

EDISON
and
FORD
winter
ESTATES

HOMES · GARDENS · MUSEUM
LABORATORY



Learn about the many species of palms in the **Palms for Your Landscape Class**.

MEMBER MAGAZINE
MARCH 2022

EDISON
and
FORD
winter
ESTATES

2350 McGregor Boulevard
Fort Myers, FL 33901
239.334.7419
edisonford.org

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Frank Aloia, Jr., Chair
Cole Peacock, Vice Chair
Craig McLean, Treasurer
Kathy Dean, Secretary

Sidney Ann Brinson
John Cauthen
Jeanne Dozier
Suzanne "Sass" Edwards
Eric Graff
Randall P. Henderson, Jr.
Richard Moulton
Steve Niehaus
Renee Norris
Madeleine Plummer
Brian Rist
Karen Ryan
Brett Sands
Margaret Sirianni

Melvin Morgan, Emeritus Trustee
Wiley Parker, Emeritus Trustee
Tom Smoot, Emeritus Trustee

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Michael Flanders

MEMBERSHIP

To become a member of Edison Ford,
apply at edisonford.org/membership

CONNECT WITH US



March Rolls in Like a Lion and out Like a Lamb

While the Northeast is still under a blanket of snow, the temperature in Southwest Florida is perfect for gardening. Whether you want to start a food forest, butterfly garden, or add some tropical plants to brighten up the front yard, you can find it at the Garden Shoppe. If you haven't visited recently, you're in for a surprise. We've expanded the space and added a lot more plants – the Garden Shoppe is now double the size!

We have a large selection of vegetables, herbs and fruit trees and now is the time of year to plant those edibles. Many of the vegetables have been started from seed, right where Thomas Edison once grew his own food. To help make the plants produce more, consider adding some plants for pollinators. We have a large selection of flowering plants to bring in the bees and butterflies. We even have milkweed for the Monarchs. If you have a small garden, or perhaps just a balcony to garden in, we have a large selection of ceramic flowerpots in many different colors and sizes.

**The Garden Shoppe is open seven days a week, from
9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. We hope to see you soon!**

March Events and Programs at a Glance:

Now through

May 29

Sustainable Conceptions Art Exhibit

March 1

Emerging Inventors (for kids)

March 2, 9, 16, 23 & 30

Yoga in the Moonlight Garden

March 5

Botanical Drawing with Megan Kissinger

March 6

Art in Bloom Art Show

March 8

Digital Discussion (Legacy of Edsel Ford)

March 8 & 12

Palms for Your Landscape Class

March 9-10

Homeschool Program (for kids)

March 12

VIP Tour to St. Petersburg

March 18

School Break Camp

March 18

Baseball Talk on the History of Spring Training

March 18

Caribbean Chillers Concert

March 19

Garden Talk

March 19

Vintage Base Ball Talks

March 19

Silk Scarf Painting Class

March 20

Vintage Base Ball Games

March 21

School Break Camp

March 22 & 26

Caladium Crazy Gardening Class

March 26

Etiquette Class

More details on each event and program are included in the following pages and on the website. EdisonFord.org



GENERAL HOURS

Open Daily
9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.



ADMISSION

Guided Tour:

Edison Ford Members: \$5

Adults: \$30

Teens: (ages 13-19) \$25

Children: (ages 6-12) \$18

Children: (ages 5 and under) FREE

Self-Guided Tour:

Edison Ford Members: FREE

Adults: \$25

Teens: (ages 13-19) \$20

Children: (ages 6-12) \$15

Children: (ages 5 and under) FREE

CONTENTS

4	Vintage "Base Ball" Games & Talks
5	Adult Education
6-7	Events
8-9	Historical Connection
10-11	Just for Kids
12-13	Tours & Programs
14-18	In the Garden
19	Book of the Month

On the cover: One of the oldest *Thrinax radiata* palms on the site; adjacent to the fountain. These Florida native palms do not grow more than 6" per year and are documented to live 150+ years. They max out height-wise at about 30 feet. It is conceivable that this Florida Thatch Palm was planted when Thomas Edison was here. *Photo credit: Karen Maxwell*



VINTAGE "BASE BALL"

SPRING TRAINING TALK FRIDAY, MARCH 18 • 11 A.M.

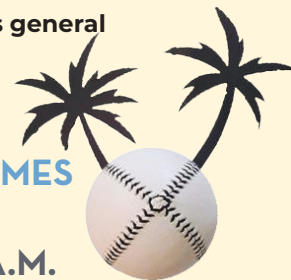
Learn about the history of Spring Training in Fort Myers with Program Manager, Holly Shaffer.

Included with Estates general admission.

EXPLORING THE ORIGINS OF VINTAGE "BASE BALL" TALK SATURDAY, MARCH 19 11 A.M. AND 3 P.M.

Allen "Honest Al" Stare is a baseball historian who will speak at Edison and Ford Winter Estates at 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. on March 19 about the origins of vintage "base ball." He'll explore the evolution of the game, the role of the umpire, and dispel some misconceptions. Allen also will umpire two of the vintage "base ball" games on March 20 at Terry Park.

The talks are included with Estates general admission.



VINTAGE "BASE BALL" GAMES AT TERRY PARK SUNDAY, MARCH 20 • 10 A.M.

Edison and Ford Winter Estates will host a day of vintage "base ball" on March 20 at historic Terry Park. Join us to celebrate the early days of our national pastime with four consecutive games, featuring: Central Florida Awkwards, Fort Myers Vagabonds, Ohio Village Muffins, and the Springfield Illinois Long Nine.

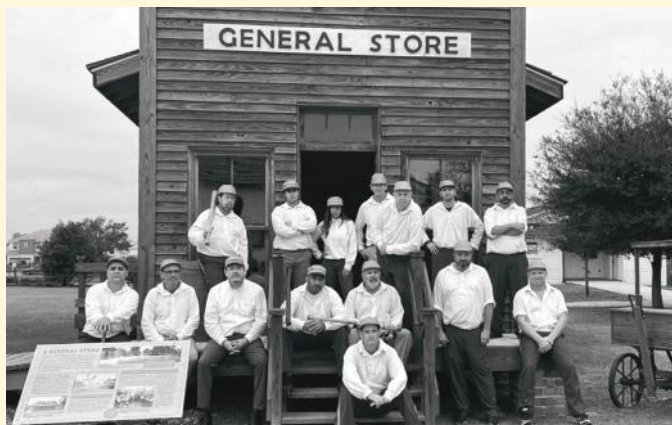
Spectators will see the game played as it was when Thomas Edison was a teenager and he developed his life-long love of the game, inspiring him to proclaim: "Baseball is the greatest of American games."

Game Location:
Terry Park
3410 Palm Beach Boulevard • Fort Myers, FL 33901

Admission: \$5 for adults, children admitted free.



FORT MYERS VAGABONDS



CENTRAL FLORIDA AWKWARDS



Botanical Drawing

SATURDAY, MARCH 5 • 9:30 A.M.

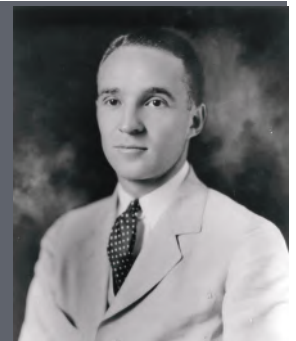
In this class, Megan Kissinger teaches the basics of drawing flowers, leaves and trees, while students gain inspiration from the gardens at the Estates. This class is more for students who want to learn traditional, realistic drawing techniques. The geometry of plants and how to draw them accurately is also covered. The class will be held near the pergola between the Edison and Guest house or in the Moonlight Garden. Participants are encouraged to bring a lunch.

Cost: members \$40, non-members \$60. All materials are included.

DIGITAL DISCUSSION:

THE LEGACY OF EDESEL FORD MARCH 8 • 10:30 a.m.

Join us as we explore the life and legacy of Edsel Ford. The son of Henry and Clara Ford, Edsel was president of the Ford Motor Company, a car designer, a philanthropist, a patron of the arts and devoted family man. Join Program Manager, Holly Shaffer for this free Digital Discussion. **Registration is required.**



Silk Scarf Painting Class

SATURDAY, MARCH 19 • 9 A.M.

Marie Dyer will teach participants how to paint a 14" X 72" scarf that can be worn or used as a piece of artwork. All materials are included in the fee.

Advance registration is required at EdisonFord.org.

Cost: Edison Ford members: \$90; non-members: \$100



YOGA IN THE MOONLIGHT GARDEN

EVERY WEDNESDAY • 10-11 A.M.



Yoga offers us a deeper connection to our inner self, nature and to the community. This one-hour yoga class allows you to step away from all the 21st century gadgets and focus on the moment. Yoga helps to recharge the body, mind, and spirit. Class will be held in the Moonlight Garden. All skill levels welcome. The class is taught by Bonnie D'Angelo, a certified yoga instructor. Bonnie started her journey as a yoga teacher to further support her own spiritual growth. She is RYT200 certified with Yoga Alliance and working toward RYT300. She is certified in Reiki 1 and Reiki 2 and will continue the path toward Reiki Master & Energy Worker.

Cost: Edison Ford members: \$15; non-members: \$20 per class (Tickets may be purchased online or at the ticket counter). **Bring a yoga mat, water and towel.** Admission to the site is not included.

ART IN BLOOM ART SHOW

SUNDAY, MARCH 6 • NOON-4 P.M.

On March 6 from noon to 4 p.m., Edison and Ford Winter Estates will host the Art in Bloom art show in partnership with the Fort Myers-Lee County Garden Council. This unique one-day art show features floral designs paired with works of art from the Sustainable Conceptions exhibit.

This year, 15 floral designs and other works of art will be on display in the Edison Caretaker's House, an original "Cracker House" and one of the oldest standing structures in Lee County. Prior to the show, participating Garden Council members are paired with a piece of artwork and create a floral display based on their interpretation of the art -- using the same colors and design feel.



Held in many cities across the country, Art in Bloom is a nationally sanctioned event through the National Garden Clubs and the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs. The local Fort Myers-Lee County Garden Council was organized in 1957 and is affiliated with both organizations. Edison Ford has a long history with garden clubs, as Mina Edison was a founding member of the Periwinkle Garden Club -- the first garden club in Fort Myers. Today, the Periwinkle Garden Club is a member of the Garden Council.

Art in Bloom is included with general admission. Visitors may vote for their favorite floral design; the winners will be announced at the end of the show.

RHYTHM ON THE RIVER: Caribbean Chillers (Jimmy Buffett tribute)

FRIDAY, MARCH 18 • 6-8 P.M.

Sponsored by



Calling all parrot heads! Join us on the Ford lawn for an exciting performance of the Caribbean Chillers – a Jimmy Buffett tribute band. Guests will get to hear many of Buffett's top hits and crowd favorites for an authentic show. Gates open at 5:30 p.m. and the concert starts at 6 p.m.

Guests can take in a beautiful river view and possibly see a spectacular sunset. Food and beverages will be available for purchase. Ticket holders should bring a folding chair and a sweater if the weather is chilly. No coolers are permitted. Free parking is available in the main Edison Ford parking lot at 2350 McGregor Boulevard.

Tickets are on sale now and may be purchased online at Edisonford.org or at the ticket counter. Individual tickets purchased in advance are \$20 for Edison Ford members and \$25 for non-members. A limited number of tickets will be available at the door for \$30 (both members and non-members).

A VIP seating area will be open and may be reserved by the table for \$225.

Each table holds up to five people. The ticket price includes the use of a table and chairs.

VIP TOUR

SATURDAY, MARCH 12, 2022

SAINT PETERSBURG

Downtown St. Pete – Lunch, The James Museum of Western and Wildlife Art, Chihuly Museum and Glass Blowing Demonstration at Morean Art Center • 8:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.

St. Petersburg is a very quaint and artsy town right on the Tampa Bay. There are many sites to see and we hope this provides you with suggestions for your next visit to the area. Many nearby locations have membership reciprocity with Edison and Ford. We will start with an early, private luncheon experience in the heart of the St. Petersburg downtown area.

Get ready to enjoy multiple venues and if you enjoy art, you will love this one. The James Museum of Western and Wildlife Art, located in downtown St. Petersburg was founded by businessman Thomas James and opened in 2018. The museum has thousands of pieces from the James'

collection including traditional as well as contemporary pieces. The Special Exhibit on the 2nd floor is called Away from Home: American Indian Boarding School Stories. This is a story about the federally-operated, off-reservation boarding schools aimed to eradicate Native American cultures through forced assimilation of children.

Next, we will visit the Chihuly Museum. The collection is a permanent and stunning collection of world-renowned artist Dale Chihuly's unique work. This museum was designed to create a visitor experience where the art and architecture work together. The entrance has a 20-foot sculpture. Chihuly's work has transformed and influenced contemporary art beyond just glass. You will love this!

Our final stop is across the street to the glass blowing studio at the Morean Art Center. This is quite a treat and you will be fascinated by the glass-blowing demonstration process. This may inspire you to come back and take a class. Watch as artists perform their glass blowing skills in this one-of-a kind demonstration. Glass pieces are also for sale in the adjacent glass shop.

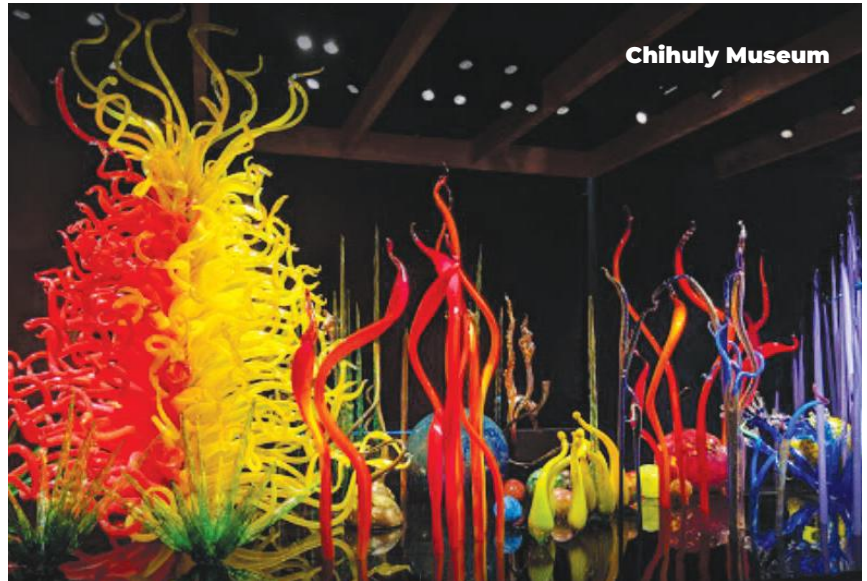
At 5 p.m., you will have an hour to visit the glass shop, other nearby shops and enjoy this great cultural district within walking distance.

TOUR COST: \$135 FOR EDISON FORD MEMBERS; \$150 FOR NON-MEMBERS.

For questions or to make reservation for this or any tour, please contact Sherri Muske at 239-335-3677 or smuske@edisonford.org. Tours fill up quickly, reserve early.

Please note all tours include a lot of walking, bus stairs and sometimes maneuvering in tight spaces. Please plan accordingly.

Cancellation Policy – Cancellations must be 14 days prior the tour date to receive a full refund, unless the vacancy can be filled. Cancellations made by Edison and Ford due to unforeseen circumstances will warrant a full refund or credit for another tour in the same season.



ELLA MAE PIPER

By Alexandria Edwards

March is Women's History Month in the United States, which encourages the study, observance and celebration of the vital role of women in American history. An extraordinary example is Dr. Ella Mae Piper. Dr. Piper was a prominent businesswoman and philanthropist who worked with many influential individuals on community projects throughout Fort Myers, including Mina Edison.

She was born on March 8, 1884, in Brunswick, Georgia, and developed a passion for service as she was growing up, inspired by her mom, Sarah Williams. As a young woman, she attended Spellman College in Atlanta, Georgia and studied chiropody at Professor Roherer's World Famous Institute of Beauty Culture in New York City. After she graduated in 1915, she worked as a hairdresser and masseuse at the Twilight Inn in New York. According to a ledger found in her records, the young entrepreneur did scalp treatments for 75 cents, a shampoo for \$1.25, and a manicure and pedicure for 60 cents.

In 1916, Ella moved to Fort Myers to be closer to her mom and opened her first beauty shop across from Englehart's Mortuary on Jackson Street. When the City of Fort Myers made the decision to extend Main Street, Piper and her husband Frank purchased land from Richard and Julia Barker on Evans Avenue for \$500, where she built her own parlor. In addition, she owned the Big 4 Bottle Company on Mango and Evans, where customers could enjoy soft drinks for just 5 cents a bottle. Some of her long-time, loyal customers were Thomas and Mina Edison and it was the one place they never failed to stop during their visits to Fort Myers.

While Mrs. Edison had her nails manicured or hair cut, Mr. Edison would wait in the shop and enjoyed ordering refreshing sodas. An acquaintance of Mrs. Piper, Geraldine Bostelman, recalled that "Ella would go over to Mrs. Edison's to work on her feet and every now and then, she'd stop by and ask my children, Linda and Ernie, if they'd like to go see Mrs. Edison today, and she'd take them with her."

Outside of her business endeavors, Ella wanted to make a difference in the lives of those around her and started volunteering in the Dunbar community with Sarah Williams – Ella's mom. They started the first Christmas celebration

for the residents in 1915, which is now an annual tradition. After Mrs. Williams passed away in 1926, Ella continued this large party with the help of many churches, businesses, and friends who provided generous donations. Reportedly, 15 girls attended the first gathering and today, nearly 600 boys and girls attend this event, held on the lawn at the Dr. Piper Center.

In addition, she helped build the Dunbar Community School, an adult education and lifelong learning center. When a new building was added to the school's auditorium in 1937, Mina Edison was the guest of honor. Mina also had a special interest in the Dunbar community – commonly known as Safety Hill – and served as chairman of the Safety Hill Garden Club. She coordinated a group to clean up the sandy roads and plant trees, shrubs, and flowers to make the schools and churches look more visually appealing.

Mrs. Piper commended Mina's work with the Plant and Flower Guild and shared how generous she was for taking time to improve the school grounds, stating in a speech, "much of the work done in this section was led by Mrs. Hughes (formerly Edison), and we want to thank her for the many things she has done for us." In response, Mina praised the work of the teachers and Mrs. Piper for dedicating countless hours to ensure the students received a quality education, something that Mrs. Edison highly valued. Mina urged that nature study be included as one of major courses offered at the school as it covers everything from "the heavens to under the seas, with all the sciences of the air and earth." In her closing remarks, Mina shared one of her late husband's famous quotes, "everything comes to him who hustles while he waits."

Piper was also active in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, founded the Tranquillo Temple, and served as an executive board member at the Elks Lodge for 26 years. A newspaper clipping from the Fort Myers Historical Museum shared that Mrs. Piper was re-elected Grand Assistant DT. Ruler of the World at the Elks Convention in Cleveland, Ohio.

Through all of her work, she developed very close and intimate relationships with many people, especially young children who needed support and guidance, which earned



her the nickname “fairy godmother.” She helped them earn scholarships to Tuskegee College, funded in part by her own money. She had no children; however, one young woman, Anna Heard, became very special to her and it was speculated that she might have legally adopted her, although there is no record of that in Lee County. Ella put the young lady through beauty school, and they worked together for many years at the beauty shop.

Another prominent person in Ella’s life was C.B. Earle, a retired head redcap from the Grand Central or Penn Station in New York City. Both lived at Ella’s home at the corner of Evans and Mango Street and she requested that her home and belongings be transferred to them when she passed away. The beauty shop was also rented to Heard at a reasonable rate. Ella also made sure that any remaining principle and income be paid to charities that provide for children and the elderly, selected by her trustee, Ernest Bostelmann, the Mayor of Fort Myers and President of the Lee County Chamber of Commerce.

The Piper residence was torn down in the mid-1970s due to the high costs of renovating it for public use. Adjacent to the former location of the home, the Dr. Ella Piper Center was built and dedicated in June of 1976. This center seeks to enhance the social and economic well-being of the frail elderly who reside in Southwest Florida, at-risk youth, special needs children, and the community at large. Nearly 50 years later, the Dr. Piper Center continues to carry out the philosophies and visions that Ella had for the

Fort Myers community. Today, the Center has five major programs, including training low-income senior citizens, a foster grandparent system, and resources for adults who do not have access to safe, reliable transportation. To learn more about the Center, visit drpipercenter.org.

Visitors can also enjoy a nice meal at Ella Mae’s Diner, located at the Luminary Hotel in historic downtown Fort Myers. They provide a twist to a classic southern diner, inspired by traditional neighborhood favorites. The mission of the restaurant is to celebrate Piper’s legacy, and it serves as a hub for the community to come together and share stories as they enjoy a nice meal surrounded by vintage décor.

Similar to the Dr. Piper Center, Edison and Ford Winter Estates serves to continue the legacy of many pioneer figures, including Mina Edison. Education programs teach young kids the importance of challenging your mind, stepping out of your comfort zone, and being innovative. The variety of botanicals on the site are a reminder that caring for plants and the environment are great ways to encourage sustainability, inspired by Mina Edison’s love for gardening and use of plants to improve many areas in Fort Myers.

We hope you take time to visit Edison and Ford Winter Estates, as well as many of the cultural institutions in Fort Myers soon and gain some inspiration to foster positive change in your community!



SCHOOL BREAK CAMP: WIZARDS OF ELECTRICITY

FRIDAY, MARCH 18

In this electrifying one-day camp, electrical concepts will be explored in a fun and educational setting.

COST: members: \$45; non-members: \$50

SCHOOL BREAK CAMP: EAGER ENGINEERS

MARCH 21-25

Budding engineers won't want to miss this popular week-long camp!

COST: members: \$200; non-members: \$230



ETIQUETTE CLASS (Lessons in Manners for the Generations)

SATURDAY, MARCH 26 • 11 A.M. TO 1 P.M.
AGES 6-12

Historical records in the Edison archives show Mina Edison, wife of legendary inventor Thomas Edison, as a gracious hostess and interested in the well-being of children and the community. Following in this tradition, this class teaches lessons in timeless etiquette and social skills.

COST: Edison Ford members: \$75; non-members: \$85



CONGRATULATIONS TO THE EDISON FORD ROBOTICS TEAM “ASSEMBLY REQUIRED!”

The team recently participated in this season's qualifying tournament and received the Innovative Project Award and a bid to the Regional Championship, which will be held on March 5. The current team has won an award in every category in the past three years: robotic design, project, and core values.

Assembly Required (4th-8th graders) participates in First LEGO League, a division of FIRST Robotics. The Estates have been involved in First LEGO League since 2011. The team's robot is named "EdiBot Jr.," after the beloved "Edison Bot," a 5' tall robot built by an earlier team to serve as an outreach ambassador of the Estates and the robotic community of Southwest Florida. Over the years, Edison and Ford staff have volunteered with FIRST robotics as tournament judges and have actively mentored local teams.

INVENTOR'S SUMMER CAMP

Join us as science and history come alive in our living laboratory! For students in grades K-2 and 3-5. No experience is needed. Visit the website for health, safety and scholarship information.

Registration is required; sign up on the website at EdisonFord.org.

ROBOT ROUND UP • June 6-10

Students will learn the principles of robotics in this high-tech camp. They will design, build, and code robots as they tackle daily challenges. No experience is required in this crash course to robotic engineering.

ELECTRIC EXPLORERS (grades 3-5) • JUNE 13-17

Campers will walk in the footsteps of Edison and Ford as they take a deep-dive into the world of electricity. They will learn the history of electricity, how to make circuits, and how to harness the power of the electron.

JUNIOR DESIGNERS (grades K-2) • JUNE 13-17

In Junior Designers, art meets design for a creative week of camp. Campers will explore the basics of 3D printing and the fundamentals of art as their designs take shape.

EAGER ENGINEERS • JUNE 20-24

Daily engineering challenges are presented in this fast-paced camp. Campers will learn and use the engineering design process to work through problems.

RENEWAL ENERGY (grades K-2) • JUNE 27-JULY 1

This camp is brand new, and will explore the renewable power sources behind balloon cars, wind-powered vehicles, circuits powered by solar panels, and paddle boats powered by rubber bands. Hands-on activities related to hydropower and other forms of renewable energy will also be included.

CODE CAMP (grades 3-5) • JUNE 27-JULY 1

Campers will learn the fundamentals of computer science with a focus on the logical concepts that are found in all coding environments. They will design a game or craft an animation in this week of code camp.

ART SMARTS • JULY 5-8

Students will fuse imagination with science and design to create masterpieces in this four-day camp. They will learn about the fundamentals of art along with the science that makes it work.

LIVING LABORATORY • JULY 11-15

Campers will explore biology, ecology, and the great outdoors of our 21-acre site, as they uncover the scientific investigations of Thomas Edison and Henry Ford here in Southwest Florida.

SPACE & ROCKETS • JULY 18-22

This camp teaches students how to survey the solar system and launch a rocket. Campers will explore space science and its history, as well as the four-forces of flight as they launch a water-powered rocket hundreds of feet into the sky.

LEGO CREATORS • JULY 25-29

Students will use their imagination and skill to conquer daily building challenges. They will apply knowledge and use LEGOs to tackle engineering challenges, such as bridge building and creating balloon-powered LEGO cars.

CURIOUS CHEMISTRY • AUGUST 1-5

Campers will learn about the hidden world of chemistry as they discover the building blocks of all things. Chemical reactions, measurements, and hands-on fun are the focus of this camp! Each camper will take part in experiments that fizz, bang, pop, and inspire curiosity.

COST (5-day camp): members: \$200, non-members: \$230. (4-day camp): members \$160, non-members: \$185.

INVENTOR'S SUMMER CAMP SPONSORED BY:





Tours And Programs

Throughout the month, presentations are offered for visitors to learn about music, sound and the phonograph, how a motor works on Henry Ford's Model T and making movies with animated images. Historian-led guided tours and self-guided tours of the site are offered daily. Through the new app, narration is available in English, French, German, and Spanish. Site maps are available in English, French, German, Spanish and Chinese.

Guided tours in German are available on Wednesdays at 11 a.m.
Cost: \$30 per person



James Moss, Automotive Curator giving a tour in garage at Ford Home.

Automotive Tour

MONDAYS • 10:30 A.M.

Join Automotive Curator James Moss, for a new perspective on the evolution of the automobile. Learn about production and how to operate a vehicle. From the Model T to the Model A, gasoline to electric, the Ford Motor Company and beyond, the Automotive Tour promises to offer a new way to connect with one of our most popular collections. Reservations are not required for this tour.

Cost: Edison Ford Members: \$15; non-members: Adults \$40, Teens (13-19) \$30, Children (6-12) \$16.



Matt Andres, Registrar giving a tour inside Edison's Guest House.

Inside-the-Homes Tours

TUESDAYS • 11:00 A.M. (first come, first served)

THURSDAYS • 11:00 A.M. (pre-registration required)

This tour is a unique opportunity to take a sneak peek inside normally-closed areas of Thomas Edison's "Seminole Lodge" and Henry Ford's "The Mangoes." Approximate tour time is 90 minutes to two hours. (Allow additional time to view the museum, laboratory, and gardens.)

Limited reservations available for this tour, pre-registration required by calling **239-335-3674**. Tours on Tuesdays offered on a first-come, first served basis.

Cost: Edison Ford members: free (one time); non-members: Adults \$50, Teens (13-19) \$35, Children (6-12) \$20.



Karen Maxwell, Horticultural Specialist giving a garden tour.

Guided Garden Tour

Available by appointment for groups of five or more.

The Edison and Ford Winter Estates botanical gardens contain more than 1,700 plants from six continents including flowering plants and trees, fruit trees, palms, bamboo, cycads, vines, roses, orchids, and Florida natives. On this tour, an experienced horticulturist leads visitors through the 20-acre site and highlights the different types of plants and their importance to the Edison and Ford families. Visitors will see the Moonlight Garden, many rare plants and get to go behind-the-scenes in the propagating nursery. Some of the plants in the gardens are available for sale in the on-site Garden Shoppe. Call today to book your tour 239-334-7419.

Cost: \$40 per person.

Private Guided Tour

Available By Appointment for groups with a maximum of nine people.

To accommodate families or small business groups, private guided tours are now available. These tours are for small groups and ensure that families will not be on a tour with other tourists. Masks are recommended on guided tours. Private tours should be reserved at least 48 hours in advance. During a private tour, visitors will see the historic winter homes of Thomas Edison and Henry Ford, the caretaker's houses, swimming pool complex, Edison's study, the Moonlight Garden, and more than 20 acres of botanical gardens. After the tour, visitors may take extra time to stroll the gardens, museum and botanic research laboratory at their own pace.

Cost: \$345 per group.

GARDENING CLASS: PALMS FOR YOUR LANDSCAPE

**TUESDAY, MARCH 8 • 1:30-3 P.M. OR
SATURDAY, MARCH 12 • 10 A.M.-11:30 A.M**

No other plant says “Florida!” more than palms. Choosing a palm is a major investment, and with many species to choose from, this class will provide the knowledge to make an informed choice that is perfect for your landscape. Once you provide a palm with its new forever home, it is very important to know how to take care of your investment: from proper feeding to disease management as well as when to prune or not and how to handle hurricane damaged palms.

We will spend 60 minutes in the classroom, then the last 30 minutes in our Palmetum. All participants will be provided with a palm seedling. Advance registration is required and limited to 25 participants. The class will be held at the Garden Council building, located across the street from the Edison Ford parking lot (on Larchmont Ave.). At the conclusion of class, each participant will receive a 20% discount coupon for plant purchases in the Garden Shoppe.

Cost: members: \$35, non-members \$50



GARDEN TALK: PHILODENDRONS AND AROIDS SATURDAY, MARCH 19 • 10 A.M.

Aroids are one of the most popular groups of plants for collectors today. They include philodendrons, anthuriums, monstera and much more! This talk will focus on the care and placement, including those that make better houseplants, as well as those that can be dramatic tree companions. **Cost:** members: \$10, non-members \$15

GARDENING CLASS: CALADIUM CRAZY

**TUESDAY, MARCH 22 • 1:30-3 P.M. OR
SATURDAY, MARCH 26 • 10 A.M.-11:30 A.M**

With the arrival of Spring, it's time to think about caladiums. These plants have a place in every garden and if you're not growing them, you're missing out on a Florida classic. Though not native to Florida, 99% of the world's supply of these gorgeous foliage plants are grown in South Florida and you will learn why. Here in Zone 10, we are the only place in the continental US where caladiums grow year-round. We will teach you the history of caladiums, how they grow and how you can grow them in your Florida garden or up north. There are so many fun ways to use caladiums from gardens to containers to arrangements and we will show you the best varieties for every situation. All participants will receive several caladium tubers.

Advance registration is required and limited to 25 participants. The class will be held at the Garden Council building, located across the street from the Edison Ford parking lot (on Larchmont Ave.). At the conclusion of class, each participant will receive a 20% discount coupon for plant purchases in the Garden Shoppe.

Cost: members: \$35, non-members \$50



WHAT IS *THAT* PLANT?

A CLOSE-UP VISIT WITH STAGHORN FERNS

By Karen Maxwell, Horticultural Specialist

Working in the gardens at Edison and Ford Winter Estates is truly a unique experience and fielding questions from guests about our extraordinary plant life is always a pleasure. Without a doubt, the most frequent inquiry is about our magnificent Staghorn Ferns found throughout the site. Perhaps you've seen them a hundred times and from a distance, they all seem to look alike, but let's take a closer look at this exotic and curious plant.



Debbie Hughes with Staghorn Fern

Native to the rainforests of tropical Asia, Africa and Australia, our ferns are in the genus *Platycterium*, the name coming from the Greek for broad and horn of which we have two species: *Platycterium bifurcatum*, and *Platycterium hillii*, two species which thrive in our wet/dry environment, along with many cultivars (the result of purposeful or natural cross breeding). Ours are of the hardy species, meaning they can survive very brief periods of cold, down to 35 degrees or so. Of the 17 or 18 known species, collectors and scientists

are hard pressed to positively identify all of the of cultivars or hybrids (hybrid or cultivar means the new plant will produce genetically matching offspring) and some may just be sports (genetic mutations that exist today). Despite the numerous variants in appearances, all *Platycterium* share common features: the same reproductive strategy, two kinds of fronds, a communal growth pattern, and basic environmental needs, though the size and width of fronds and direction of growth may vary greatly between species. *P. bifurcatum*, native to Australia and New Guinea is the most-commonly grown species and is the species or at least a parent of most of the Staghorn Ferns on our property.

As we see them suspended from chains and hanging on heavy tree limbs throughout the Estates, it is easy to forget their origins. *Platycterium* are ferns native to humid tropical rainforests and like orchids and bromeliads, they are considered epiphytes, meaning in the wild they live a soil-less existence, growing on the branches of trees, often in the canopy of forests, but in no way is one considered parasitic to the other. As a true fern, they neither produce fruit or flowers.

Staghorn Ferns are also called Elkhorn Ferns (particularly those with narrow fronds) or Moosehead Ferns due to the forked or antler like appearance of the fronds. Like all ferns, they naturally reproduce by spores. The pups can be removed once they are at least six inches wide and either planted or mounted on their own.



P. Bifurcatum Pup

Alternatively, we may propagate them by division which is much quicker. In this method, a sharp knife is used to cut away sections that will then be mounted to a board, using sphagnum moss as a backing and securely tying the new section to the board that may later be attached to a chain and tree. The new Staghorn will grow right over its new mount.

When viewing one of our massive ferns (older ones may grow to weigh about 300 pounds), one is actually looking at a colony of individual ferns working together as a community to provide resources to all the residents. It was reported in *Scientific Naturalist* in May 2021 by researchers Burns, Hutton and Shephard that the Staghorn Fern is unique in the world of plants in that within a collection of ferns that appear as one, there is actually a division of labor – specific tasks performed by different ferns to insure the health and survival of the colony, much the way bees work.

Platycterium are made up of two distinct fronds: the basal or shield frond and the longer strap frond. Basal or shield fronds grow in individual halves and appear as one piece when mature, and they remain green while they are growing. The purpose of the shield or basal frond is to collect and hold moisture and nutrients. The shape of the shield frond, particularly its top edge, is a useful key in species identification along with how the particular shield frond attaches itself to the mother plant.



As they age, their color turns to a shade of soft cinnamon. In *P. bifurcatum*, the shield frond grows tight against the old growth, while the French Silver Staghorn Fern (*P. veitchii*), another species that will grow well in South Florida (though not as hardy as *P. bifurcatum*) has a top edge of the shield that is deeply and irregularly lobed. In the research conducted by Burns, Hutton & Shephard, they realized that the shield fronds actually soak up more moisture and water than the strap fronds or leaves that protrude from the collective.



At the base of each shield frond, there is a bud, which will produce the strap fronds (also called fertile fronds). These are recognized by their short stem and forking, which gives these plants their common name. Four out of every 10 strap fronds cannot reproduce and the remaining, or fertile fronds will produce spores that give the feel of velvet on the underside of the fronds. This velvet pattern is known as the sporangia and where it occurs on the frond is another key to identification of *Platycterium* species *P. Hillii*.



With the onset of warmer weather, the sporangia will appear and get continuously darker until they burst and expel their spores during the summer months. After the spores are released, the fertile fronds will return to their full green appearance. Each new frond will last between two to three years before they are replaced by longer and larger fronds.

With strap fronds of *P. bifurcatum*, the protruding leaves grow upright when new and as they age, they will hang down. *Bifurcatum* means twice divided, and the narrow wedge-shaped fronds divide into two major forks, and ultimately two to eight final splits or fingers. As in the shape of the shield frond, the shape and direction of growth of the strap fronds are further keys to establishing species identification. In addition to producing the spores that will result in the reproduction of the staghorn fern, the strap fronds are often covered with a waxy or dust-like substance (which should never be wiped off). It was discovered that this fabric of very fine hairs, actually allows the strap fronds to direct water to the nest of shield fronds which may further distribute their collected water via the fine rhizomatous root system hidden behind the shield fronds to the rest of the plant colony.

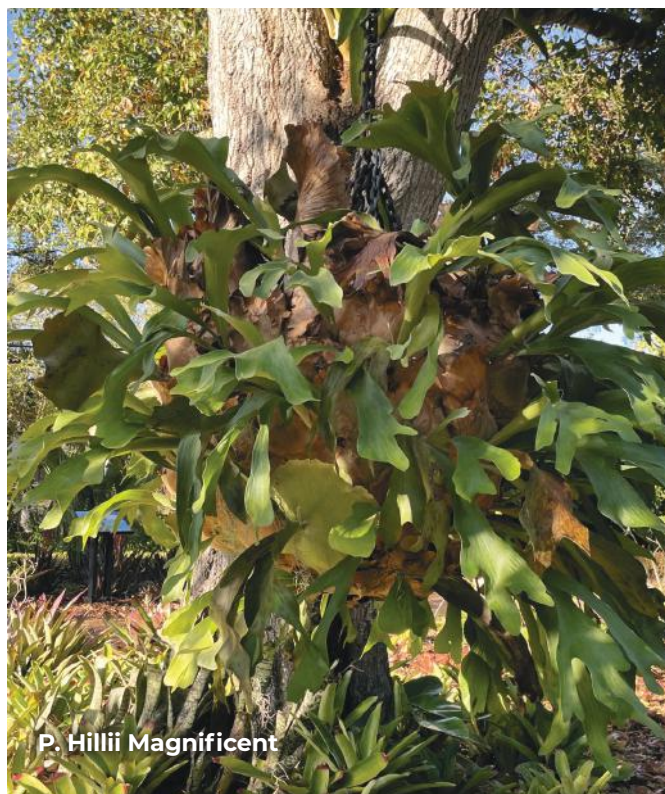
All staghorn ferns will thrive in high humidity – ideally over 70 percent – and those fine hairs on the strap fronds easily absorb the ambient humidity. These plants can be easily grown as houseplants if grown with a nice loose and well-draining soil in a pot, while providing their preferred indirect light and high humidity (it's possible they will only ever produce strap fronds). Staghorn ferns should never be grown in full sunlight. A filtered light or shady spot is ideal and giving each one its own space will provide the best setting to appreciate their beautiful growth patterns and individuality. If grown as a mounted specimen, it will take the plant six to seven years to produce fertile fronds, provided all of its natural requirements are met. Staghorns will get all the water they need if grown outdoors in South Florida. If we have an extended hot spell, (when temperatures remain above 80 degrees) without water, an occasional hose spray once a week will be appreciated. When it's cooler, the staghorn doesn't need much water.

Here at Edison Ford, our climate is quite suitable to *P. bifurcatum*, so no additional feeding is necessary as the plant derives all its needs from the rain, humidity and detritus that falls onto and breaks down on top of the colony. There is street lore that cutting up a banana peel and placing pieces under the shield fronds will feed the Staghorn. While it does offer a little potassium and phosphorous, that alone isn't sufficient for a mature Staghorn fern as it also needs nitrogen to grow. If grown

indoors, a balanced liquid fertilizer twice a year is all that is needed. Some growers caution against using banana peel, as commercial bananas are treated with a fungicide which may not be healthy for the Staghorn.

A mature *P. bifurcatum* can grow to four feet wide in approximately 20 years and outgrows many gardens in Southwest Florida. Because of this, Edison Ford has become the recipient of approximately 30 different *Platycteriums*, the majority being cultivars of the *P. bifurcatum* with shield fronds about 12 inches wide and strap fronds to three and a half feet long.

The French Silver Staghorn (*P. veitchii*), which can also be grown in Southwest Florida has narrow strap fronds, gets its common name from the fine matted hairs that protect the fronds from sun and give the two-foot fronds a whitish-gray appearance. It is considered semi-hardy to 40 degrees, so some cover during very cold periods should be provided. The other so-called hardy Staghorn fern in our gardens is *P. hillii*, generally considered a desert species; however, at Edison Ford, we have the cultivar Magnificent, which produces dark green strap fronds nearly two-foot wide and three-feet long with distinctive kidney shaped, 20-inch-wide shield fronds. The shortened fingers of the new fronds grow upright and since this desert species plant is actually thriving in our humid climate, perhaps it has some *P. bifurcatum* in its lineage.



continued on next page ▶



P. Hillii Magnificent



Cheiroglossa

The Dwarf Staghorn, (*Cheiroglossa palmate*, syn. *Ophioglossum palmatum*) is a rare and small Florida native fern, unrelated to the Staghorn fern, but it grows similarly. Discovered in 1875, growing abundantly in Sabal palms along the banks of the Caloosahatchee River, it is also known as the Hand Fern and is considered endangered due to over collecting and reduction of native, humid hammocks. Not only is it illegal to collect the Dwarf Staghorn, but it is also important to note that it's impossible to transplant or cultivate the plant once it is removed or detached from its home in an old boot or leaf base of the Sabal Palm.

As new fronds for all Staghorn ferns take on many different shapes until they mature, it is important to purchase a rare variety from a reputable dealer or assume the plant is *P. bifurcatum* as it is the most common and easiest grown Staghorn in Southwest Florida. They grow so easily that the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council has it listed as a category # invasive species.

Generally free from pest problems, the inside of the mature colony is dead but as it naturally grows on a strong tree, the mature staghorn can return the favor and serve as the host to other plants. Thanks to Mother Nature, the birds and other means of plants finding new homes, some of our Staghorns at Edison are homes to orchids, air plants, and in one case, a young Royal Palm has taken up residence.

Upon your next visit to Edison Ford, take a closer look at any two Staghorn Ferns and see if you can spot the differences.

**Indicates plants in the Edison and Ford Winter Estates gardens.*



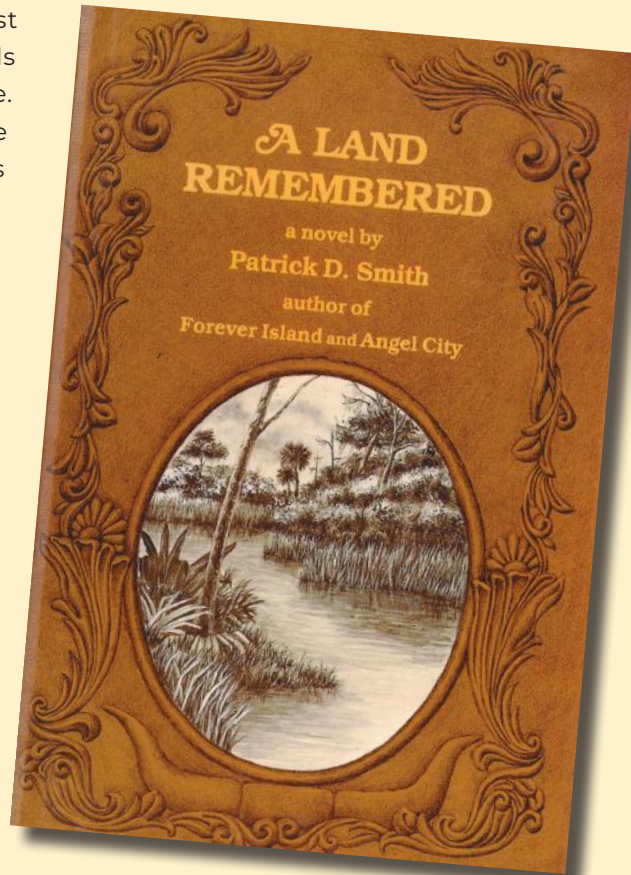
SAVE THE DATE
"Grow Fort Myers" Plant Sale & Workshops
SATURDAY, APRIL 9

March Book of the Month: A Land Remembered

By Patrick Smith

This book has been chosen as a “Best Florida Book” eight times in annual polls conducted by Florida Monthly Magazine. It was also chosen as the winner of the Florida Historical Society's Tebeau Prize as the Most Outstanding Florida Historical Novel. The book focuses on the MacIvey family who migrated to Florida in the 1850s. After trying to scratch a living out of the land the family began to round up wild cattle and drove them to Punta Rassa where they were shipped to Cuba. Learn how they survived and thrived in undeveloped Florida. Discover the connection to Southwest Florida. This is a must-read book for those interested in the history of Florida.

This book is available in the museum store, or you may call 239-334-7419 and we can have it shipped to you. Members receive 10 % off the purchase price.



EDISON HOME MODEL

Edison Ford volunteers, Jim Hopton and Kim Dabner constructed a 1/12 scale replica of Thomas Edison's winter home. The home is currently on display on the museum porch and will be moved to Lakes Regional Park in mid-March (as part of the park's 30th anniversary), where it will become a permanent part of the little railroad display.





NON PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
FORT MYERS, FL
PERMIT NO: 569

SUSTAINABLE CONCEPTIONS ART EXHIBIT

NOW THROUGH MAY 29

While the Green Movement was not popular during their lifetimes, Edison and Ford both recognized the importance of recycling and reusing materials. This exhibit showcases art inspired by Edison and Ford's efforts to reuse products and their abilities to work toward a sustainable future. Artwork will be on display in the Edison Caretaker's House through May 29.

Included with general admission.

The Edison and Ford Winter Estates is a National Register Historic Site and a Save America's Treasures site of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The Edison laboratory is a National Historic Chemical Landmark. It is governed by a private, non-profit organization with a Board of Trustees.

EDISON
and
FORD
winter
ESTATES

2350 McGregor Blvd.
Fort Myers, FL 33901



Newsletter sponsored
and printed by
Panther Printing