat spiny branches full of succulent and relatively short dull green leaves. The tiny evergreen leaves are alternate on a branch. Single flowers form along the branch at the leaf connection. The flowers can be bluish-white or light to deep lavender with white centers and are full of nectar. Because of its long flowering period, spring through summer, Christmasberry's nectar attracts a variety of butterflies, moths and bees. The flowers are also reported to attract hummingbirds.

The flowers turn into green egg-shaped berries that become bright red when they ripen in late autumn or early winter, often just in time for Christmas. The berries can be toxic to some animals, such as livestock, but are a popular food source for many birds. Ripe fruits are edible by humans and may be consumed raw, dried or made into a tea. However, never consume immature green berries as they can be toxic.

Christmasberry can be used as a specimen plant or part of a hedge. It grows 6-8' tall with a 3-5' wide spread. It likes full sun to light shade and is moderately drought tolerant. Salt doesn't scare it. It can tolerate brackish water, occasional saltwater flooding from storm surges and salty wind. However, it should be protected from a lot of direct salt spray. And lucky for us, it can grow in calcareous (high pH) soil so prevalent in the Keys.

This plant is in the tomato/potato family (Solanaceae or Nightshade family) and is a relative of the Goji berry (*L. barbarum*, *L. chinense*). It is also called Carolina Desert-thorn because of the thorns that sometimes grow on its branches.



Christmasberry was aptly named for its bright red berries that are often present around Christmas.

Source: This photo was copied from the IRC website (copyright by: George D. Gann) to show the beautiful red berries that the plant in the Coastal Garden will have once it is more mature.



Cultivation Data

Source: www.regionalconservation.org

Soils: Periodically inundated to moist, moderately well-drained to poorly-drained brackish soils, with humusy top layer.

Nutritional Requirements: Moderate; can grow in nutrient poor soils, but needs some organic content to thrive.

Salt Water Tolerance: Moderate; tolerates brackish water or occasional inundation by salt water.

Salt Wind Tolerance: Moderate; grows near salt water, but is protected from direct salt spray by other vegetation.

Drought Tolerance: Moderate; generally requires moist soils, but tolerant of short periods of drought once established.

Light Requirements: Full sun to light shade.

Flower Color: Lavender to lilac or rarely white.

Flower Characteristics: Semi-showy, 3/8-inches wide.

Flowering Season: All year; peak summer-fall.

Fruit: Bright red succulent berry. Winter.

Wildlife and Ecology: Provides significant food and cover for wildlife. Nectar plant for great southern white (*Ascia monuste*), gulf fritillary (*Agraulis vanillae*) and other butterflies. Also attracts sphinx moths and bee pollinators.

Gardening Best Practices

Melaleuca Mulch

by Laurie Brooks

Adding mulch to your garden beds is one of the nine practices recommended by UF's IFAS Extension service for a Florida Friendly Landscape. Mulch helps to retain moisture in our soils, buffer the soil temperature – keeping plant roots cooler in the summer, reduce soil erosion, suppress weed growth and, as it breaks down, enriches the soil with organic matter improving soil aeration, structure and drainage. And mulch makes your garden beds look neat and tidy! Here are two excerpts from UF Extension service publications explaining why melaleuca mulch is a great choice.

“Why use melaleuca mulch? Commercial melaleuca mulch, which has been composted for 90 days before bagging in order to kill the seeds, is some of the most environmentally-friendly and termite-resistant mulch on the market. But producers are having a difficult time convincing consumers to buy it because it is not the mulch they have become accustomed to using. The majority of retail mulch comes from cypress; unfortu-

nately, thousands of cypress trees are cut annually solely for use in residential and commercial landscapes. Having a market for melaleuca products would provide another incentive for melaleuca removal from natural lands.” Source: <http://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/nassauco/files/2017/07/melaleucafactsheet.pdf>

“Melaleuca mulch is made from the exotic invasive trees. It gives the same traditional look as mixed hardwood and cypress mulches. The product is cured at a high temperature to kill any seeds so they won't germinate in your garden. It settles very slowly, meaning it will last a long time. In one study by UF/IFAS, melaleuca mulch outperformed pine bark and cypress mulch in durability.” Source: <https://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/care/planting/mulch.html>

I recently asked KLI to order some melaleuca mulch – it should come in soon. Here is a picture of one of my garden beds seven months after applying melaleuca mulch that I bought at KLI in April. No weeds!



The Gingerbread Craft Market was a Great Success!

A big THANK YOU goes to GCUK members for their support baking, making crafts, decorating the clubhouse and grounds, signing up and organizing our vendors and orchestrating the silent auction. Kathy Holmes and her extraordinary team of members worked tirelessly organizing, advertising and executing the event on November 27, 2021.



Out and About at the Francis Tracy Gardens

Many thanks to our members! Projects in November included:

- 1) Cleaning up and adding new ferns and cycads to the Buttonwood Bed (DeeDee & Richard Barreto and Charlene Regenhardt),
- 2) Adopting the Buttonwood Bed (Betty Ann Gear)
- 3) Sprucing up the Rougeberry Bed (Lonell Rice),
- 4) Adding Christmasberry to the new coastal garden (Laurie Brooks),
- 5) Adopting and cleaning up the Front Berm Bed (Deb and Rich Riolo), and

6) pressure washing the walkway (Rich Daniels).

The grounds are looking better than ever! THANK YOU!



Notable Dates and Birthdays

A warm birthday wish to our members with December birthdays!

December

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------|
| * Sharon B. | * Phyllis M. |
| * Betty Ann G. | * John R. |
| * Patti G. | * Francis R. |
| * Donna H. | * Marsha S. |
| * Debbie Sue J. | * Terry W. |



Upcoming meetings and club activities:

December

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

4	Open House (2 pm - 4 pm)
7	GCUK Board Meeting (10 am)
14	GCUK Holiday Potluck (11:30 am)
14	Florida Native Plant ID Class (Zoom, 5:30 pm)
15	Master Gardener Plant Clinic (9 am - 12 pm)
30	Cooking for God's Kitchen

January

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

4	GCUK Workday (9-11 am)
11	GCUK Board Meeting (10 am)
12	Garden Get-Together: Twined Garlic Basket (10 am)
16	Workday at REEF (10-11 am) followed by workday at GCUK (11 am-12 pm)
18	GCUK General Membership Meeting (11 am)
18	Florida Native Plant ID Class (Zoom, 5:30 pm)
19	Master Gardener Plant Clinic (9 am - 12 pm)

Looking Forward...

- **Board** meetings at 10 am on Jan 11, Feb 1, Mar 8, Apr 12, May 10
- **General Membership** meetings on Dec 14, Jan 18, Feb 15, Mar 15, Apr 19, May 17. Meetings begin at 11 am; If held at the clubhouse, doors open at 10 am for social time.
- **Special Events:** The Garden Walk is scheduled for February 19, 2022.
A Yard Sale is rescheduled for April 2, 2022.