

THE

Magnolia

NEWS

NEWS OF INTEREST TO THE RESIDENTS OF MAGNOLIA POINT

VOLUME 7 • ISSUE 10

OCTOBER 2026



2026
WINNER CHARLIE AWARD
 Association/Non Profit
Best Overall: Magazine

WINNER CHARLIE AWARD
 Association/Non Profit
Best Overall: Design

 **fma**
 Florida Magazine Association

HOTEL *Holidays*

We're thrilled to continue our fiction series, authored by **Larianne Stutts**, President of our Village Improvement Association. Charles's adventures continue this month as he meets the lovely Anna Rose, then Miss Martha. Larianne's contributions started with August's 'Rivers Run Through It', then 'When Charles and John Met Frederick'; 'Hotel Holidays' presents three landmark hotels from local lore, focused on the people and lives they touched. **Pages 16-21.**

2025

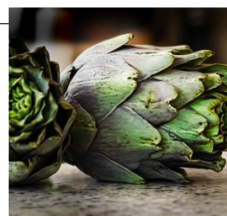
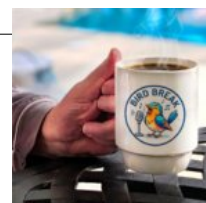
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This month's entrée is '**Datil Shrimp & Grits**', making use of two area favorites: the Datil pepper, and fresh Mayport shrimp, **pages 12-13.** We know you'll love this one! We do!



Take a 'Bird Break' and listen in on the iconic virtuoso *Northern Mockingbird* and the stunning, soaring *Mississippi Kite* on **page 30.**



Stuffed artichokes get a Dixie twist in this month's '**Southern on the Side**', with a Cotton-Belt take on the stuffing, sure to bring it home, on **page 14.**

Continuing the fiery theme and Halloween colors, this month's 'Potting Bench' features the Firebush, a fashion statement and wildlife attractor all in one, **pages 26-26.**



A beverage for the occasion, the '**Low Jack**' ('Low Country Jack o' Lantern') is our *MIXmagic* installment this month, **page 27.**

Little chainsaw, big attitude. Another in our series of handheld yard tools that punch above their weight and get you back on the sofa in no time, **page 28.**



Magnolia's Melanie Dean, *Bluebird Savant*, conservationist and environmentalist, turns her attention and affections to the *Corvus brachyrhynchos* among us in 'Murder, She Wrote', **pages 32-33.**

Miss Puddles' advice column is back, with a rowdy guy who has a unique claim to Halloween, and the chops to back it up, **pages 35-36.**



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CARTS 'N CANDY 2026

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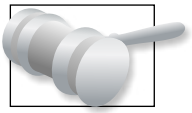


CURB DROP



- EDITOR





ACCESS CONTROL

Chair: Chuck Cox

The Access Control Committee continues to manage critical security infrastructure while addressing persistent gate damage issues. In August, the community recorded 4

billable gate damage incidents (all involving drivers tailgating behind residents or visitors at the rear gate and striking the barrier arm). This brings total billed gate damages to \$28,775.13 year-to-date, with \$10,950.00 successfully recovered. Traffic volume through our gates remained high in August, with 51,676 total resident transactions (36,718 front / 14,958 rear) and 12,012 visitor arrivals processed (9,444 front guard / 2,568 rear kiosk).

The committee actively resolved multiple equipment maintenance items in August and early September. On August 11, a defective manual switch for the front visitor gate arm was replaced. On August 17, wiring for the wireless transmitter on the front resident gate was reconnected and redressed. Following an August 15 test where the SoS emergency box failed to open gates via real sirens, a replacement unit was ordered for installation in September (the Knox Box remains fully operational for primary EMS access). On September 2, after the left-side rear entry metal gate began intermittently stopping, it was locked in the open position to preserve traffic flow while technicians investigate the root cause. Crucially, new safety beams were successfully installed on the rear entry gate to prevent arms from lowering onto vehicles missed by in-ground loops. Dedicated water line installation to the guard shack is currently awaiting City action to relocate the water meter.

Shifts in Priorities, Reversals, Initiatives

- **Leadership Transition:** After announcing his intention to step down as Chair, Chuck Cox led committee meetings on August 6, 20, and 25 to prepare the 2027 budget and finalize ongoing projects. A formal motion has been submitted requesting Board approval for Trey Laramore to assume the role of Access Control Committee Chairman beginning in October 2026.
- **Tailgating Mitigation & Signage:** To further curb rear-gate piggybacking, the committee completed safety beam upgrades and is finalizing new warning signage to be placed on Medinah Avenue near the property line

October Action Items

1. Transition committee chairmanship to Trey Laramore upon formal Board approval.
2. Complete the RFID system integration and credential enrollment process.
3. Coordinate with the City of Green Cove Springs to move the meter and complete the dedicated water line to the guard shack.
4. Finalize and install new warning signage along Medinah Avenue and at the rear gate

From 9 reports submitted of a total of 9 year to date.



ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW

Chair: William M. (Wally) Bransford

The ARC remains one of the HOA's most active bodies, having processed well over 115 homeowner requests through the summer. Recent reviews cover a broad spectrum of property upgrades, including

roof replacements, fence installations and changes, exterior repainting, landscaping enhancements, and whole-house generator additions.

A primary ongoing challenge remains unauthorized property alterations by lot speculators and owners, such as the unapproved clear-cutting of two lots on Barton Creek Circle earlier this summer, which the ARC formally disapproved and referred to Rules Enforcement and the Board for disciplinary action

Shifts in Priorities, Reversals, Initiatives

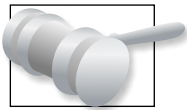
- **Enforcing Structural Boundaries:** The committee maintains a firm stance against "separate structures" (disallowing standalone pool houses while encouraging breezeway-connected options), balancing community aesthetics with state mandates (FS 720) that permit small, hidden storage sheds on homesteaded lots.
- **Leadership Succession:** Wally Bransford continues to manage committee operations while actively seeking a qualified volunteer to assume the ARC chairmanship.

October Action Items

Continue pressing the Board to publish explicit fining guidelines and disciplinary procedures for lot owners who clear-cut trees without prior ARC approval

From 8 reports submitted of a total of 9 year to date.





COMMUNICATIONS

Chair: Joanne LaBeouf

Following the May launch of the new MPCA website and the migration to Constant Contact, the Communications Committee is focusing on database

optimization and resident outreach. Website registration has reached 616 registered residents, and the committee continues to assist homeowners with account setup.

Constant Contact now houses 1,269 total user profiles. A detailed engagement analysis reveals that 825 users (65%) are engaged and regularly open community emails, 243 users (19%) open emails occasionally, and 165 users (13%) show lower engagement. The committee is currently investigating a small batch of email addresses imported from HOA-Express that entered 'suspended' status due to delivery bounces, ensuring residents update their emails on file to maintain uninterrupted communications.

Shifts in Priorities, Reversals, Initiatives

- **Volunteer Recruitment Shift:** Due to an unexpected situation, the volunteer who recently agreed to lead the new resident welcoming segment had to step down. The committee is pivoting back to active recruitment for an enthusiastic resident to fill this key welcoming role.
- **Data Integrity Focus:** Emphasizing self-service account management, the committee reminds residents that homeowners are responsible for updating their contact details directly in the system.

October Action Items

1. Recruit a replacement volunteer to manage the new resident welcoming process and distribute welcome packets in coordination with the MPWC.
2. Audit suspended Constant Contact email accounts and assist affected residents in updating their email addresses.

From 8 reports submitted of a total of 9 year to date.



ROADWAYS, DRAINAGE & WATERWAYS

Chair: Vacant

The RDW Committee continues to oversee Magnolia Point's extensive physical infrastructure. Major milestones completed earlier this year

include the long-awaited \$75,116 entryway expansion by Duval Asphalt, priority asphalt patching across key intersections, warranty repairs on the 3658 Oglebay drainage outlet, and the installation of a new 30" stop sign at Colonial and Quaker Ridge Road.

In September, the committee addressed new maintenance items: filling several road potholes in August, scheduling Barton Turf for a September 15 inspection of surface water erosion at 3658 Oglebay Drive (unrelated to the previously lined storm pipe), and coordinating an exploratory dig on September 11 with Wind River to investigate a storm drain sinkhole on the #12 rough.

Shifts in Priorities, Reversals, Initiatives

- **Golf Course Protection During Heavy Repairs:** Due to concerns regarding heavy backhoe travel over golf course turf during the #12 rough sinkhole investigation, the committee paused digging to formulate a lower-impact access plan.
- **Open Leadership Position:** The committee is actively searching for a volunteer to fill the open Committee Chair position following recent roster changes.

October Action Items

1. Finalize low-impact logistics for the storm drain sinkhole repair on the #12 rough.
2. Finalize planning and vendor selection for the 2026 street crack-filling initiative.
3. Review Barton Turf's assessment regarding surface erosion solutions at 3658 Oglebay Drive.

From 4 reports submitted of a total of 9 year to date.

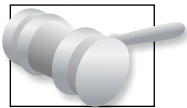


RULES ENFORCEMENT

Chair: Larry Francisco

The Rules Enforcement Committee maintained consistent neighborhood oversight throughout August. Written violations for August were heavily concentrated in Landscape Maintenance (71%), followed by Driveway Maintenance (7%), General Maintenance (7%), Signs/Flags/Banners (5%), Street/Overnight Parking (2%), Exterior Maintenance (2%), Motor





Vehicles (2%), and Trash/Rubbish (2%).

Demonstrating strong community compliance, no violation hearings were required in August because no residents received formal fine assessments during the period.

Shifts in Priorities, Reversals, Initiatives

Continued Drought Leniency: The committee maintained its policy of holding dead-lawn violations in abeyance during ongoing drought conditions and watering restrictions, allowing homeowners ample opportunity for lawn recovery.

October Action Items

Conduct routine compliance monitoring and issue courtesy notices as standard procedure.

From 7 reports submitted of a total of 9 year to date.



STRATEGIC PLANNING

Chair: Ann Sims

Having completed initial drafts of the *Club Continuity Handbook* and the *5-Year Strategic Plan*, the Strategic Planning Committee met to refine both documents.

The committee is incorporating findings from ongoing legal research regarding the pending sale of the Club. Additionally, the SPC is conducting research with the City of Green Cove Springs regarding the formal process for modifying a Planned Unit Development (PUD), ensuring the HOA a roadmap for potential future governance scenarios.

-EDITOR

Shifts in Priorities, Reversals, Initiatives

- **PUD & Legal Decision Tree Realignment:** the committee is expanding its strategic focus to map out PUD modification steps and legal contingencies surrounding the club's sale.

October Action Items

1. Finalize Club Continuity Handbook and 5-Year Strategic Plan with PUD research and legal findings.
2. Complete the PUD modification Decision Tree in consultation with City officials.
3. Publish all finalized governance and strategic documents for Board adoption and community distribution.

From 6 reports submitted of a total of 9 year to date.



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EXTRA!

VOLUME 7 ISSUE 10

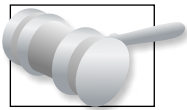
"BREAKING NEWS FROM BEHIND THE HEDGES"

OCTOBER 2026



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BOARD NOTES



VOLUME 7 ISSUE 10

- SOURCE: magpt.org • SUMMARY BY EDITOR

OCTOBER 2026

Evolving Strategic Reversals & Policy Shifts in H2

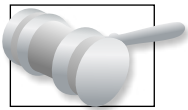
Domain	Q1 / Early Stance	H2 Execution & Policy Reversal (Q3–Q4)
Traffic Safety & Enforcement	Dismissed resident speeding complaints based on early GCPD studies; claimed no problem existed.	Fully reversed stance: deployed 4 solar radar signs (\$2,400 total) and authorized paid off-duty police patrols up to 25 hrs/month.
Surveillance & Security	Maintained third-party Flock license-plate-reader (LPR) cameras across community access points.	Voted unanimously in September to discontinue/remove all Flock cameras, consolidating surveillance to internal HD gate cameras.
Communication & Engagement	Terminated online Members Forum; restricted direct resident dialogue channels.	Funded a printed newsletter, published 'living updates' on MPI, copyrighted the logo, and set firm social media boundaries.
Vendor & Asset Strategy	Sought routine third-party management RFP and enforcement of MPI Use Agreement.	Tabled management company RFP to focus entirely on evaluating \$4.15M MPI club acquisition; sought and abandoned perceived ROFR 90-day extension. Enforced terms of Use Agreement for non-compliance.

H2 Expenditure Summary

Month	Project / Expenditure Item	Amount (\$)	GL Account / Strategic Purpose
June/July	CBRE Golf Course & Red 9 Professional Appraisal	\$9,000	GL#5130 Professional Fees (MPI Due Diligence)
June/July	Brennen Manna Diamond (Specialized Land Use Legal Counsel)	\$7,500	GL#5130 Professional Fees (MPI Due Diligence)
June/July	USGA Course Physical Assessment (Contingent)	\$3,500	GL#5130 Professional Fees (MPI Due Diligence)
June/Aug	Solar Radar Speed Signs (4 Active Units Total)	\$2,400	GL#6060 General Maintenance (\$1,200 x 2)
July	Quarterly Gate Preventative Maint. & Medinah Batteries	\$4,000	GL#6060 Gate Operations & Maintenance
July	Community Road & Asphalt Repairs	\$9,500	GL#8545 Roads & Drainage Maintenance

Continued





BOARD NOTES



VOLUME 7 ISSUE 10

- SOURCE: magpt.org • SUMMARY BY EDITOR

OCTOBER 2026

July	Reserve Capital Transfer (CDARS Ladder)	\$375,000	Reserve ICS to CDARS (Yield Optimization)
August	Tree Tech Community-Wide Tree Canopy Trimming (16 ft)	\$21,000	GL#6070 Tree Trimming (RFP Compliant)
August	Bold City Seal Asphalt Crack Filling	\$11,000	GL#8545 Roads & Drainage Maintenance
August	Medinah Gate Electronic LED Sign	\$2,500	GL#6060 General Maintenance
September	Electrical Box Wraps, Rose Bed & Guard House Sodding	\$9,955	GL#6020 Beautification (\$6k wraps, \$1.78k roses, \$2.175k sod)

Notes

During the September 14, 2026 meeting, the Board unanimously voted to discontinue and remove the neighborhood's Flock license plate reader cameras at the earliest practical opportunity. The formal motion, introduced by Mr. Bastress and seconded by Ms. Sims, represented a major strategic shift away from third-party subscription surveillance. Rather than replacing the Flock units with another external security vendor, the Association decided to consolidate its surveillance operations by relying exclusively on its existing high-definition gate cameras installed at both the front and rear entrances. The Board established that these internal HD gate cameras already deliver video coverage for tracking vehicle access, documenting gate arm damage, and recording illegal activities or security incidents. By eliminating the external Flock camera system, the Board reduced third-party vendor dependencies while maintaining reliable access monitoring across primary entry points.

The publication of the CBRE appraisal in July 2026 generated intense resident engagement and revealed deep divisions across the community regarding whether the Association should purchase the golf course and club assets. Homeowners actively attended Board assemblies, submitted survey responses, and participated in a dedicated Saturday Town Hall meeting with land-use attorney Matt Jackson to examine appraisal findings, contract terms, and potential financing structures. Many residents expressed frustration when Board members declined to share personal opinions on the acquisition. In response, Miller and Sims stated that elected directors

bear a fiduciary responsibility requiring strict neutrality while gathering factual data. To accommodate community interest, the Board issued a series of 'living updates' and published survey results. Of note, a hoped-for 90 day ROFR extension on purchase of the club to extend time for evaluation and negotiation was abandoned as immaterial.

To evaluate the potential purchase of the club properties, the Board focused on credit evaluation, liquidity management, and community oversight. Bastress and CAM Burgess met with representatives from First Citizens Bank to examine loan qualification requirements and assess the feasibility of obtaining commercial bank financing. The Board emphasized that it will not unilaterally commit the community to debt; the directors are responsible for gathering comprehensive financial data, defining loan parameters, and presenting a vetted acquisition proposal to all 967 lot owners. Any final decision to secure financing and acquire the club assets rests upon a formal majority vote by the community.

The transition to RFID got underway with \$52,500 committed to fund hardware, software, and credential deployment in May. By August, the Association officially launched in-person installation appointments for residents to receive vehicle tags, shifting resident entry protocols to automated scanning. In September, the Board further structured project oversight by appointing Trey Laramore as Chairman of the Access Control Committee.

- EDITOR



Few dishes capture the soul of coastal Florida quite like Shrimp and Grits, but when you infuse it with the distinct, fruity fire of St. Augustine's native Datil pepper, this Southern staple reaches an entirely new level. Inspired by beachside Minorcan traditions and local award-winning recipes, this version brings together sweet Mayport shrimp, rich cheddar grits, and a tangy, spicy pan sauce.

The 'Good 2 Go' Fast Fact: Pan-toasting dry stone-ground grits in a skillet before adding liquid toasts the natural starches in the corn. This unlocks a fine, roasted flavor note and helps prevent clumping as they simmer. Paired with the Datil pepper, a chili that packs a fiery punch balanced by sweet, citrus-like fruitiness, this dish delivers gourmet flavor in under 30 minutes. **FULL DISCLOSURE:** this hack will have you hooked! The flavor this imparts to this recipe elevates grits to an entirely new place, and will find its way into all your recipes!

DATIL SHRIMP & GRITS!

Ingredients

For the Pan-Toasted Cheese Grits:

- 1 cup stone-ground corn grits
- 2 cups low-sodium chicken or vegetable broth
- 2 cups milk (whole or 1%)
- ½ tsp kosher salt
- ½ cup sharp cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1 tbsp unsalted butter

For the Datil Pepper Shrimp & Sauce:

- 1 pound large fresh Mayport shrimp, peeled & deveined
- 1 to 2 tsp Datil pepper sauce (to taste)
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tbsp unsalted butter (or 1 tbsp butter + 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil)
- 1 tbsp fresh lemon juice
- 2 tbsp fresh chopped parsley garnish

Continued





Preparation

Pan-Toast the Grits (The Game-Changer Step):

Place a dry skillet over medium heat. Add the 1 cup of dry stone-ground grits. Toast, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon or spatula, for 3 to 4 minutes until the grits smell *lightly* fragrant; **don't expect a big browning effect!** It's very subtle! Again, keep them stirring, and remove from heat immediately so they do not scorch!

Simmer to Creamy Perfection:

In a medium saucepan, bring the broth, milk, and salt to a gentle simmer over medium-high heat. Slowly whisk in the pan-toasted grits in a steady stream to prevent lumps. Reduce heat to low, cover, and cook for 15 to 20 minutes (stirring occasionally) until thick, creamy, and tender. Remove from heat and fold in the shredded sharp cheddar cheese and 1 tablespoon of butter until melted and smooth.

Sauté the Garlic (Yes, that's a thing!):

With one careful eye on the grits as they simmer, melt the remaining butter (or butter and olive oil mix) in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the minced garlic and sauté for about 1 minute until fragrant and lightly golden.

The Datil Kick & Shrimp Sear:

Add the peeled shrimp to the skillet in a single layer. Turn once, then pour in the fresh lemon juice and Datil pepper sauce. Cook for just 2 to 3 minutes, tossing gently, until the shrimp turn opaque and pink and are thoroughly coated in the glossy, spicy pan sauce.

Assemble & Serve:

Spoon generous portions of hot, creamy pan-toasted cheese grits into shallow bowls. Top generously with the spicy Datil shrimp and spoon the warm garlic-lemon pan sauce over the top. Garnish with freshly chopped parsley and serve immediately!

- **Add Green Crunch:** Toss a handful of fresh baby spinach, diced green bell peppers, or sliced green onions into the skillet during the last minute of sautéing the shrimp for extra color and nutrient power.
- **Extra Tang:** Keep a bottle of local St. Augustine Datil pepper vinegar at the table for a splash of bright acidity right before digging in.

RECIPE, PHOTOS: EDITOR



RECIPE, PHOTOS: EDITOR





SOUTHERN ON THE SIDE



This ***Dixie Stuffed Artichoke*** recipe combines the traditional Italian technique with a Dixie twist. The earthy leaves are loaded with a savory, buttery dressing featuring that Cajun trinity, bacon, and Creole seasoning, resulting in a rich, crowd-pleasing, substantial side dish an entrée for some!

Ingredients

- 4 large globe artichokes
- 2 cups seasoned Italian breadcrumbs
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1/2 cup butter, melted
- 1/2 cup diced yellow onion
- 1/4 cup diced celery
- 1/2 cup diced red bell pepper
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley
- 4-6 slices crispy bacon, crumbled
- 1/2 tsp Creole or Cajun seasoning
- 1/2 cup chicken broth

Preparation

- Cut about 1 inch off the top of each artichoke and snip off the thorny tips of all the outer leaves using kitchen shears.
- Trim the stem so the artichoke can stand upright, and scoop out the fuzzy, fibrous choke from the center with a spoon.

- Melt the butter in a skillet over medium heat. Add the onion, celery, and bell pepper; sauté until softened, about 5 minutes.
- Add the minced garlic and cook 1 more minute.
- Remove from heat and stir in the breadcrumbs, Parmesan, bacon, parsley, and Creole seasoning until the mixture resembles coarse, damp sand.
- Gently pull the leaves outward to loosen them. Press the stuffing mixture tightly between each leaf and generously fill the center cavity.
- Place the stuffed artichokes upright in a large, deep pot or Dutch oven.
- Pour the chicken broth and an inch of water into the bottom of the pot.
- Cover tightly and steam on the stovetop over medium-low heat for 40 to 45 minutes, or until the leaves pull out easily.

Toast Yer Grits?!

Sound familiar? Yes, you can use the toasted grits hack from 'Good 2 Go' on the preceding pages. Why not? Same texture boost and nutty finish. Just add a splash of oil to the grits before you stuff the 'chokes, to help them cling to the leaves a little better!

RECIPES, PHOTOS: EDITOR



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WHEN CHARLES MET ANNA ROSE

As soon as Charles reached the bottom of the steps, she spoke. "Is that where you live?" Her voice was almost as pretty as her face, and she was obviously more confident than he was.

His first instinct was to lie to her, but he was already hoping to see her again, so he figured he'd better be honest. He couldn't keep up the pretense of living there indefinitely.

"No," he replied apologetically. "I don't even know the family that lives here. I just hang out in the park a lot and wanted to see what was going on at the Qui Si Sana. I heard the music."

"I've seen you before," she responded quickly. "My name is Anna Rose. What's yours?"

"I'm Charles. I guess you don't live in Green Cove Springs?" he asked. Charles was beginning to relax a little bit, and grateful that she was handling most of the conversation.

"I don't," she told him. "I'm from Jacksonville. My dad and I came here on the southbound train. It's our second time visiting the Qui Si Sana. We might be moving to this area, but he hasn't decided yet."

Anna Rose left the hotel veranda and walked the few steps into the park. The closer she got to Charles, the more nervous he got, but talking to her was so easy. In what seemed like a short amount of time, he learned that her mother had passed away from heart trouble soon after Anna Rose was born. Her father was a successful businessman who worked in real estate and architecture. He had been involved in rebuilding the area that was destroyed by the Great Fire of 1901 in Jacksonville. Anna Rose's grandmother lived in Green Cove and had been encouraging her son to move south for the healing waters. She thought it would be good for Anna Rose.

The sun was going down in the park. As much as he hated to separate from his new friend, Charles knew he had to head home. His parents always expected him home in time for dinner.

"I must go home, Anna Rose. Will you still be here tomorrow?" Charles asked her.

"I'll only be at the Qui Si Sana a few more days," she replied. "But I will be in Green Cove Springs for several weeks. We're staying with my grandmother. I was named after her. Can I look for you here tomorrow? At about this same time?"

It was almost as if she read his mind. Charles did not want to leave her until he was confident that he would see her again.

"I'll be here," Charles replied, trying not to sound as eager as he felt. "I'll be looking for you, too."

They both looked at each other, a bit nervously for a few seconds, and then Anna Rose smiled.

Charles smiled back and noticed how her hair framed the curve of her face. She reached down unexpectedly and slipped off her shoes. When she did so, she



stumbled just a bit and grabbed Charles's arm. Cautiously, he put his hand on top of hers to steady her. This time, Anna Rose smiled more confidently, and he noticed the dimple on the right side of her face. She then turned and headed back to the Qui Si Sana.

Had she really stumbled, Charles asked himself, or was she simply

wanting to touch his hand? Either way, he was glad that it happened.

Charles watched her walk away. There was something quite endearing about seeing her skip barefoot across the grass in a silk dress.

Charles was only confident about one thing: Anna Rose had the bluest eyes he had ever seen.

He watched her walk away, and then turned and hurried home. His mother was putting dinner on the table as he walked in. His father was not home yet. "You're later than usual, Charles," his mother said. "Is everything okay?"

"Everything is fine, Mother," Charles responded. "I'm just thinking about the Qui Si Sana and everything that it brings to the park. Watching the ferries come in, bringing all those successful people and the clothes they wear. Even the food they eat tastes rich. I met someone today who came over on a train. I guess I never realized how big the world really was, and how much of it I was missing. You have no idea how fancy it is!"

Continued



WHEN CHARLES MET ANNA ROSE

Charles's mother smiled warmly. "I think I do, my son. When I was a teenager, we all got excited about the Clarendon," she said. "I was lucky enough to work there when I was just a little older than you. That's where I met your father."

"You've never told me that." Charles was surprised. "I knew you had been inside it, but I never knew you worked there. Father worked there too?"

"He sure did. It was just one of our many jobs back then," she continued. "He was a bellhop, and I cleaned the rooms. That's why I'm always so particular about you making your bed. I learned to do a flawless job at that." They both laughed.

"It wasn't nearly as spectacular as the Qui Si Sana, was it?" Charles could not imagine that it could have been. "Oh, it was!" his mother replied. Charles could see his mother's eyes light up, and she seemed to be reliving some very exciting moments. He was enjoying seeing her get so enthusiastic about her past.

"It was like the Qui Si Sana, but it was four stories instead of three. It also owned some adjoining cottages, so it was able to hold right at 200 guests at a time." Charles's mother began describing the Clarendon while her son listened intently. He was amused at how passionate she got talking about it, and he couldn't remember a time when he had seen her so animated. "The Qui Si Sana has sort of a Spanish look to it, but the Clarendon was more Victorian. To me, it seemed like it was decorated by women, while the Qui Si Sana looks more masculine."

Charles asked, "No tennis or golf?"

"Both! The Qui Si Sana is built around its courtyard, but the Clarendon was more rectangular with balconies overlooking the river. The Clarendon also had a billiard room and a bowling alley."

Charles continued to listen intently. He had never really thought about the life his mother had lived before he was born. She seemed to be as excited about the Clarendon as he was about the Qui Si Sana. He wanted her to continue.

"Where was the pool for the springs?" Charles was trying to picture the layout of the earlier hotel. His mother was eager to answer. "The Clarendon rooms had the spring water pumped directly into the rooms. You could take a hot bath or a cold sulfur bath right in your own room. I think I would have liked that even better than sharing the large pool. You were about three years old when it all burned down. The whole town mourned the loss. Folks sure got in a hurry to rebuild, too. We needed another hotel, and fast!"

Charles pictured this in his mind. He loved hearing his

mother become so excited about the luxurious hotels, but it made him wonder why she didn't seem desperate to be among the rich, just as he was. She'd never even been inside the Qui Si Sana. To his knowledge, she had never even made the attempt to do so.

"Mother, don't you ever wonder what life would be like if we lived in a big city?" he asked. "If we made more money and could travel like Frederick? John can't afford the Qui Si Sana, but at least he isn't stuck here." Charles began to feel frustrated.

His mother stepped closer to him and ran her hand through his hair. Charles had always been mature beyond his years, with a great work ethic. He helped at home and did whatever he could to bring in money for their family. Right now, though, she was reminded that he was still very much a teenager.

"My sweet boy," she said quietly. "Have you ever thought about why these hotels were built? Why they are so important to our town?"

"What do you mean?" Charles asked. "People come to Green Cove to stay in the Qui Si Sana and live like royalty. Isn't that why they came to the Clarendon, too? That's the life I'd want, only we can't afford it," he said, sounding quite disgruntled.

"No, son." His mother's voice was so reassuring. "People come to Green Cove Springs because of its natural beauty. They come for the springs. I don't know if they really have any healing powers or not, but we all love the springs. We had to build the hotels because so many people were coming here to enjoy the peace and serenity that we have every day. Think about all the reasons you head to the springs every afternoon, Charles."

"It's peaceful," his mother continued. "You go there to read sometimes, and you meet your friends there to swim and play ball. It's the most beautiful place in the world, as far as I see, Son. Hotels will come and go, just like the Clarendon did. But the springs, the people here—no, I never think about leaving. If I ever even considered it, that changed when I met your father. And I don't want you to leave, either." She hugged him.

"Maybe you're right." Charles began to ponder all his afternoons in the park. "It's just that Frederick and John—well, mostly Frederick—have such exciting stories to tell. Mine are all pretty much the same."

"Charles," his mother smirked. "Do you want a red-and-white-striped bathing suit? Like Frederick's? Would that make you happy?" Now they were both laughing. "You will make your life here, my son, and you will be just as happy as your father and I. Halloween in the park is going to be great this year, too. Everyone is excited to use the new crepe paper for

Continued



WHEN CHARLES MET ANNA ROSE

decorations. As always, there will be apple bobbing and dancing in the park. I've heard the Qui Si Sana is having a masquerade ball. I bet they will serve orange tarts and mince pies. I'll bet some of those guests who appreciate you carrying their trunks and shining their shoes will make sure you have some!"

Charles's ears perked at that! He did love Halloween. The scent of cinnamon apple cider wafted through the area between the old house and the Qui Si Sana. There was usually a smell of popcorn, and some of the merchants would give boxes of Cracker Jack or Good & Plenty candies to the children they saw. His father usually brought home three Hershey's milk chocolate bars, too—one for each of them. His mother was correct; usually the hotel guests were quick to give Charles treats in appreciation for his service.

The door flew open. Charles's father was home, and he seemed to be in a very good mood.

"I've had a great day," Charles's father announced. "I met some great people and found a way to make some extra money, too." Both Charles and his mother were eager to hear more. "Let's bless our food, and I will tell you all about it."

Charles's mother put dinner on the table. Her husband prayed and then prepared to tell them about his day. Charles always loved to hear his father pray. His father's prayers were not poetic or full of beautiful words. They were just a hardworking man asking his heavenly Father for the simplest of things and being thankful for another good day.

"I'm going to go in early and help at the Gustafson Dairy. They are getting ready to add more cows, and they need help maintaining them. Miss Martha from

the Village Improvement Association told me about it. The ladies are none too happy about roaming cows, but they don't want to cause trouble either. She encouraged me to go talk to the family and see if I could help. She also said the butter they make tastes better than any she had ever tasted. They can't pay much right now, but they were pleased, and I hope it will lead into something bigger and steadier. I'll still work in the lumber yards, but this will be extra for a while. I'd be happy if he wanted to pay me in butter and milk. I've heard the milk is sweeter than you can imagine, too."

Both Charles and his mother were optimistic. Extra money was great, and Charles's parents loved to be around animals. Charles himself thought he might even pick up some extra money at the dairy with his dad.

That night, when Charles went to bed, he pondered some of the things his mother had said. He started thinking a little more about all the things he looked forward to every day. He knew lots of people, and he always hurried to the park and springs every chance he got. Whenever he went to the springs, there were always others there, too, and he had lots of friends—a few his age, most of them older—but he always enjoyed the conversations. He still aspired to see the world and live like the rich hotel guests, but he was putting it in perspective. His mother was right: neither John nor Frederick wanted to leave Green Cove Springs. And now there was Anna Rose. Charles could almost feel the warmth of her hand on his arm again. He remembered, too, how small and delicate her hand felt under his, and it made him smile. The image that he fell asleep to, however, was of her skipping back to the hotel in her bare feet, carrying her satin shoes. When he woke up the next morning, however, he was only thinking about one thing: *Anna Rose*.

WHEN CHARLES MET MISS MARTHA

Charles had breakfast with his parents, then headed to the park. Ferries were coming, and he wanted to be there waiting for them. As of now, helping hotel guests get their luggage from the pier to the hotel was his best source of income. Shoe shining was lucrative, too, but some of the guests were especially generous with tips when they had lots of heavy luggage. On occasion, Charles wished he could go to school like some of the other boys his age, but on days like this, he was so glad he didn't. Making money and meeting people were more exciting; deep down he knew he'd never sit still for an entire morning, much less a whole day. Every now and then, he went, but it was getting less and less.

Charles had a successful day, and then he stopped and headed towards the white house. He waited there for Anna Rose.

He didn't have to wait long. She was walking his way, smiling in a pale blue cotton dress that just barely covered her knees. Her shoes were white, too, but today they were canvas, not satin. Her hair was loose, blowing in the breeze, but she carried a lace parasol to keep the sun from her face. Her skin was so fair. Charles had specifically noticed the contrast in their hands when she touched him at their first meeting. His hands were brown and leathery from the sun, while her

Continued



hands were milky white and so soft.

Conversations with Anna Rose were so easy. This afternoon, she asked Charles more questions about his own family and his life in Green Cove Springs. He was happy to tell her all about it, and as he spoke, he thought back to some of the things his mother had said the night before. Charles realized he really did feel proud of his family and enjoyed the simplicity of it. He also enjoyed hearing her tell stories about her family. He couldn't imagine not having a mother, but Anna Rose seemed so confident and well adjusted.

Charles told her about his father working at the lumberyard, how his mother had been a seamstress for as long as he could remember. Sometimes she got extra jobs cleaning people's houses, but making clothes was her passion. Anna Rose clung to every word he said.

As the afternoon turned into evening, Charles also told Anna Rose about his father's new job with the Gustafson's. He was happy to see her get excited about the cows. He didn't know what he would do if she seemed squeamish about farm animals or repelled at the thought of getting dirty.

"So, have you met Buttercup?" she asked with much excitement.

Charles laughed. "I have. I haven't seen her in a while, but I did meet her. We live over there close to the Gustafson farm. We don't own a house, but we stayed in the boarding house on Palmetto when Buttercup first arrived. I'll ask my father tonight if he saw her. They are adding more cows now. That's why my father is helping out for a while. How did you know about Buttercup?"

"My grandmother is part of the Village Improvement Association," Anna Rose answered enthusiastically. "She and her friends are working to keep the streets clean. She had cows growing up and she loves Buttercup. My grandmother also helps with bazaars and stuff at the St. Mary's Episcopal Church on the river. She goes to a lot of dinners and parties at the Magnolia Hotel, and Gustafson's Dairy provides milk and butter for their events. Everyone says it's the best." At times Anna Rose seemed to know as much about Green Cove as Charles did.

Just as it did the previous day, time seemed to pass too quickly when Charles and Anna Rose were together. He hated for the evening to end, but he knew his parents would be expecting him.

"How much longer will you be at the Qui Si Sana?" He was afraid of the answer, but hated not knowing.

"I'll be here through the winter," she said happily. "My grandmother loves having us here. Once the summer months get here, I'll let her work on my father. She is



already making plans for me to stay here after he goes back to Jacksonville."

Charles felt his whole body relax when she said she was staying. He breathed a sigh of relief. Anna Rose then dropped her head and said shyly, "I'm hoping you want me to stay."

In that moment, Charles felt braver than he ever had. He touched her face with his hand, and then lifted her chin so that she looked directly at him.

"I want you to stay," he said softly, but confidently. They both looked at each other and smiled. She put her hand on his. For quite a while, they just stood there looking at each other. Then Anna Rose turned and headed back to the Qui Si Sana. Neither of them mentioned tomorrow. They both knew that the other one would be there waiting.

Charles and Anna Rose continued meeting between the big house on Spring Street and the Qui Si Sana consistently for several weeks. Occasionally, one would leave a note for the other in the slats of the house, if for some reason they could not be together physically. The notes were always brief, typically a simple explanation, like "Had to help my dad. Miss you, C." or "I'm having tea with my grandmother. Miss you, AR." They always closed with "miss you." Their connection remained strong. With every visit they grew more enchanted, but



WHEN CHARLES MET MISS MARTHA

also more comfortable with each other. Charles was consistently writing to Frederick and John, but he wasn't missing them as badly as he thought he would. The company of Anna Rose had filled that void quickly and effectively.

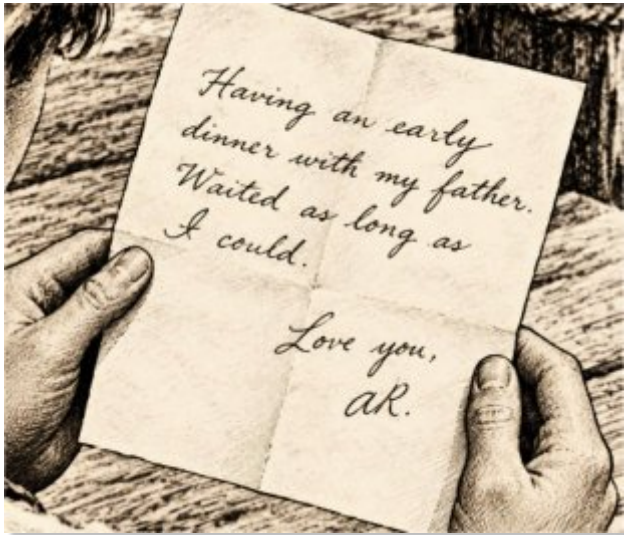
One particular morning, Charles's father woke him up earlier than usual.

"Good morning, son," he said cheerfully. "I don't know what you have planned for today, but I would like for you to go with me to the Gustafsons'. Miss Martha is meeting me there, too, so we can help contain the cows, and keep them from wandering too far from the house. You can help me. It could become another source of income for you, too, when you have extra time."

Charles had breakfast with his parents, and then he and his dad hurried over to Palmetto Street. Miss Martha and another lady from the Village Improvement Association were waiting there for them to arrive.

Miss Martha introduced her friend to Charles and his father. "Gentlemen. I would like for you to meet Miss Rose," she said politely. "She and I are working together to keep the area clean, but we still love Gustafson milk! If you fine men could help us with this project, we sure would be grateful."

Charles's father responded, just as politely, "It is a pleasure to meet you, Miss Rose. This is my son, Charles, and we are both happy to help you, Ma'am. We are both hard workers." Charles's father nudged his son to speak to the ladies.



"Good morning, Miss Martha and Miss Rose. I am pleased to be here to help," Charles said, 'eloquently'.

Charles was eager to get to work. Miss Rose was making him quite nervous. Something about the way

she perked up when she heard his name was very curious. She was definitely smiling at him, but he knew he had never met her before. Her eyes, however, were a familiar shade of blue, and he thought back to his first conversation with Anna Rose:

"We're staying with my grandmother; I was named after her," she had told him.

Could Miss Rose be Anna Rose's grandmother?

Charles had not told his parents about Anna Rose. Had she told her grandmother about him?

Charles worked hard that morning, and he worked very quickly. He wasn't sure if it was to avoid an uncomfortable conversation, or if it was to impress Miss Rose, just in case. Either way, he was sure they would want him back.

He headed for the Qui Si Sana and set up for shoe shining. Part of him was so distracted that he feared he would just worry until he could talk to Anna Rose, but he knew the time would go by faster if he kept busy. Besides, it was only a few hours more.

Just as he was getting his things together to leave, a family arrived with at least seven large trunks full of their belongings. It was later than usual for guests to be arriving, but they sought him out and asked for help carrying their luggage. Charles felt obligated, and he assisted the family with their baggage. The children were also very sweet, but talkative, and they asked Charles lots of questions. He worked as quickly as he could, though, and as soon as he got all of the bags to their rooms, he hurried off to meet Anna Rose.

His heart sank when he saw the white folded paper in one of the slats of the house. He knew what that meant. He would not be seeing Anna Rose this afternoon. Of all the days, today he really needed to talk to her. He needed to know about her grandmother and if she had shared with her about their relationship. Disappointedly, he read the note:

"Having an early dinner with my father. Waited as long as I could. Love you, AR."

Charles was disappointed, but he was expecting that he had missed her. He stuffed the note in his pocket and began to drag himself home.

"Wait!" he said to himself. "Did that note say what I think it said? Did I read that correctly?" Charles quickly took the crumpled note out of his pocket and unfolded it. "Love you," it read. Yes, it definitely said "Love you." Anna Rose loved him! In writing! As much as he missed seeing her face and hearing her voice, he was consoled by her words. She *loved* him!



WHEN CHARLES MET MISS MARTHA



Almanac page: Country Florida Dairy farm

He completely forgot about the morning. He had it in writing that Anna Rose loved him, and, at the moment, nothing else mattered. He walked home proudly. Charles's parents were getting ready to sit down to dinner. They welcomed their son home and he joined them at the table. All three seemed to be in very good moods, and while his parents were excited to share stories about their day, Charles remained happily quiet. As always, his father blessed their food and thanked God for his blessings. His prayer expressed so much gratitude for his family's new lucrative possibilities, and he also expressed thanks for his loving family. Charles, too, was feeling especially grateful this night.

After he said "Amen," Charles's father smiled and looked directly at his son.

"Charles, do you have anything you'd like to share with your parents this evening?" he asked.

Charles wasn't sure what was coming. He had almost forgotten about this morning, and the ladies from the VIA. Oh, how he wished he had been able to talk to Anna Rose this afternoon. He didn't want to share too much if he didn't have to, but neither did he want his parents to think he was hiding something. Charles had never been in this predicament before.

He sat in silence; his father spoke: "Miss Rose told Miss Martha and me that her granddaughter had been meeting a handsome young man in the park every afternoon for over a month now. The more she talked, the more this young man sounded like somebody I might know." His father was smiling, so Charles was beginning to relax a bit. "She said he had dark hair, suntanned skin, worked hard, and had brown eyes, almost too pretty for a boy."

Charles was embarrassed, but he liked what he was hearing.

"Miss Rose was wondering if I knew anybody like that." His father was lovingly enjoying his son's discomfort. "At first, I wasn't sure, but then she told me his name was Charles, just like yours. You're the only Charles I know."

Both of his parents were smiling. Charles was pleased with all the things Anna Rose must have told her grandmother about him. He'd never thought about his eyes being pretty, or a girl getting excited because he was a hard worker. However, none of that mattered too much right now. He still had the paper in his pocket that said "*Love you.*"

- LARIANNE STUTTS

HOTEL *Holidays*

Graphics: Editor





“Apparently 'ambiance' isn't a permitted use of common area.”

TOONS



*“Really, Ted?! **All** the candy corn? Already?!”*





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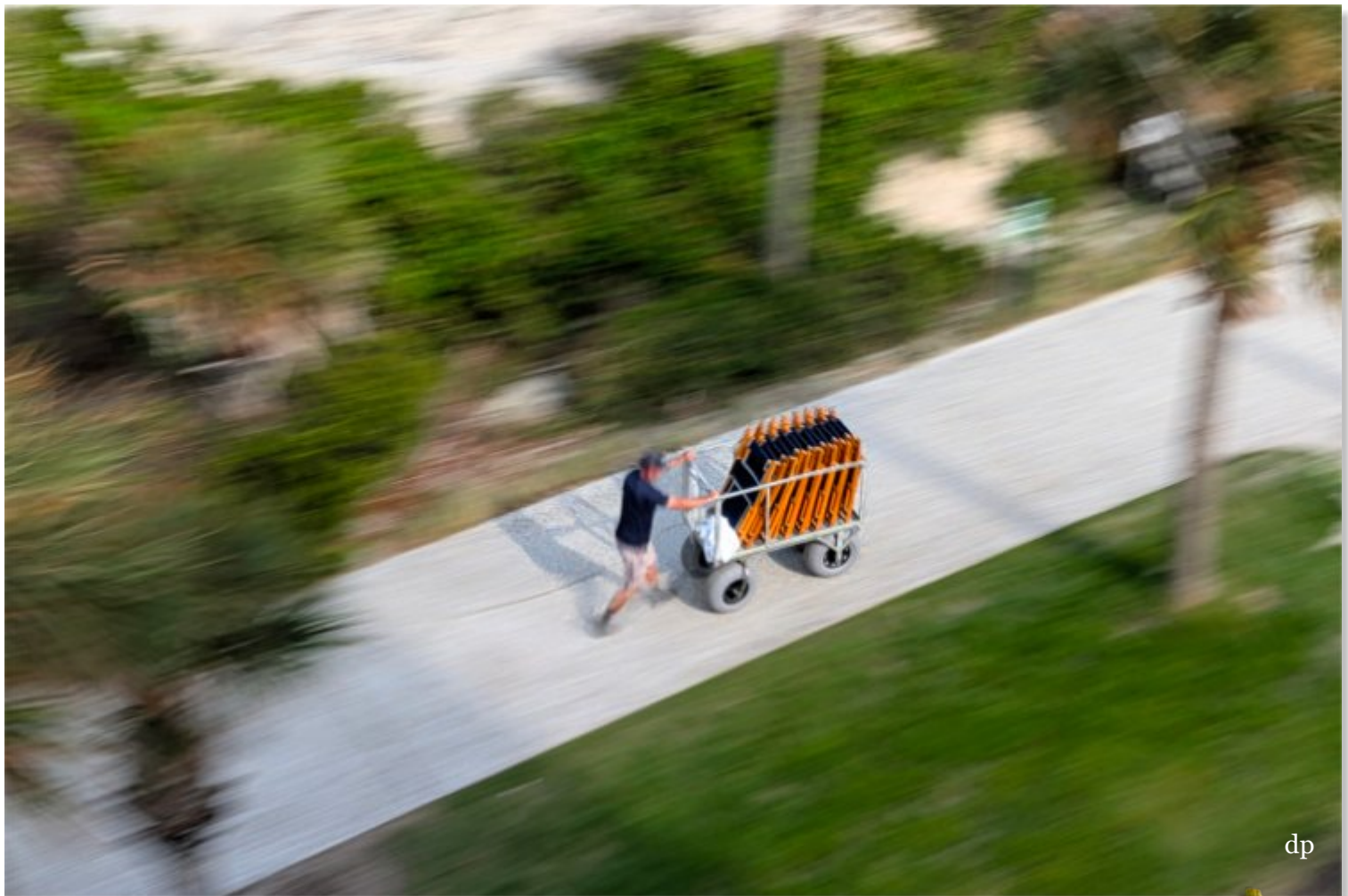


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Welcome to the October installment of "The Potting Bench"! As autumn arrives in North Florida, many traditional garden flowers begin to fade, but the **Firebush** (*Hamelia patens*), also known as **Scarletbush** or **Firecracker Shrub**, is just reaching its fiery peak. Native to Florida, this invincible perennial produces mass clusters of vibrant, tubular orange-red blossoms from late spring continuously until the first winter frost. If you want to transform your suburban yard into a buzzing autumn sanctuary for hummingbirds, Gulf Fritillary butterflies, zebra longwings, and berry-loving songbirds, Firebush is an absolute essential.

Continued

Sourcing Your Firebush & Top Cultivars:

True native Firebush features fuzzy, hairy leaves and deep reddish-orange tubular flowers. Be mindful when shopping, as non-native varieties (*Hamelia patens* var. *glabra*), often sold under the name "Dwarf Firebush," feature smooth leaves and lighter, yellow-orange blooms.

Compact & Variegated Selections:

Standard native Firebush grows rapidly into a large shrub reaching 8 to 12 feet tall (or up to 15 feet if given support). For smaller suburban flower beds,

look for '**Firefly**', a compact cultivar with leaves and flowers half the normal size that stays neatly between 3 and 5 feet tall. For striking foliage contrast, seek out '**Lime Sizzler**'™, which showcases bold chartreuse-and-green variegated foliage alongside bright blooms.

Transplanting and Placement

Sunlight is Key:

To enjoy the maximum number of flowers and dense growth, plant Firebush in full sun where it receives 8 to 10+ hours of direct light daily. While it tolerates



Potting Bench



partial shade, shaded plants grow noticeably leggy and set far fewer blooms.

Soil Tolerance:

Firebush is remarkably adaptable and thrives in any well-drained soil across a wide pH range.

Transplanting Care:

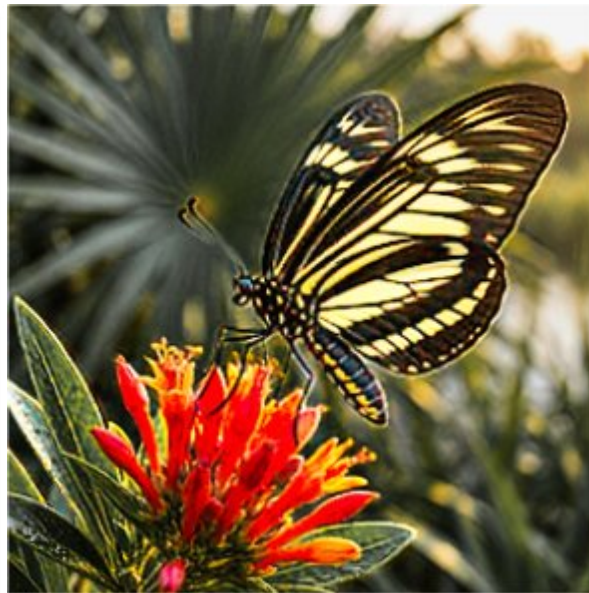
Late spring or summer is the ideal time to install

8–9 (which cover North Florida), cold winter freezes will kill the soft-stemmed top foliage back to the ground. Don't worry: Firebush acts as a "root-hardy perennial" in our region, sprouting back vigorously every spring to push 5 to 9 feet of fresh growth in a single season.

Pruning Schedule: Leave the frost-damaged foliage alone during the winter to protect the crown. In late

winter or early spring (after the last freeze), cut the entire plant back hard to about 6 inches above ground level. Avoid frequent or severe shearing during the summer blooming season, as over-pruning will reduce flower production.

Ultra-Low Maintenance: Once established, Firebush is exceptionally



potted plants in USDA Zones 8–11. Keep the newly transplanted shrub well-watered until its root system becomes fully established.

heat- and drought-tolerant, needing water only during severe dry spells. It requires no fertilizer to grow into a thriving, lush shrub and is virtually free of serious disease or insect pests.

Ongoing Maintenance & Cut-Back

North Florida Root-Hardiness: In USDA Zones

- STORY, PHOTOS: EDITOR



MIXmagiC

THE LOW JACK

A Low Country Jack o' Lantern

- 3 oz Blood Orange Juice or fresh orange juice blended with a splash of tart cherry juice.
- ¾ oz Fresh Lemon Juice
- 1 oz **Spiced Apple-Honey Syrup*** (see prep below, or sub vanilla-honey syrup)
- 2 dashes Orange Bitters
- 2–3 oz Ginger Beer
- **Glass Rim:** 1 tsp smoked sea salt mixed with ½ tsp raw sugar and a pinch of smoked paprika
- **Garnish:** A blood orange wheel, a cinnamon stick "stem", and a fresh sprig of slapped mint or rosemary.

'Spike Station'

While the drink is refreshing, bubbly, sweet, and tangy on its own, guests can kick it up a notch as desired: they can pour 1 or 2 oz of aged Bourbon or Spiced Rum into their chilled glass before the shaken juice mixture.

Preparation

Prepare the Rim: Rub the rim of a rocks or highball glass with a fresh lemon wedge and dip into the smoked salt-and-paprika mixture to create a dark, savory border • **Spiced Apple-Honey Syrup:** In a small saucepan over low heat, combine ½ cup honey, ½ cup apple cider, and 2 cinnamon sticks. Warm for 5–10 minutes until honey is fully dissolved and infused. Allow to cool completely before using • **Build the Spirit (Optional):** If spiking, add 1 to 2 oz of Bourbon or Spiced Rum directly into the salted glass over fresh, clean ice • **Shake the Base:** In a cocktail shaker filled with ice, combine the blood orange juice, fresh lemon juice, spiced apple-honey syrup, and orange bitters. Shake vigorously for 15 seconds until thoroughly chilled • **Strain & Top:** Strain the mixture over the ice into your prepared glass. Top with 2–3 oz of chilled ginger beer for a bubbly top layer • **Garnish & Serve:** Float the blood orange wheel on top, insert the cinnamon stick like a pumpkin stem, and tuck in a mint or rosemary sprig • **Serve immediately** alongside a piping-hot bowl of **Datil Shrimp & Grits!**

The 'Low Jack' offers a bright, sweet-tart, and smoky-spiced balance. The initial sip delivers the zesty burst of citrus, which cuts straight through the cheese and butter of the grits. Next, the warm, velvety sweetness of honey and apple-cinnamon delights, while the ginger beer finish provides a lively pepper-like effervescence.



TOOL»»TALK

Sometimes, only a chainsaw will do. But you loathe getting one out just for that quick, *smaller* job. But then, what would the reason for ‘**Tool Talk**’ be, if not for those miraculous new, low-cost and very capable ‘mini’ tools so popular lately? And, true to form, this month’s installment not only delivers on those pint-sized jobs, but also punches way above its weight should you linger in your personal Outback, with an eye towards bringing in a project, just a little *bigger* than ‘small’.

While I haven’t had mine in continuous use, the chain has held up very well so



far. With this particular deal, a second chain was included; the replacement chains are available online in this length, if needed.

The saw’s small size doesn’t mean you get a pass from the demands of lubrication. The physics of bar-wear doesn’t change with the size, and the absence of a lubrication system makes attention to this detail even more important. Don’t fool around: get genuine chainsaw bar oil, which has ‘tackifiers’ that prevent it from slinging off, instantly. In a pinch, clean 30W engine oil will work, but don’t make it a habit. ***Don’t use any sprays, silicone or whatever!***

Apply a few drops of (genuine) bar oil every 10 to 15 cuts, or before every work session. Drip the oil directly along the top run of the chain and into the guide bar groove, then briefly run the tool for 2–3 seconds off-wood to distribute the oil evenly.

Check and adjust the chain tension before every use, and now and then during use, same as the big boys: pull the chain upward from the middle of the guide bar. The drive links should stay engaged in the groove with roughly 1/8 inch of give. After every 2 or 3 uses, remove the chain and clean debris from the bar groove.

Finally, inspect the chain teeth periodically, check for dullness or chipped edges, and sharpen as needed. You can find round chain cutter files online typically 5/32" (4.0 mm) for these mini chains. Last step: flip the guide bar upside down periodically to ensure even bar-wear. Verify sharpness by checking that the saw produces thin wood chips rather than fine dust during cuts. Then, *let ‘er rip!*

- STORY, PHOTOS: EDITOR



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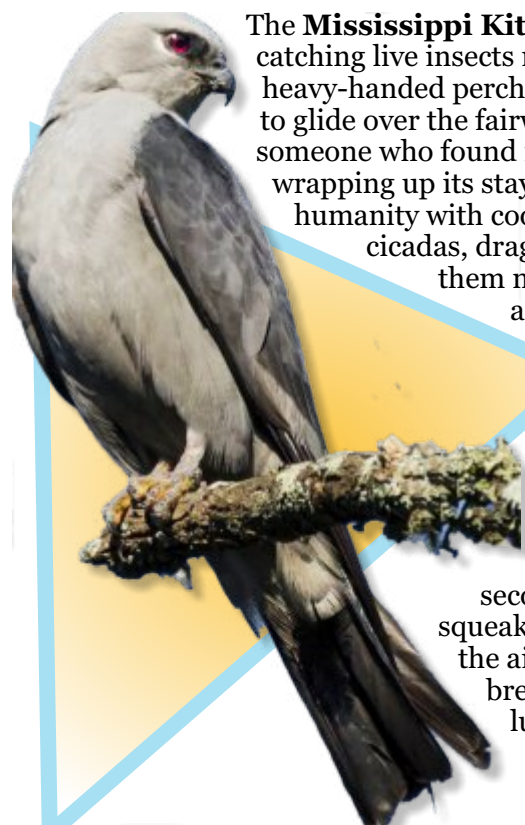


BIRD BREAK

Ah, October on the lanai. There is a faint, fleeting suggestion of autumn in the morning air, or at least humidity dropping down to double digits, punctuated by the usual suspects: the odd bullfrog, a NAS JAX flyover, a leaf blower starting five minutes too early, and those birds! With over 520 recorded species in our neck of the woods, fall brings a fresh seasonal shuffle: migrants passing through, winter visitors arriving, and year-round locals holding down the fort with unbothered attitude. Armed with a fresh cup of coffee and open ears, let's meet two aerial icons taking center stage this month.

The **Northern Mockingbird** is the neighborhood's unhinged midnight DJ, a hyperactive sonic plagiarist who has never once respected quiet hours. It holds the official title of Florida's State Bird, a distinction it uses as legal immunity to torment every living thing within a three-block radius. It doesn't merely sing; it performs a relentless, non-stop mashup of every sound it has ever overheard, from Blue Jays and tree frogs to car alarms, squeaky lawnmower wheels, and cell phone ringtones. It perches at the topmost twig of your oak tree, or the peak of your roof, flashing its white wing patches like a frantic traffic cop directing a multi-car pileup. If a male is single, it will happily perform a 2:00 a.m. acoustic solo set directly outside your bedroom window with the unearned confidence of a garage band frontman. It will dive-bomb housecats, walking dogs, postal carriers, and its own reflection in your car's side mirror without a second thought. You do not own your yard; you are merely renting space on the mockingbird's current concert tour.

Song and Call: The song is a dizzying, virtuosic medley of stolen phrases, with one strict rule: it repeats each stolen snippet three to five times before jumping to the next track on its stolen playlist. A typical performance goes: **"car-alarm car-alarm car-alarm, jay-call jay-call jay-call, whistle-tone whistle-tone whistle-tone."** It is the ultimate karaoke flex, though it would thoroughly humiliate anyone attempting it on a Wednesday night at Saloon 17. When it isn't plagiarizing others, its native call is a sharp, scolding **"chack!"** or a raspy **"cherrr,"** which sounds suspiciously like a game-show buzzer announcing that your presence in its yard was a wrong answer.



The **Mississippi Kite** is the effortless aerial acrobat of the raptor world, a bird that makes catching live insects mid-air look like a casual trip through a drive-thru. While hawks do all that heavy-handed perching, tree-screaming, and territorial posturing, the Mississippi Kite prefers to glide over the fairway with the sleek, silent elegance of a stealth fighter jet engineered by someone who found red-shouldered hawks entirely too dramatic. It is a summer visitor wrapping up its stay in October, catching thermals over Oglebay and looking down on humanity with cool detachment. It doesn't bother hunting on the ground; instead, it snatches cicadas, dragonflies, and June bugs straight out of the sky with its yellow feet and eats them mid-flight like a bag of movie theater popcorn. It swoops low over rooftops and lawns with long, pointed wings, performing physics-defying banking turns just to show off. It has never once flapped its wings in anger, and it considers gravity to be merely a polite suggestion.

Song and Call: For a bird that looks like a high-performance jet, its vocalization is delightfully ridiculous. Like other raptors, it lacks the complex vocal apparatus (syrinx complexity) of songbirds, skipping the concert entirely. Its signature call is a high-pitched, two-note whistle, a smooth, squeaky **"phee-phew"** or **"pee-tee"** dropping sharply on the second syllable. It sounds less like an apex predator and more like a rubber squeaky toy or a high school referee calling a minor personal foul from 200 feet in the air. It uses this call to keep tabs on its mate while drifting effortlessly on a breeze, reminding you that while you're stuck in morning traffic, it's having lunch at 500 feet without ever breaking a sweat.

Full disclosure: my thanks to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology for their brilliant 'Merlin Bird ID' app, which uses your phone to identify the birds in your backyard by their calls! You gotta try this! The rest I noodled up on my own. You know, before coffee when I have no sense!

EDITOR



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dp



MURDER SHE WROTE

I used to dislike crows. I didn't even have a good reason, I think I once heard someone say they didn't like crows and I chimed in, *'Me neither! They're loud and obnoxious!'* Which makes no sense because I love all animals! I love nature!

The next time I was in the process of chasing them off, I stopped and asked myself 'What am I doing?' I immediately stopped and decided: *'No! I want to get to know these beautiful birds!'* And within a few days I'd begun what I hoped would be a long relationship.

I began with a call one day. Just like that. It surprisingly took only a few days before I believe they began to recognize me. I'm sure my neighbors think I'm nuts: I already have a call for my bluebirds, another for the pig-nosed slider turtles I feed every day. Now, a third call for the crows! To be clear, the turtles come no matter what I'm yelling, everyone else is a bit selective.

I have a small group of about four or five crows now that regularly show up looking for handouts. For those of you in the know, that's a *'Murder'*.

I feed them shelled and unshelled peanuts, high-quality dog and cat kibble, apples, and the occasional cooked egg yolk. When my husband isn't looking, they might get some unseasoned cooked chicken or beef. I told Ken I think the training is going well. He agreed, actually saying it was going great because every time I hear a crow, I jump up, get some food and run outside.

And just today, a breakthrough! I put out shelled peanuts and sat down about 20 feet from the tree. Two immediately dropped down and began picking them up. Sometimes they'll pick up a few, set them back

down and choose another. I wonder if they're weighing them as Blue Jays do...greedy little things, always wanting the biggest bang for their buck.

There were five in the tree; four eventually came down, and the first two made multiple trips. I couldn't win #5 today, but I will succeed! The early bird gets those nuts. For me it's too early to tell how they interact with each other, but I'm watching closely for that. I know I may



Continued





Photos: M. Dean

never receive a shiny trinket gifted to me, as the folklore insists; that would be very special indeed! After years of work with them, I've found our bluebirds will sit outside the patio and demand food for their babies; they know us and are trusting of us when we open the box to ensure all is well. Once fed, however, they move on. The crows seem curious to watch me as I watch them. I've begun talking to them and they seem to actually listen. Sometimes they're talking to each other, saying, I hope, 'Hey, she's not so bad! Go ahead, Junior! Get yourself some breakfast!'

Happily, the bluebirds and crows coexist in our yard nicely.

For anyone looking to befriend a 'Murder', I suggest you start slow, just by watching them and speaking softly, repeating whatever you've found 'speaks' to them. And soon, most likely very soon, they'll begin they'll begin to seek you out.

I will continue exactly as I have been, and hopefully in six months or so they'll trust me enough to take food from my hand...in spite of my Miniature Schnauzer. They seem used to his noise and just go about their day. Magnolia Point gives us so many beautiful glimpses of nature and I'm thankful for the opportunity to get close to all of it!

We continue each year with the Bluebirds, usually January through July, and estimate we've seen nearly 200 fledge.

The turtles in our pond are a hoot! So much personality! One big fella comes closer than most. He has the most beautiful yellow eyes and we just stare at each other while he inches closer for more food. I've sat on the bank just a couple of feet from where he eats, hoping one day to have him take some food from my hand. They also enjoy high-quality dog and cat kibble, melon (lettuce, eh, not so much!)

I'm also trying my hand at bees, though so far I've made homes for mason wasps, which are also beneficial to my garden, so I'll let them be this first year and try to better attract mason bees next year.

Things can get a little busy around here...just as I like it!

- MELANIE DEAN



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DEAR MISS PUDDLES

Letter #7 - "Our Chihuahua Believes He Is the Sovereign Lord of the Underworld"

Our four-pound Chihuahua, Bones, was born on October 31, and we are beginning to suspect his birth certificate was signed in brimstone. Bones possesses the body of a teacup canine and the soul of a vengeful mythical beast. He spends his days stalking the living room perimeter, emitting low demonic rumbles at passing leaves, furiously barking at Amazon delivery drivers, and glaring at guests with glowing, unblinking eyes. Last week, he stole a decorative velvet pumpkin, dragged it beneath the sofa, and guarded it like a dragon hoarding treasure. Yet, the moment night falls, this little terror crawls under the duvet, burrows against my feet, and slumbers like a sweet, purring heating pad until morning. We love him fiercely, but with Halloween approaching, we fear his protective, hellbound antics will terrorize the entire cul-de-sac. How do we manage a four-pound guardian of the underworld?

— Haunted on Medinah

Dear Haunted,

You have a Chihuahua. He weighs four pounds. He believes he is the demon hound Cerberus guarding the gates of Hades. Born on All Hallows' Eve, Bones takes his natal zodiac of dark chaos very seriously. Over the years, I have observed that humans consistently lose arguments with animals weighing under fourteen pounds. Small dogs do not recognize physical dimensions; they measure themselves purely in audacity and volume. Bones is not malfunctioning; he is simply operating as a four-pound Director of Perimeter Security who happens to love you with terrifying intensity.

Suggestions

1. Establish a Formal Stand-Down Protocol. When Bones begins his demonic low rumble at an incoming mail carrier, do not shout "QUIET!" repeatedly from across the room. Approach him calmly, make firm eye contact, and issue a clear directive: "Thank you, Lord Bones, perimeter secure! Stand down, Sergeant." Small dogs respond remarkably well to bureaucratic protocol and solemn recognition of their authority.
2. Enact a Pumpkin Treaty. Bones has not stolen your decorative velvet pumpkin; he has liberated it for a higher purpose. Do not engage in a forcible repossession. Place a designated velvet pumpkin by the front entryway with his name written in permanent marker. Dogs respect ceremony.
3. Reframe the Trick-or-Treater Invasion. On Halloween night, Bones will interpret costumed neighbors as an invading legion of goblins. Position him in a secure, elevated throne room, such as a padded armchair behind the screened lanai, where he can monitor the realm without launching a physical assault.

Continued



4. Divert the Hellbound Energy. A tiny emotional pirate with no occupation will construct his own chaos economy. Provide Bones with scent-based enrichment and hidden treat puzzles. A Chihuahua with an occupation is a Chihuahua too busy to destabilize the neighborhood.



Miss Puddles' Bonus Holistic Tips:

- Lavender calming wipes applied gently before dusk can help soothe a high-strung canine guardian during spooky seasonal shifts.
- Puzzle feeders are exceptional for dark intellects. Hide a puzzle feeder beneath a second puzzle feeder to create a puzzle feeder ouroboros that occupies his supernatural mind until at least Thursday.
- Hydration and temperature management remain essential in Magnolia Point. Serve pet-safe frozen treats on proper plates; he may be hellbound, but he has earned royal service.

EXTRA BONUS - Field Notes:

Dear Haunted, I reviewed your doorbell camera footage. My observations:

A delivery driver carrying an oversized package approached the porch on Tuesday. Bones met him at the front window, standing on his hind legs, ears pinned back, emitting a vibration that rattled the glass. The driver backed down the walkway slowly, without making eye contact, and left the package behind a hedge. Bones watched him depart with deep satisfaction, convinced his tactical curse had worked.

Later that evening, a neighborhood raccoon attempted to inspect the patio trash container. Bones unleashed a series of piercing shrieks from behind the glass that sent the raccoon scrambling up the nearest oak tree to reconsider several of its life choices.

Even the neighbor's terrier, a dog with zero respect for property lines, made one exploratory stroll past your lawn, caught sight of Bones glaring from the window sill, and left noticeably faster and considerably more thoughtful.

- STORY, PHOTOS: EDITOR



