

UF Bug Week 2017 focuses on beneficial bugs used in biocontrol efforts

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GAINESVILLE, Fla. --- Calling all bug lovers, insect aficionados and future entomologists -- the fifth annual University of Florida Bug Week is coming May 20-26.

This multi-faceted celebration is aimed at the general public, especially youth, and is presented by the UF Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences and the UF College of Veterinary Medicine.

This year's Bug Week showcases biocontrol, an environmentally friendly strategy for managing pest plants and insects using beneficial bugs.

"There's never been a better time for showcasing biocontrol, because interest is at an all-time high among producers and scientists, and we want the public to know about biocontrol, too," said Jack Payne, UF senior vice president for agriculture and natural resources. "For years, UF/IFAS has been a leader in both scientific investigation and real-world application of beneficial organisms that can help people manage pests. This is a fascinating and important topic, and I'm glad Bug Week is covering it."

Articles on the Bug Week website, <http://bugs.ufl.edu>, cover UF/IFAS biocontrol successes, the history of biocontrol in Florida, and how residents can practice "backyard biocontrol" to save money and reduce pest problems around the house.

Back by popular demand, the Bug Week Scavenger Hunt returns to the Florida Museum of Natural History from 10 a.m. to noon Saturday, May 20. This educational event is free and open to the public. Participants will visit museum exhibits seeking answers to five bug-related questions; winners will receive Bug Week souvenirs while supplies last.

During the scavenger hunt, a safe yet exciting Bug Zoo will be on display outside the museum, provided and supervised by the UF/IFAS Entomology and Nematology Department.

This year's "Protect Our Pets" video will interest horse owners -- it focuses on biting midges and their role in an equine health condition known as sweet itch.

Five other informational videos are planned for release during Bug Week, including reports on biocontrol bugs that consume invasive air potato and tropical soda apple plants, and reduce populations of turf-destroying mole crickets.

Bug Week's social media outreach includes the popular Bug of the Day and Bug Word of the Day, which will appear May 22-26.

Floridians statewide are encouraged to post their best bug photos on the UF/IFAS Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/UFIFASNews>) and Twitter account ([@UF_IFAS](#)) using the hashtag #UFBugs or e-mail them to socialmedia@ifas.ufl.edu. Organizers also plan brief tutorials on the UF Snapchat account, uf1853, which will cover how the public can employ biocontrol.

Other features are in the works, and a few surprises are sure to occur, said Bug Week project director Beverly James, UF/IFAS director of communications.

"We think this will be the most interesting Bug Week yet, because with biocontrol, we're spotlighting a hot science issue, and something that saves millions of dollars each year for Florida's agricultural producers," James said. "We want kids to be excited about biocontrol, because we need to inspire the next generation of entomologists and nematologists."