

UF/IFAS Extension Duval County **2024 Year in Review**



Our Mission

UF/IFAS EXTENSION partners with communities to
PROVIDE QUALITY, RELEVANT EDUCATION
and **RESEARCH-BASED EXPERTISE** to
foster **HEALTHY PEOPLE**, a healthy
ENVIRONMENT, and a healthy **ECONOMY**.

Directors message

Greetings from UF/IFAS Extension in Duval County! As a partnership between the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) and the City of Jacksonville, we're proud to share that our educational outreach reaches broadly throughout the city. We serve agricultural producers, small and urban farmers, horticultural industries and gardeners, businesses and entrepreneurs, families, and youth. Whether your interest is to develop positive and civic-minded youth, strengthen family relationships, create a healthy lifestyle, learn to preserve your craft food products or the bounty of your garden, practice Florida Friendly Landscape principles, start a farm, earn your pesticide applicator license or build your business, manage a community garden, buy your first home, or prepare your trees for

the next storm, we can teach you how to do it all! In fact, we reached over 20,000 citizens through our classes, answered over 10,000 emails and phone calls, and made nearly 150,000 web and social media contacts! Just under 500 extension volunteers add strength to our programs through extending the educational efforts. Our volunteers serve as Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists, Master Food Preservationists, and 4-H Leaders.

We hope you enjoy the stories in this report that highlight some of the creative educational outreach that we do in Duval County. Come learn more about us and join us at one of our events!

Stephanie Toelle
Duval County Extension Director

Duval County Success Stories: Real Impact in the Community

.....



Making Healthier Dairy Choices

A second-grade student at Pinedale Elementary had little knowledge of nutrition before participating in the Youth Understanding MyPlate program, an initiative supported by the Family Nutrition Program (FNP). Over several weeks, he learned about different food groups and how to make healthier choices. When shopping with his mom, he confidently selected low-fat yogurt instead of his usual choice, explaining, “I learned in Ms. Anna’s health and nutrition class that this will help me have strong bones and teeth.” His story highlights how small educational interventions can create lifelong healthy habits.

School Garden Leadership Training Inspires Expansion

In collaboration with Florida Agriculture in the Classroom and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Sciences, UF/IFAS Extension hosted a School Garden Leadership Training (SGLT) to help educators and community leaders strengthen their school garden programs. Participants engaged in hands-on activities, such as growing potatoes in laundry baskets—an innovative, budget-friendly gardening method. A week after the training, two middle schools and an early childhood education center reached out to partner with UF/IFAS Extension for school garden initiatives in the 2024-2025 academic year.

Bringing Play to Physical Activity

During a Summer Food, Summer Moves lesson at the Eastside Police Athletic League, instructor Sheila Shaw introduced students to the Play Hard Activity Cube. The cube encourages movement-based learning by assigning exercises to rolled outcomes. A staff member, inspired by the engagement, created a similar cube for recess and gym activities, ensuring that physical activity remains a fun and integral part of students’ daily routines.

Expanding SNAP Access at Farmers Markets

At the Riverside Arts Market, the Fresh Access Bucks (FAB) program allows Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients to double their purchasing power for fresh fruits and vegetables. UF/IFAS Extension, through the Family Nutrition Program (FNP), supported the initiative by creating promotional sandwich boards and producing cards featuring nutritional benefits and QR codes linking to healthy recipes. These efforts increased awareness and usage of SNAP benefits, helping families make nutritious food choices while supporting local farmers.



The Duval County Tree Stewards: A Decade of Impact

In 2014, Duval County's first cohort of 20 tree stewards received training in tree pruning and care. Over the past decade, 74 Master Gardeners have completed the program's rigorous 16-hour training, dedicating their time to maintaining Jacksonville's urban tree canopy. Meeting twice monthly for workdays, these volunteers have contributed more than 3,680 hours, pruning over 4,745 trees in city parks.

The impact of this work is substantial. According to the National Tree Benefits Calculator (<http://www.treebenefits.com>), these trees provide \$180,310 in ecosystem services annually—a value projected to increase to \$294,190 as the trees mature over the next five years. Additionally, the effort put forth by these



First tree steward cohort of 2014.

volunteers equates to the work of three full-time park maintenance employees, saving city resources while enhancing Jacksonville's green spaces.



Preserving Food, Preserving Independence: Canning Center Empowers Seniors

A partnership between UF/IFAS Extension and COJ Senior Services has brought food preservation skills to local seniors, helping them reduce waste and save money. For many, particularly those living in food deserts or facing transportation challenges, this knowledge is invaluable.

One participant shared how the program changed her habits. After learning to can, freeze, and dry food, she immediately applied these skills at home, preserving excess groceries that would have otherwise gone to waste. This not only stretched her food supply but also helped her cut costs. "Now, I always have meals available and don't have to shop as often," she said.

By equipping seniors with practical, sustainable food preservation techniques, the Canning Center is enhancing food security and fostering greater independence in the community.

Pest Control Challenge: Accurate Identification Saves Resources

A Jacksonville pest control company faced an unusual problem—tiny insects were invading a commercial building's second floor. Despite treatments, the infestation persisted, leading to frustration among employees and disputes between the roofing company and building owners. Even the company's entomologist could not identify the elusive pest.

Seeking answers, the company turned to UF/IFAS Extension's commercial horticulture agent, who collected samples and consulted the Insect Identification Laboratory in Gainesville. The verdict? A tropical species of booklice, thriving in attic mold due to excessive moisture. The solution was not more pesticides, but dehumidification to eliminate the pests' food source.

This case underscores the value of accurate pest identification, preventing unnecessary pesticide use and ensuring effective, science-based management strategies.

Brain Buzzers: Engaging Seniors Through Play

Social isolation can take a toll on seniors' mental well-being, but Brain Buzzers is changing that—one game at a time. A UF/IFAS Extension initiative, Brain Buzzers combines cognitive challenges like puzzles and trivia with interactive social engagement at local senior centers.

The response has been overwhelmingly positive. Seniors eagerly anticipate sessions, welcoming the Extension team with, "Here comes fun and games!" While sessions are scheduled for an hour, they often extend due to high engagement. Of 175 participants, 83% reported feeling more socially connected and less stressed after attending.

By bringing joy, mental stimulation, and meaningful connections, Brain Buzzers is proving that play is not just for kids—it is vital for lifelong well-being.



Hooked on Insects: 4-H Youth Find Passion in Entomology

For many youths, insects are more than just creepy crawlies—they are a gateway to discovery. In 2022, Duval 4-H launched Fun with Bugs: A 4-H Entomology Extravaganza, an event that ignited enthusiasm for entomology among young participants. Activities ranged from hands-on insect identification to sampling edible insects.

One of the event's attendees, eight-year-old Rebelle, became so captivated by entomology that she joined Duval 4-H's Insectathon team. Within a year, she and her teammates won first place in the Junior 4-H division. Her passion did not stop there. Rebelle introduced 4-H's entomology programs to her school, leading to expanded in-school education and butterfly-raising projects for her classmates.

Now, as a seasoned competitor, Rebelle has won first place in the Florida 4-H Insectathon Contest. But perhaps her most significant achievement is her personal growth. Once quiet and reserved, she now confidently leads discussions, gives presentations, and participates in 4-H camps and competitions. Rebelle's journey is a testament to how 4-H nurtures curiosity, confidence, and lifelong learning.

Slow Food and Sustainable Agriculture: A Community Connection

Duval County is rediscovering the importance of local agriculture through a partnership between UF/IFAS Extension and Slow Food First Coast. Through Tour de Farms—a series of immersive farm tours—residents connect with local farmers, witness sustainable food production firsthand, and gain a deeper appreciation for their region's agricultural heritage.

These tours introduce participants to everything from organic vegetable farms to hydroponic greenhouses. Attendees sample freshly harvested produce, watch farm-to-table demonstrations, and hear directly from farmers about their challenges and triumphs. A common refrain among visitors: "I never knew this farm was here!"

With Duval's agricultural acreage declining over the years, fostering these connections is more important than ever. By encouraging the community to support local farmers, UF/IFAS Extension is strengthening food security and sustainability in the region.

Junior Master Gardener Program: Hands-On Science for Students

Master Gardener-led afterschool gardening programs are in high demand in Duval County. Currently offered at four schools, the demand continues to grow, with new schools requesting participation each year. However, finding volunteers able to commit for 30 weeks per school year is a challenge. To meet these needs, UF/IFAS Extension developed an alternative—a structured eight-week Junior Master Gardener (JMG) program designed for third-grade science classes.

This program follows Florida's state science standards, focusing on plant science and water conservation. Each one-hour lesson includes hands-on activities such as reading seed packets, planting seeds, dissecting plant structures, and demonstrating water movement through plants using a watershed model.

In the 2023-2024 school year, eight volunteers and one program assistant delivered the JMG program to three schools, reaching 317 students. Pre- and post-assessments showed a 30-49% improvement in students' understanding of watersheds, stormwater runoff, and water pollution.

2024 Statistics

CLIENTELE CONTACTS

Participants at Group Learning Events	20,898
Field and Office Consultations	2,676
Phone and Email Consultations	10,009
Educational Materials Created	351
Web and Social Media Contacts	142,318

VOLUNTEERS

Number Of Volunteers	482
Volunteer Hours Donated	20,954
Dollar Value Of Volunteer Hours	\$666,337

2024 by the numbers

60+ TEACHERS
Led 4-H School
Enrichment Programs
for **3,000+ YOUTH**

**833 ADULTS
INCREASED**
consumption of
healthy foods

Pesticide Applicator
Training provided **24
CEUS to 1,025
PARTICIPANTS**

250+ TREES in
Jacksonville parks pruned
by **VOLUNTEER
TREE STEWARDS**

Approx. **3,100
POUNDS** of
**PRODUCE GROWN
AND DONATED**
by The Urban Garden

**860 ADULTS
and YOUTH**
adopted food
safety practices

**626 ADULTS
and YOUTH**
improved money
management skills

4,102,324 GALLONS
of **WATER SAVED** by
Florida-Friendly Landscape
Program Participants

FOR MORE INFORMATION

UF/IFAS Extension Duval County
1010 N. McDuff Ave., Jacksonville, FL 32254
Phone: 904.255.7450 • Fax: 904.387.8902
E-mail: duval@ifas.ufl.edu

sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/duval

CONTACT US, FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND READ OUR NEWSLETTERS

[sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/duval/
contact-us-and-newsletters](http://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/duval/contact-us-and-newsletters)

