

As I write this article, I am sitting along a shady street in Paris, sipping a latte and savoring every morsel of a delicate French pastry. Before I made this breakfast stop, Canada had lured me over to visit her wonderful western canyons and botanical gardens. Soon I'll be touring an English tea garden.

The EPCOT International Flower & Garden Festival in Orlando is a must-see for every gardener and plant enthusiast. This 300 acre theme park is all about dazzling plants and garden design. The gardens guide visitors through charming village streets in countries around the world. Without ever leaving the park, visitors experience exotic destinations with wonderful sights, sounds, and local food. A blend of American and international tourists makes this the fifth most visited theme park anywhere, and this park and flower festival is right in our own back yard.

The University of Florida Master Gardeners staff an 'Ask the Expert' booth at the entrance to the festival headquarters from March into May. County Extension Offices may send their own Master Gardeners to staff the booth and take part in the Festival. Your Master Gardeners represented Columbia County on April 22<sup>nd</sup> and will be volunteering again in May.

EPCOT is a wonderful place to soak in the beauty of blooms and foliage, but it's also a great place to learn. Gardeners will return home from a visit with more new ideas than they can ever use. As usual, the creativity of Disney is evident everywhere. Every path taken in the park is met with beautifully manicured gardens. Theme gardens, such as the raised vegetable and herb beds, or the butterfly and hummingbird gardens teach through demonstration and signage. In the Audubon garden, birds happily feast on abundant insects and seeds made available through the creative teaming of native plants and colorful annual flowers.

UF/IFAS Master Gardeners in Columbia County provide many services for residents in the county. The free soil pH testing has become very popular with homeowners and small farmers. These dedicated volunteers provide gardening help at the extension office, in our local schools, at fairs and community events, and over the phone. They also teach workshops with the aid of teaching gardens. These activities are all funded by the proceeds from the annual Master Gardener Plant Sale.

Please support the volunteers and show your appreciation for the work they do in Columbia County. Attend the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Master Gardener Plant Sale on Saturday, May 4<sup>th</sup> from 9 am – noon at the Extension office located on the fairgrounds. Find the best Quality Plants at unbelievable Low Prices. Find healthy natives plants, herbs, annuals, perennials, ornamentals – lovingly grown by the volunteers for you. (*Published 4-28-13*)

