



# Growing Green



Spring 2013

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## Welcome from the County Administrator



Welcome to the first edition of the Growing Green newsletter! This newsletter is intended to inform you about sustainability efforts underway in Leon County, both within our County government and in the community at large. Leon County has an ongoing commitment to improving the sustainability of the County's day-to-day practices and to serving as a catalyst for community initiatives that promote resource conservation, our local green economy, and healthy neighborhoods. We will give you updates about our own sustainability journey as well as offer insight into the efforts of our community partners. We hope you will enjoy this first issue and look forward to receiving future ones quarterly.

Our Sustainability Team will share inspiring stories, inform you about sustainability-related County events and programs, and share pertinent news briefs. We also want to encourage you to get outside and connect with our ecologically diverse and beautiful County, so we're providing a "Nature's Calendar" feature to put you in tune with what's happening in the woods, skies, and waters around us. As always, from the Sustainability website at [www.GrowingGreen.org](http://www.GrowingGreen.org), you can link to a calendar of events to discover the latest green happenings around the County.

Sincerely,

Vincent S. Long  
Leon County Administrator

## Summit Resources and Video are at Your Fingertips

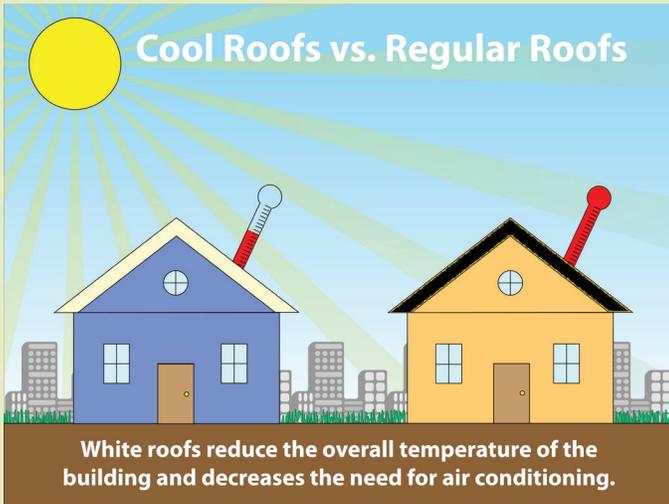
Perhaps you were able to attend and soak in some of the energy and information at the 2012 Sustainable Communities Summit, which featured 42 presenters and two keynote speakers. Whether you were present or not, no one could have taken in all of the knowledge presented. The good news is that the [Growing Green website](http://www.GrowingGreen.org) contains an archive of multi-media presentations and videos as an ongoing reference about a range of sustainability topics. Please re-use and recycle this valuable community information.

A short video captures the excitement and buzz of the day (the beekeeper is easy to spot). It highlights keynote speakers **Hazel Henderson** - who spoke on the growing international green economy - and **Janisse Ray** - who inspired a greater appreciation for the power of seeds and of those who grow them. If you attended, you might even find yourself captured on film. Check it out at [www.GrowingGreen.org](http://www.GrowingGreen.org).

Also archived are 11 multi-media presentations. Topics include:

- ▶ "Cultivating a Nature Connection: Exploring our Local Natural Areas," which is loaded with gorgeous photos of local outdoor recreation opportunities.
- ▶ "The Wiley Family's No-Waste Summer," which includes practical tips for bringing your curbside garage to almost nil.
- ▶ "Compost Happens: Yard Debris to Garden Treasure," a guide that can help anyone begin composting instead of trashing valuable organic wastes.

## DID YOU KNOW? The Color of Your Roof Influences Your Air Conditioning Bills



Just as light-colored clothing helps you stay cool on a hot day, a lighter roof reflects solar radiation effectively, keeping a light roof cooler than a standard or dark roof. Decreasing roof temperature can extend the life of your roof, cut energy bills, and diminish the urban heat island effect. Reducing air conditioning need reduces peak electricity demand and results in fewer harmful emissions produced by power plants. How do you cool your roof? Building a cool roof from the start is easier and less expensive than converting an existing roof. Coating existing asphalt shingles is not normally recommended or approved by shingle manufacturers, but if you are ready to replace your roof, you can use cool shingles that provide better solar reflectance. You can find out more about cool roofs from the US Department of Energy [here](#).

## COUNTY HIGHLIGHT: Garden Program Helps Citizens “Get Growing”

If you are interested in growing a stronger neighborhood along with your veggies and flowers, Leon County’s new community garden program might be for you.

The County program, supports two kinds of community gardens - **County Community Gardens**, which operate on suitable County property, and **Stakeholder Community Gardens**, which operate on non-County lands. So far the initiative has supported development of one new County Community Garden, called “**Pumpkin Place**,” in the Lake Jackson Heights neighborhood, and has awarded Stakeholder grants to the **Seminole Manor Community Garden** and the **Little Lambs Preschool** at John Wesley United Methodist Church. Additional applications are welcome and several sites are under consideration for development as gardens.

## How does the garden program work?

Interested citizens fill out applications that are available online at [www.GrowingGreen.org](http://www.GrowingGreen.org). Proposed gardens must be on appropriate sites, demonstrate benefits to the community, and show a level of organization that makes them likely to succeed.

Successful applicant groups receive assistance including mini-grants that provide up to \$500 for County Community Gardens and up to \$1,000 for Stakeholder Community Gardens to buy supplies including soil amendments, garden tools, seeds, and lumber as well as technical consultation to promote food-growing success and adoption of sustainable gardening practices.

For growers interested in starting a County Community Garden, two primary steps are finding a suitable County site and organizing your garden group. County staff have identified a set of County locations that are well-suited for future gardens, based on criteria including public access, open sunny spaces, availability of water, and land use suitability. Existing County Community Gardens are at the Ft. Braden Community Center and at Miccosukee Community Park. Contact the Office of Sustainability for more information about particular sites.

Equally important to finding a good site is gathering a group of at least eight people with at least a two-year commitment to the garden. One way to form a community garden group is through an existing organization such as a Neighborhood Association, civic, or faith-based group. Gathering neighbors and friends is another option.

Once the site and the group are in place, the designated garden organizer shepherds the application process and the group is on its way.

The Stakeholder Community Garden Program assists gardens operated by not-for-profit organizations on non-County lands provided the garden proposes to improve the civic life of our community by increasing the availability of fresh produce, providing education, or revitalizing neighborhoods. Grants up to \$1,000 are available through this program.

For more information about the Leon County Community Garden Program, contact Kathryn Ziewitz, Sustainability Program Coordinator, by email at: [ZiewitzK@LeonCountyFL.gov](mailto:ZiewitzK@LeonCountyFL.gov), or by phone at (850) 606-5383.



*Explore the wonders that the Earth can bring you.*

## FEATURE: Dirt and Other Benefits of Gardening

Households that grow their own produce are likely to eat more fresh fruits and vegetables daily than non-gardeners, which means they take in more vitamins and anti-oxidants and fewer empty calories. This health benefit is hardly surprising. What's surprising is the extent to which gardening promotes well-being in other ways, even extending to health benefits from physical contact with living soil. Science is showing that having a little dirt under your fingernails can be positively healthy!

Connecting with nature through gardening reduces anxiety and stress levels and provides mild exercise. Members of community gardens derive extra quality-of-life benefits including boosts in self-esteem and greater sense of community belonging. It has even been found that contact with soil improves mental and physical health. In 2007, neuroscientist Dr. Christopher Lowry found that exposure to *Mycobacterium vaccae*, a bacterium found in dirt, activates neurons in the brain that increase levels of serotonin—a hormone that positively affects mood.

Furthermore, research on the “hygiene hypothesis,” has found a causal link between the extent of exposure to microorganisms as a child and the development of immune disorders later in life. Children who are exposed to the rich stew of microbial organisms on farms are less likely to develop various allergies and asthma compared to children only exposed to urban conditions, like a city apartment. Farm children are in close contact with animals, hay, and dirt, and scientists have documented that interaction with these environments stimulates immune responses.

All in all, gardening is one way to unplug and regain balance, as well as to improve your diet.

- Contributed by Caroline McGuire, Sustainability Intern



**Playing in dirt can boost immune system development. (And it's fun!)**

## COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT:

### Join the Yellow Wave: Plant Sunflowers and Plant Smiles



A grassroots effort dubbed the “Talla-Happy Sunflowers” is aiming to turn our County into the sunflower capital of the South by enlisting residents to plant the iconic sun-tracking flowers all over town and country. You are encouraged to plant them at your mailbox and in sunny spots around your yard, around your neighborhood, in neglected flowerbeds, at your business, in cooperation with your child's daycare or at your place of worship—wherever your imagination leads you! By planting sunflower seeds, you can directly contribute to the goal of making our community a more beautiful and happy place to live as well as provide much-needed food and nectar for bees and other pollinating insects.

The Talla-Happy Sunflowers were born out of a January workshop moderated by urbanist Peter Kageyama and co-sponsored by Leon County, the City of Tallahassee, the Knight Creative Communities Initiative, and the Village Square. The Talla-Happy Sunflowers used a \$500 grant to pack and distribute over 8,000 packets of Mammoth grey stripe and Black oil sunflower seeds to community members during the Springtime Tallahassee parade.

The Leon County Board of County Commissioners adopted a proclamation on March 12th, 2013 that supported the Talla-Happy Sunflowers initiative and recognized the many virtues of sunflowers. Sunflowers grow in many varieties and are native to both North and South America, including the state of Florida. These bright flowers represent an enduring symbol of hope, strength, and happiness. The flower's petals, comparable to yellow rays of sunshine, reflect many of the sun's positive attributes and evoke feelings of warmth and happiness.

In support of the Talla-Happy movement, Leon County has incorporated sunflowers throughout County flower beds at buildings and parks to enhance the aesthetic appeal of our community and provide a symbol of civic pride.

The Talla-Happy Sunflowers are working to continue seed distribution in conjunction with interested groups, organize mass plantings, and incorporate sunflower plantings with science education in Leon County Schools. Anyone can become a “Talla-Happy Sunflower” simply by planting sunflowers purchased at a local nursery, either grown from seed or as transplants; the most economical planting choice is bird seed. Anyone wishing to join the effort should email the delightful (and fictitious) “Ima B. Plantin” at [TLHsunflowers@gmail.com](mailto:TLHsunflowers@gmail.com). For ongoing updates, please visit the [Talla-Happy Sunflowers Facebook](#) page. Check out the “Sunflowers” listing on the [Tallahassee Wiki](#) for detailed planting instructions, including information about native and perennial sunflower varieties.

- Contributed by Sarah Vitale, Sustainability Intern



**Members of the Talla-Happy team at Springtime Tallahassee, ready to plant a smile by passing out packets at the parade.**

## BRIEFS

### Green Living Handbook Available at Libraries

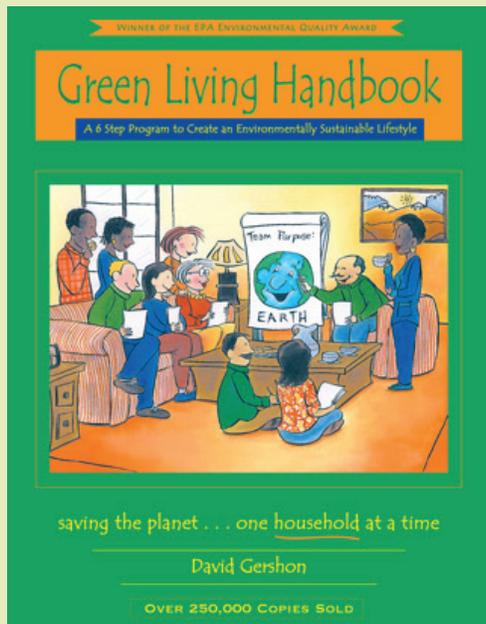
If you are like many people, you understand the importance of reducing your impact on the environment but you might not know where to begin. The Leon County Office of Sustainability has provided 30 copies of the *Green Living Handbook: A 6-Step Program to Create an Environmentally Sustainable Lifestyle* to Leon County libraries. The books are available at all Leon County library branches and through the bookmobile.

Author David Gershon's motto is simple: "Saving the planet... one household at a time." The *Green Living Handbook* simplifies the overwhelming amount of green lifestyle information that is available. It is composed of six steps, each to be carried out over a two-week period. The first five steps involve decreasing your environmental impact in the areas of waste, water, energy, transportation, and consumption. The sixth step, empowerment, enables you to help others lessen their impact on the planet.

The handbook is designed to be completed in small groups and combines easy-to-follow Earth Actions with peer collaboration and support. The program provides you with the tools to create an EcoTeam within your household family, a group of friends, neighbors, or co-workers. With step-by-step instructions, check lists, and time requirements listed for each Earth Action, your EcoTeam will learn how to develop lifestyle practices that not only promote environmental sustainability for future generations, but also help your group save money on costly utility bills.

So, visit your local library to check out this title or the many other books there that will help you in your sustainability quest.

- Contributed by Sarah Vitale, Sustainability Intern



David Gershon's "Green Living Handbook" is available at all Leon County Libraries.

## Start or Join an EcoTeam!

In February, small groups of area residents began meeting in homes, places of worship, and on campus with a common goal in mind--to put sustainability into practice in their own lives. Leon County has played a crucial role in providing leadership support and funding in the launch of the EcoTeams program.

EcoTeams consist of a small supportive team of 5 to 10 people who meet on a flexible schedule to discuss important sustainability-related topics such as water, waste, energy, transportation, food, consumption and local resilience. Members are provided with resources including a *Green Living Handbook* (see related article) and are also invited to attend local seminars, workshops and field trips. Individuals as well as any neighborhood, faith-based, or workplace group can join together an EcoTeam to work towards social, economic and environmental sustainability.

To date, five EcoTeams have formed, with 50 community members participating in its environmental goals. EcoTeams are implementing conservation improvements in their households as well as joining in group projects that have included exotic invasive plant removal and a bicycle tour of neighborhood gardens.



EcoTeam members share ideas.

In addition to small group meetings, several lectures have been organized to supplement understanding about local perspectives on topics of water, energy, and waste. These events have been open to the general public as well as EcoTeam members.

If you are interested in starting or joining an EcoTeam, please contact **Dan Parker** at [EcoTeams@SustainableTallahassee.org](mailto:EcoTeams@SustainableTallahassee.org) or call 850-567-3201 for more information.

- Contributed by Sarah Vitale, Sustainability Intern

# NATURE'S CALENDAR

Connecting with nature is easy in Leon County, where the County alone maintains more than 2,800 acres of community parks, boat landings, campgrounds and greenways. Whether in your own backyard or at one of these many facilities ([click here](#) to connect to an index of County Parks and Recreation areas), the calendar below will clue you in about what to look for in the woods, waters, and skies of our area.

## JUNE

- ▶ Most animals are nesting, including alligators, southern flying squirrels, and black-necked stilts.
- ▶ It is the peak month for wild fires which rejuvenate many plant communities.
- ▶ Blooming tarflowers signal the beginning of summer.
- ▶ Leatherback, loggerhead and green sea turtles continue to crawl ashore to lay eggs.
- ▶ Eighteen-month old black bears separate from their mothers.
- ▶ Indigo snakes lay their eggs, sometimes in gopher tortoise burrows.

### Important Dates:

- ▶ 6/1 – Atlantic Hurricane Season begins
- ▶ 6/5 – World Environment Day
- ▶ 6/21 – First Day of Summer

- Compiled by Caroline McGuire, Sustainability Intern

**Nature's Calendar Sources:** Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission; Florida Native Plant Society 2013 calendar.

# Saluting Our Interns

The Office of Sustainability wishes to thank interns Caroline McGuire and Sarah Vitale for their outstanding contributions in researching, writing, editing, and assembling this newsletter. Ms. McGuire is a senior at Florida State University, who will be graduating this summer with a double major in Environmental Studies and Political Science. Ms. Vitale is a junior at Florida State University acquiring a Bachelor of Science degree in Interdisciplinary Social Sciences - Environmental Studies with a minor in classical piano.



Caroline McGuire



Sarah Vitale

# A Note from the Leon County Sustainability Team

We hope you have enjoyed this edition of the newsletter. We welcome your feedback as well as any suggestions for future stories to cover. Contact us at [Sustainability@LeonCountyFl.gov](mailto:Sustainability@LeonCountyFl.gov). If you wish to be removed from our list, simply choose the "unsubscribe" tab at the bottom of the newsletter.

Best regards from Leon County's Sustainability Team,



**Maggie Theriot**

Director of Resource Stewardship



**Kathryn Ziewitz**

Sustainability Coordinator