Key West GARDEN CLUB
WEST MARTELLO

Spring/Summer 2025

A Message from the President

Happy Summer!

It has become increasingly evident that global temperatures are continuing to rise. Our small group of Monday volunteers diligently maintains the gardens, ensuring they remain beautiful and well-kept. Hopefully we can keep those named storms away from the Keys. Each week, as we tend to the garden and plants, our efforts feel doubly rewarded. Together, we find resilience not only in the roots of our plants but in each other, weathering both the heat and whatever challenges the season might bring.

Garden Curator Lynne Bentley-Kemp and her assistant Brian led efforts to adapt gardening practices for climate change. The two of them have created a beautiful, more resilient landscape. When you visit, you'll see more plants suited to our subtropical climate. A huge thank you to Lynne and Brian.

Beginning with July 16th, we are closing the gardens two days per week: Wednesdays and Thursdays. The numbers of visitors diminish greatly, which makes for very long days for our receptionists. It offers relief for them as they cope with inadequate air conditioning and only around 20 daily visitors. Our seven-day-a-week schedule will be reinstated effective October 1st.

Best wishes—I hope to see many of you soon.

Mary

Work Around the Garden

The summer volunteers are Garden Club heroes! We can't thank them enough for showing up on Monday mornings.

Propagation has been Busy

Carol Borland and Marcia Lara put together some really cute succulents for sale. They are a big hit with visitors.

Melanija making orchid balls

The staghorn crew was very busy creating new plants from a huge mother staghorn and Marcia planted a desert rose in a lovely pot.

Synda Patten, Barbara McShea and Melanija Borlja working through the summer heat.

The Courtyard Repaved! By Hazel Hans

We decided to redo our bricks due to standing water in numerous areas. The worst area for flooding was near the birdcage exit. Topline, owned by Jefferson Ricardo, the contractor who reinstalled the bricks in the courtyard, worked closely with member Mike Sheehan to install drainage to eliminate our flooding issue. After removing all the bricks and grading the area, they laid pipe from the courtyard to the pump at the easterly end of the Pavilion. Mike did the work of installing the sump pump and getting electricity to it. All you see now is a very neat square drain. Most of the year it is concealed by our “Plants for Sale” display.

After installing the sump pump, Mike recently added screening under the drain and under the caps of the tanks at each end of the Pavilion. This is part of our ongoing effort **to minimize the mosquito population.** Not only are mosquitos annoying they are a menace to our health.

I recently read that mosquitos cause one million deaths a year worldwide--in comparison sharks kill about ten people. Our small, invasive mosquitos, **Aedes aegypti**, are vectors for the spread of malaria, Zika virus, dengue fever, yellow fever, chikungunya and West Nile virus. They lay single eggs so only need a minimal amount of water like a water bottle capful, upturned leaf or even the sludge in the interior of a bromeliad. Patrol your outside areas for any standing water weekly and after a rainfall. Thoroughly hose out bromeliads. Don't use saucers under outdoor pots. If you are rooting plants in water, even inside your home, add granules or pellets such as Mosquito Dunk, available locally at MARC, and similar pesticide products at stores such as Home Depot. Avoid being outdoors during dawn and dusk when mosquitos are most active. Be aware these mosquitos are also out in cloudy weather or in shady areas such as the interior of our Fort. Use DEET or a concentrate of Lemon eucalyptus to repel the mosquito. Wearing long pants and long sleeves also helps protect you.

In the past few years, Key West has seen an increase in the native Black Salt Marsh mosquito, ***Aedes taeniorhynchus***. Unlike the **Aedes aegypti** who hang out close to where they breed, these native mosquitos can fly 10-20 miles or more from their breeding locations. Although they don't spread the same diseases as the **Aedes aegypti**, the Marsh variety is an aggressive biter and a vector for Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases. Early July was a problem with several days of rain. Tens of thousands were breeding in Stock Island alone.

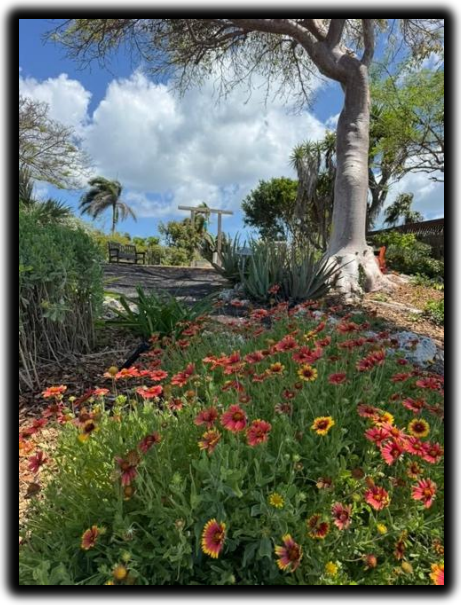
After determining our problem, our local mosquito Control increased their regular truck spraying and added a pass by the Fort. **Florida Keys Mosquito Control District** is very helpful. Go online to **keysmosquito.org** and you will get a quick response. We have regular inspections at the Fort by the same technician. The district has a variety of solutions such as mosquito fish, Gambusia affinis, which eat the larvae (these were recently added to our waterfall pond), pellets for water tanks (added to the tanks at the ends of our pavilion), spraying larvicide from a helicopter as well as spraying adulticide from a truck as mentioned above.

The Lynne and Brian Team in the Garden by Lynne Bentley-Kemp

We have had a very hot and humid summer so far, with plenty of rain. Everything is growing – some plants doubling in size from week to week! This is the time of year when we really miss our snowbird volunteers. We are now down to a skeleton crew of 8-10 volunteers each Monday.

The garden maintenance that Brian and I do on Fridays consists of clearing fallen fronds, cutting down or heavily trimming a few unhealthy trees (there has been a problem with carpenter ants and termites) and generally caring for the health of the plants and the safety of our visitors. We have been taking advantage of the rainy season by planting new plants and transplanting the plants that were getting too crowded. This activity keeps the garden looking fresh. We are finding that bromeliads are a good choice in the garden as they add color and texture and a pop of interest as you turn corners. They're easy to plant and can be replaced easily as I take the pups and nurture them at my house until they are big enough to plant.

The garden is always a work in progress and is a never-ending exercise in aesthetics and design. I am very pleased with the reactions from our visitors and the questions they have regarding the plants. Even though there are fewer visitors in the heat of summer, those who do come appreciate the space and a chance to cool down in the shade and observe the ocean and delight in the flora and fauna that live in our little slice of paradise.



Scholarship

The purpose of the **Key West Garden Club Scholarship** is to assist an individual interested in pursuing a career that reflects the interests of the club's mission. Support is designed for students with a major interest in agriculture, biology, botany, conservation, ecology, environmental science, landscape design or related fields.

This year we offered this **$2,000** scholarship to all of the students in the Florida Keys and the response was overwhelming! One student rose to the top of the list with an amazing application filled with stellar academics and a variety of volunteer work that aligns perfectly with the Key West Garden Club. It gives me great pleasure to award the 2025 Key West Garden Club Scholarship to **Teagan Eriksen** of Coral Shores High School.

Earth Day

In honor of Earth Day, member **BJ Deis** invited some of the Master Gardeners to see her home's lovely garden and landscaping. She's allowed us to share some pictures to see what can be done in a Keys garden. We went a little crazy with the picture-taking, as there was just so much to see!

BJ Deis, a fabulous hostess!

KEY WEST GARDEN CLUB ANNUAL PLANT SALE AND ARTIST MARKET NOV. 2025

The Key West Garden Club will hold its annual fall plant sale and artist market at the West Martello Tower in Key West on Friday, November 21st and Saturday November 22nd from 10am – 3pm. Put it on your calendars. We will need lots of volunteers for this, and it's really fun!!

Again, a big Thank You Shout Out to the Summer Volunteers. It's hot!!!

Thank you for photo and story contributions from Lynne Bentley-Kemp, Kitty Somerville and Hazel Hans. Thank you to Christa Varacalli for proofreading.

Editor, Sue Sullivan