



Year 2003



Progress Report of Activities

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Brooksville, Florida Plant Materials Center

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Hot Off the Press--Floral Passion Released

The floral passion (*Liatris elegans* [Walt.] Michx.) was released in September 2003. This hardy perennial herb has one to several long upright spikes 3 feet tall or taller, arising from a tuber (woody corm). Stems that have been damaged or grazed may produce multiple spikes. Leaves are alternate, gradually decreasing in length from the base of the stem upward. Many lavender or purple colored flowers are produced on the spikes in the fall. It is adapted to extremely coarse droughty soils similar to long leaf pine or turkey oak sandhills. These plants are grazed by deer, and the flowers are favored by butterflies and bees.

A small amount of seed (5 grams, approx. 2,500 seed) is now available for nursery growers. All you need to do is put in your request for material.



Floral Passion

Mission and Objectives

The mission of the Plant Materials Program is to provide timely and effective vegetative solutions for identified resource needs. Superior accessions of adapted plants are developed, tested and released to commercial growers. Technical assistance is then provided in regards to production and management methodologies. Plant materials and state-of-the-art plant science technology are promoted to assist in conservation of natural resources and meeting the objectives of environmental programs. The use of native plant materials is encouraged.

The following are the major objectives of the Brooksville Plant Materials Center (PMC):

- Improve and maintain water quality
- Control erosion on cropland and stabilize critical areas
- Improve forage on pastures and rangeland
- Improve wildlife habitat

The PMC is located 7 miles north of Brooksville on U.S. Highway 41, 15 miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico. Areas served include Florida, Puerto Rico, and the coastal areas of South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama.

There are 43 acres under cultivation which are used for the evaluation and production of plant materials. The remaining 139 acres are native woodlands and planted pines. The PMC also has two greenhouses, an office building, seed processing building, laboratory for seed germination and tissue grinding, conference building, and open educational shelter. Wildlife, such as deer and wild turkey, is abundant

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in the wooded areas and can be seen along the trails or around the edge of the fields.



Sunrise at PMC

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She’s Back and Doing It Again

Courtney Rumala, now a 10th grade student at Hernando Christian Academy, is back again working on another science project, “The Effect of Nitrogen on the Protein Synthesis of *Bacillus thuringiensis* in *Zea mays* L.” The objective of the project is to find out if nitrogen levels affect the toxin levels of *Bacillus thuringiensis* in *Zea mays* L.

The plants are growing and so are her armyworm larvae. The cuttings are taken home and fed to the larvae. This is where she studies them. Only time will tell.

The PMC is proud to be a part of this important project.



Courtney Rumala Working on Science Project

Florida Nursery and Allied Trade Show (FNATS) Conference

Clarence Maura (Plant Materials Manager), Sam Sanders (Plant Materials Specialist), and Mary Anne Gonter (Biological Science Technician, Plants) attended the FNATS conference in Orlando, FL, September 25 – 27, 2003. The National Plant Materials information booth was set up and manned. The booth provides public insight on functions of the Plant Materials Program. Over 10,600 people attended the Conference. Pauline Deavers, an Earth Team volunteer, assisted in manning the booth.



National Plant Materials Information Booth

Native Wildflower Project With the Florida Department of Transportation (DOT)

The Florida DOT wanted to use ecotypes of native wildflowers for a beautification project and to reduce mowing. However, there are very few sources of wildflowers on the commercial market. Dr. Jeff Norcini of the University of FL, IFAS, has been working under a grant from the DOT to develop seed sources and asked the Brooksville PMC staff to assist in increasing the seed quantities for commercial growers.

Seed of yellowtop (*Flaveria linearis*) was collected from south, central and north Florida locations and brought to the PMC. Seed was planted in the greenhouse in cone trays. Once the plants were 6 inches in height, they were then transplanted into production fields for seed increase. South and north ecotypes of yellowtop have displayed a completely different growth habit.

An accession of blackeyed susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*) is also being increased in a similar manner. Specialized vacuum harvesters are being developed to collect the seed. Since blackeyed susan is a biennial and yellowtop is a perennial, seed increase fields are expected to be productive for 2 or more years. This year Florida tickseed (*Coreopsis floridana*) was harvested for them.



Wildflowers at DOT Roadside

New Earth Team Volunteer—From Submarines to Plants

We have a new volunteer—Willard “Flash” Gordon, originally from Maryland, is retired from the U.S. Department of the Navy, Naval Surface Warfare Center, where he worked as a sheet metal model submarine maker. He does a variety of jobs for us—from assembling manuals to working in the greenhouse and in the fields. He is a great asset to the PMC, and his volunteer services are greatly appreciated.



Earth Team Volunteer Working in the Greenhouse

Florida Native Seed Production Manual Still Available—It’s Yours for the Asking

The Manual contains comprehensive information about growing Florida native species for seed, including state-of-the-art planting and production technology. Planting and collection equipment currently on the market is discussed, along with detailed information about seed conditioning equipment. To obtain an electronic copy of this document, visit the website at <http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/flpmc>. To request a hard copy, call the PMC at (352) 796-9600.

On the Road to Release

Thanks to the help of Maelo Reyes, Resource Conservationist, Dennis Hall, Soil Conservationist, and Sam Sanders, Plant Materials Specialist, our white muhly is on the road to release. It is hoped to be ready to go this fall. It's just a matter of time now.



White Muhly

People Come From Near and Far to Tour the PMC

Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University (FAMU) Students—Dr. Oghenekome Onokpise brings his students every year to tour the PMC. These students, traveling from Tallahassee, are taught the procedures involved in releasing plant materials and learn of the activities at the PMC. They also receive a hands-on demonstration of the evaluation process.



FAMU Students

Hernando County Master Gardeners—Hernando County Master Gardeners toured the PMC. They found, much to their surprise, how long it takes to release a plant for commercial production. Like all tours, we stress the Earth Team Volunteer Program and invite them to participate.



Mary Anne Gonter (right), Biological Science Technician, Talking With Master Gardeners

To learn more about these or other PMC activities request the 2003 Annual Technical Report or visit our website:
<http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov>