



—Scientific Note—

Going Beyond the Grant for Community, Educational, and Volunteer Engagement

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Teaching gardens offer University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension Agents, an opportunity to reach a wider audience than a typical classroom setting, while also providing environmental benefits that can have lasting impacts in a community. Many residents in Monroe County, FL often relocate to the island chain from other regions of the country, with little knowledge of the flora and fauna that grow here. So, one of the goals of the demonstration garden was to expose residents to a wider diversity of native flora that thrive in our environment and do well in a landscape setting. Additionally, as land is cleared, and natural ecosystems are removed, less habitat is available for pollinators and beneficial organisms. Native wildflower demonstration gardens can help connect larger areas of conservation and create pathways for fauna by providing important habitat.

Monroe County Extension Service was awarded the Viva Florida Grant from the Florida Wildflower Foundation in 2019. The \$3,000 grant was the first step toward developing the public demonstration garden. Extension staff also worked with Monroe County government for additional support since the proposed site was on county property. Monroe County supplied water to the garden and enabled the pruning of the mature native trees. Extension staff and volunteers partnered with Key West Botanical Garden Nursery to provide the plant material that would be installed. The Botanical Garden is one of the recipients of the Florida Department of Agriculture's Endangered Plant Advisory Council (EPAC) grants for propagating and researching rare and endangered plants in the Keys. A part of the Garden's mission is to reestablish threatened and endangered plants in the community and the demonstration garden provided an opportunity to showcase some of these plants. Thirteen state-threatened and endangered plants were donated to help raise awareness. Keys Energy Services and Golden Bough Tree Service provided free mulch. Extension staff also worked with a local graphic designer, Local Guy Design, on developing educational signage. Other businesses and organizations donated services and financial support for the garden including Bandit Wildlife Management, City of Key West, and the Key West Garden Club.

Three educational signs were installed to help support the overall objectives of the demonstration garden—Butterflies in the Garden; Beneficial Insects: Friends of the Garden; and Threatened and Endangered Plants. A QR code was included on each sign that directs visitors to the Monroe County Extension Service's webpage on educational gardens to provide additional information about the plants growing in the garden. To date, eight local fact sheets have been written to provide gardeners with growing information that is relevant in Monroe County. Since some of the plants are very rare, little had been written about these species to support gardeners that wanted to utilize them in their landscapes. The demonstration garden has also provided an opportunity to observe, document, and write about these plant species.

Extension staff and volunteers have received overwhelmingly positive feedback for the 3600 ft² wildflower demonstration garden in the heart of downtown Key West. Over \$2,400 was received in donated services and products and just over \$2,000 was spent from the Extension Agent's programming funds, in addition to the initial grant award. Two-hundred and fifty Master Gardener Volunteer service hours have gone toward installing and maintaining the garden.

A Qualtrics survey was sent out to stakeholders, volunteers, and the public to gauge the success of the garden. Six community organization leaders, including the Mayor of the City of Key West, that provided Letters of Support for the garden, responded that we met our objectives of the demonstration garden and beautified the area. Seventy percent of the respondents to the survey said they used the website for additional information about growing plants. Twenty-eight Master Gardeners over the past two years have volunteered in the garden. All said they appreciated having an opportunity to work outside during the pandemic and that it was important for their mental health. Additionally, 80% of Master Gardeners said it was important to them to have hands-on gardening opportunities in extension sponsored demonstration gardens.

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