The Sentinel

Newsletter of the Florida State Agricultural Response Team

A golden silk orb-weaver, also known by its scientific name Trichonephila clavipes. It is also commonly referred to as a banana spider.

Spider Season is here!

Florida's "spider season," has started, and, contrary to common fears, the season isn't about an invasion of dangerous spiders. It's a natural period when native orb-weaver spiders become more common as they weave intricate webs.

They can often be found in gardens, parks, and wooded areas as they prefer areas that include a large population of flowering plants. Experts would like to remind people that as they go about their days, Orb-weaver spiders are harmless and beneficial and should be appreciated rather than feared. The native spider's webs are more noticeable in fall due to mating and feed behaviors.

The spiders' diets can include flies, mosquitoes, beetles, wasps, caterpillars, crickets, and other soft bodied pests. This diverse diet works as not only a non-chemical option for pest control, but an early warning system by giving farmers and gardeners a snapshot of pests in the area.

So instead of knocking them down take some time embrace this seasonal spectacle as part of the state's rich biodiversity.

Special Features of this Issue:

- *Welcome to the ESF 17 SART Team, Colin Mullins*
- *Citrus Season Outlook… "Cautiously Optimistic"*
- *Myth Busters: The Facts About How African Swine Fever (ASF) Spreads*

"During the 2024 hurricane season, I worked alongside our NGO partners to coordinate seven field kitchens, collectively serving more than 4.3 million meals in response to Hurricane Milton."

— Colin Mullins
Government Analyst I
Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services

Read more on Page 2.

Citrus Season Outlook… "Cautiously Optimistic"

Over the years, the Florida citrus industry has taken significant hits. In 2005 citrus psyllids invaded Florida and spread huanglongbing (HLB), or citrus greening. To date, the impact of HLB continues to leave its mark with citrus production being reduced by as much as 60%, according to the Citrus Research and Field Trial (CRAFT) Foundation. The past few hurricane seasons have also been taxing on the producers in addition to the loss of commercial acreage. This year, however, citrus producers are "cautiously optimistic" about the upcoming season. This optimism comes from several areas, but mostly the less active hurricane season and the CRAFT Foundation. The lackluster hurricane season has allowed producers to establish younger trees for the next season and the older trees a bit of a respite.

For those unfamiliar with the CRAFT Foundation, it was incorporated in 2019 with the main purpose of researching HLB treatment methods and managing broad scale field trials in the commercial realm. The Foundation also offers programs that will assist producers replant some of their lost groves. Assistance is granted through an application process and this year they received over 2000 applications – a substantially higher than normal number. That assistance is used to help reduce some of the risk the producer takes on in their replanting efforts, while simultaneously testing new ways to counter HLB.

For more information about the CRAFT Foundation and some of the projects they have worked on, visit CRAFT.

Welcome to the ESF 17 SART Team, Colin Mullins!

Colin Mullins, a seasoned emergency management professional, has been appointed Government Analyst I for the Emergency Programs Section of the Division of Animal Industry, joining the ESF-17 team alongside Josh Wells. Mullins arrives with a robust résumé that spans nearly three years as a project manager and trainer for a technology deployment firm—where he oversaw logistics, product design, and testing—and a rapid rise through Florida's state agencies since 2022. After starting on the Department of Corrections' Warrant Distribution Team, he moved to the Department of Children and Families' (DCF) Travel P-Card Audit Team, then to General Services, where he volunteered with the ESF-06 Mass Care team during Hurricane Idalia. His leadership shone after Idalia, when he was named Operations Chief for ESF-06 and, during the 2024 hurricane season, coordinated seven field kitchens that together delivered more than 4.3 million meals in response to Hurricane Milton.

Mullins' new role will see him supporting the Florida State Agricultural Response Team (SART) activities, State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) activations, Division of Animal Industry Incident Management Team deployments, equipment tracking, logistics, and GIS mapping. Colleagues note that his prior collaborations with the SEOC—particularly as Operations Section Chief for ESF-06 Mass Care and in coordinating emergency efforts for the Florida DCF have given him a comprehensive view of mass care and human services operations.

Myth Busters: The Facts About How African Swine Fever (ASF) Spreads

Lynn Wachtman, Veterinary Medical Officer
U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)

At APHIS, we get questions about what we do and the animal diseases we track. Let's review some of the common misconceptions around African swine fever (ASF) — what it is and how it's transmitted.

Myth #1: ASF is the next human pandemic.
ASF is a highly contagious viral disease infecting wild and domestic pigs. It is **NOT** a threat to human health. The virus cannot spread from pigs to people— it cannot make people sick and is not a food safety concern. However, people can spread ASF, so it's crucial to raise awareness about this disease. ASF has killed millions of pigs worldwide. It is found in countries worldwide, including the Caribbean islands of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. We remain on high alert because an ASF outbreak in the United States would devastate our farmers, food supply and economy.

Myth #2: ASF can be cured.
Unfortunately, no. There is no treatment or USDA-approved vaccine for ASF. The only way to stop the disease is to depopulate all affected and exposed pigs. Preventing introduction is key!

Myth #3: ASF and swine influenza are the same.
No, these are different diseases. Swine influenza is caused by a different virus than the virus that causes ASF. Influenza A is common in swine. It can cause a mild respiratory illness, and most pigs recover within a week. Contrastingly, ASF is a deadly viral disease of swine.

Myth #4: ASF can't survive in processed foods.
Incorrect! The ASF virus is hardy. It can survive freezing, smoking, and a range of cooking temperatures, so foods containing pork (like sausage, pernil, and pasteles) could carry the virus. It's critical not to bring pork when traveling from any country, including to and between the U.S. mainland, U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

Myth #5: ASF is *only* transmitted through direct contact with pigs.
No, ASF can spread via contact with infected pigs, pork, **AND** through contact with contaminated objects and even ticks. Because the virus can survive on clothing, shoes, or vehicles, people can unknowingly spread the disease. Wait at least five days before visiting any facility with pigs after you return.

Thanks for taking the time to learn more about ASF! Please spread the word and share this information with anyone you know who may be traveling. To learn more about how you can help prevent the spread of ASF when you travel, visit: www.aphis.usda.gov/traveling-with-ag-products/asf

USDA United States Department of Agriculture

New World Screwworm

Story provided by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

New World screwworms are fly larvae (maggots) that can infest livestock and other warm-blooded animals, including people. They most often enter an animal through an open wound. They feed on the animal's living flesh and, if not treated, infestations can be fatal. While New World screwworm (*Cochliomyia hominivorax*) has not been widely present in the United States since the 1960s, it is still found in most of South America and in five Caribbean countries. Cases began spreading in 2023, heading north from Panama, and have reached southern Mexico, increasing the risk of reintroduction into the United States.

Signs

Screwworms are typically found on warm-blooded animals that have a draining or enlarging wound.

Screwworm eggs are creamy and white and deposited in a shingle-like manner on or near the edges of superficial wounds. The larvae are cylindrical with one pointed end and one blunt end and have rings of dark brown spines around the body. Female screwworm flies are larger than a housefly with a dark blue to blue-green body and reddish-orange head.

Almost any type of wound can become infested with screwworm larvae, including those caused by feeding ticks, castration, dehorning, branding, shearing, barbed wire fences, and even shedding of antler velvet in deer. The navels of newborn mammals can also become infested.

Guidance for Animal Health

Carefully inspect animal wounds and hides for signs of screwworm. Owners should immediately consult their veterinarian if a case of screwworm is suspected.

Continued, next page.

New World Screwworm (continued)

Story provided by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Treatment

Screwworm infestation is treated by cleaning the site and topical application of a pesticide or other medication effective at killing the screwworm larvae. Treated wounds should be inspected daily until completely healed. The examining veterinarian will remove larvae from the wound with tweezers, place them in alcohol, and report to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Division of Animal Industry (State Veterinarian's Office).

Report Suspected Cases

- **By phone during office hours:** (850) 410-0900
- **By phone after hours:** 1-800-342-5869
- **Via email:** RAD@FDACS.gov
- **Report online at:** www.FDACS.gov/RAD

Wildlife Reports

To report sick or injured wildlife, including a suspected screwworm infestation, call the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) at 1-888-404-FWCC (3922) or email the Wildlife Health Team at WildlifeHealthTeam@MyFWC.com.

Source: USDA APHIS (Updated 9/30/2025)

New World Screwworm Resources

- Information on the Screwworm Eradication Program (USDA APHIS)
- Commissioner Wilton Simpson, FDACS Urge Vigilance as New World Screwworm Threat Increases
- FDACS – New World Screwworm Information Page

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Small Animal Emergency Sheltering Training

Florida State Animal Response Coalition (FLSARC) provides Small Animal Emergency Sheltering training for Florida communities. These courses teach the unique procedures, skills, and knowledge necessary to build and operate a temporary emergency animal shelter in response to natural disasters and animal cruelty cases. These courses were created and designed by experts from many organizations including Florida SART, University of Florida Veterinary Emergency Treatment Service (VETS) Team, and leadership of FLSARC. This training is state-certified by the Florida Division of Emergency Management.

Awareness Level 1	Operations Level 2
• November 1st & 2nd	• TBD

To register, visit: https://flsarc.org/training-classes-events

SART Partners Meeting

The following meeting is by invitation only to primary representatives of SART partner agencies and are not open to the public:

- Monthly Virtual Meeting – November 13, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. via Microsoft Teams
- In Person Meeting – December 10, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. in Gainesville, Florida

In the News…

- Commissioner Wilton Simpson Announces $25M Funding Opportunity to Support Agricultural Water Resource Projects (FDACS)
- Florida Forest Service Opens 2025 Applications for Southern Pine Beetle Assistance and Prevention Program (FDACS)

Florida EDEN: Mental Health Matters

Disasters shake more than just the physical foundations of our lives—they can take a significant emotional toll as well, *according to the Florida Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN)*. While the loss of property and disruption to daily life are often visible, the invisible impacts on mental health can be just as devastating. For Extension professionals, the responsibility of supporting communities through these events can bring added emotional strain, especially when navigating personal losses at the same time.

The educational materials below aim to equip you with practical strategies to strengthen personal resilience and better support those around you. Together we can foster healthier communities that are more prepared emotionally and physically before, during, and after disaster strikes.

Personal resilience plays a critical role in disaster response, especially for Extension professionals who serve on the front lines during crises like hurricanes. Resilience is the ability to reduce stress and adapt in challenging situations—anchored by three key attitudes: *challenge*, *commitment*, and *control*.

Research from UF/IFAS following Hurricane Irma showed that while many agents demonstrated strengths in learning and connecting with others, they also faced mental fatigue, stress, and unclear expectations—factors that impacted their ability to meet job demands.
This educational resource outlines practical strategies for building resilience, including:

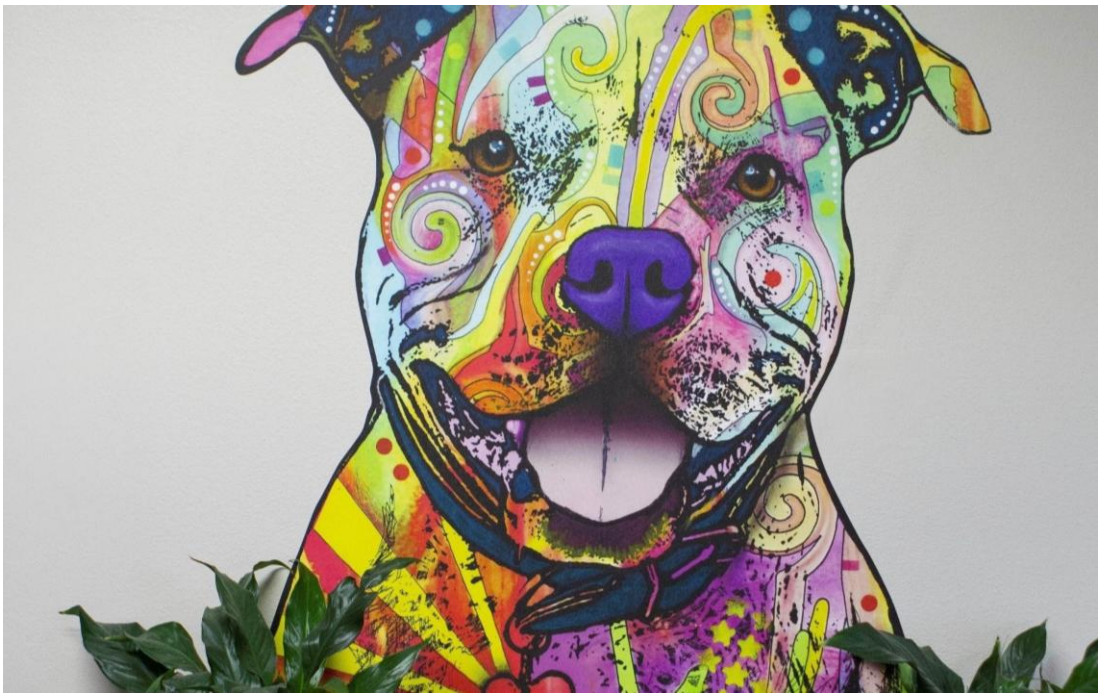
- Clarifying disaster response roles
- Offering targeted training
- Promoting support services and peer connection

By strengthening these skills and attitudes, Extension professionals can better balance personal and professional responsibilities and serve their communities more effectively in times of need.

Follow Florida EDEN on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to stay updated! Visit our webpage to learn more and access disaster preparedness resources.

Did You Know? SART Offers Pet-Friendly Sheltering Online Training

The Pet-Friendly Sheltering Online Training is the first of its kind to be offered in Florida. The Training gives guidance to private, local, and state entities on how to plan for and operate a pet-friendly shelter to ensure that individuals evacuating from a disaster with their household pets are accommodated.



This training includes useful information on how to:

- Use the Incident Command System in pet-friendly shelter planning and operations;
- Plan for a pet-friendly shelter;
- Understand the Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act (PETS Act);
- Establish partnerships for resource coordination;
- Deliver a unified message for resource coordination;
- Deliver a unified message to the public before, during, and after an emergency, and;
- Set up, operate, and demobilize a pet-friendly shelter.

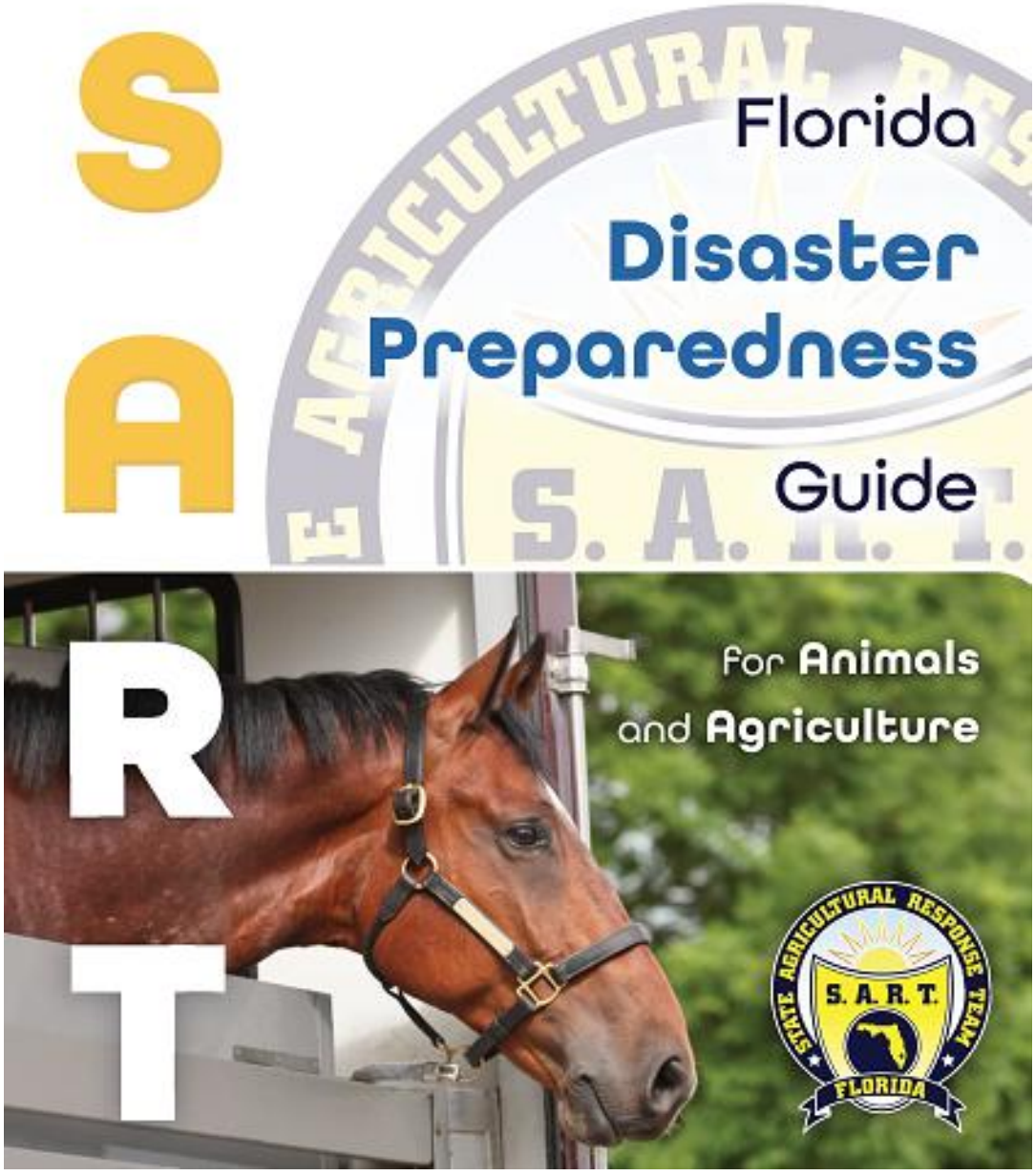
> **Paula Carroll**
>
> Jefferson County, Florida
>
> "I feel that with this training we will succeed... I am much more equipped."

The four-hour course is designed for emergency managers, county employees, veterinary and animal services, and shelter volunteers. There is no charge for this 100% online course. For more information, please visit www.FLSART.org.

The Florida Disaster Preparedness Guide for Animals and Agriculture

The Florida Disaster Preparedness Guide for Animals and Agriculture was developed by FDACS and Florida SART. This guide explores the various animal and agricultural sectors in the state of Florida that are at risk from natural and man-made disasters, and what you can do to help prepare and protect animals and agriculture before a disaster strikes. The recommendations and resources in this guide are applicable to preparing for all hazards such as hurricanes, floods, wildfires, disease introduction, hazardous material spills, and more.

This publication is available only to SART members. To access the Florida Disaster Preparedness Guide for Animals and Agriculture, visit the SART website at flsart.org, and navigate to the "Resources" tab. It may also be accessed directly at:
https://flsart.org/resource/DisasterPreparednessGuides/DisasterPreparednessGuides.jsp



Become a Volunteer of the Florida Veterinary Corps Today!

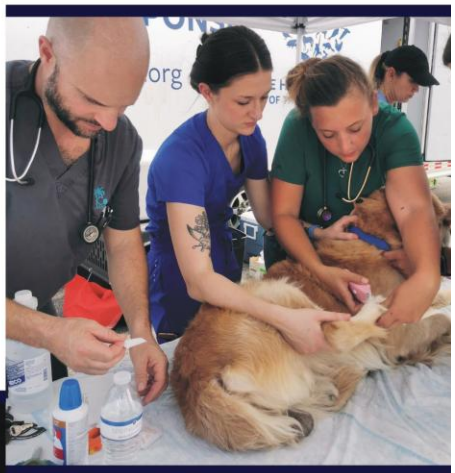
Florida veterinarians and veterinary technicians have volunteered to assist local and state emergency management officials in responding to animal emergencies. The Florida Veterinary Corps is recruiting more volunteers to help protect our state.

Become A Volunteer

To apply to the Florida Veterinary Corps, visit **www.FLSART.org**

Florida Veterinary Corps

Safeguarding Animal and Public Health in Florida



A cooperative effort of the Florida State Agricultural Response Team and its Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Florida Veterinary Medical Association, and University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine.

Florida Veterinary Corps

What is the Florida Veterinary Corps?

- The Florida Veterinary Corps (The Corps) is a component of the Florida State Agricultural Response Team (SART), established within the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and a cooperative effort with the Florida Veterinary Medical Association and the University of Florida, College of Veterinary Medicine.
- The Corps has been established to enlist veterinarians and veterinary technicians who are willing to volunteer their services in responding to animal emergencies in the state of Florida.
- During activation, Corps volunteers will work within an Incident Command System structure under state Emergency Support Function 17 as part of the State Emergency Response Team.
- Corps volunteers will be kept informed as to the status of emergencies and the need for volunteers depending upon the specific emergency.
- Volunteers may serve in veterinary infrastructure assessment teams, triage or emergency animal treatment teams, and animal disease surveillance or control teams under an Incident Command System structure.

Obligation of Corps Volunteers

- Corps volunteers will serve only when activated within an Incident Command System structure under state Emergency Support Function 17 as part of the State Emergency Response Team and adhere to all state regulations and rules.
- Complete the following four Incident Command System trainings to apply for The Corps. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides the independent study courses online, free of charge. The training is required for credentialing of emergency responders by the Department of Homeland Security. The courses are critical to train a professional volunteer Corps capable of responding as part of the state Emergency Support Function 17 and State Emergency Response Team.
  - IS-100.C: Introduction to the Incident Command System (ICS)
  - IS-200.C: Basic ICS for Initial Response
  - IS-700.B: An Introduction to the National Incident Management System (NIMS)
  - IS-800.D: National Response Framework, An Introduction
- Corps volunteers will only be activated in response to specific emergency situations and may decline service at any time.

Rationale

- Protecting animal agriculture and household pets in Florida begins locally and requires cooperation, participation, and partnership.
- Federal or other outside assistance to deal with an animal disease emergency may not be available for hours or days.
- Animal agriculture in Florida is highly vulnerable to severe disruption and financial loss through natural disasters and exotic or zoonotic diseases.
- Counties and state agencies must be prepared to respond to animal disasters through planning and identification of human and material resources.
- Natural disasters are unpredictable and cannot be prevented.
- Florida has a high risk for introduction of a foreign animal disease.

Become a Volunteer

To apply to the Florida Veterinary Corps, visit **www.FLSART.org**

Be Sure to Check Out the FDACS and UF IFAS Partnership Video

Florida SART, FDACS, and University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) teamed up to create a training video on their disaster response partnership.

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

UF IFAS UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

Published in December 2022 on YouTube, the video features interviews with LeiAnna Moorhead (FDACS Emergency Programs Manager), Dr. Saqib Mukhtar (UF/IFAS Associate Dean for Extension, Agriculture, and Natural Resources), and Dr. Angie Lindsey [Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN)].

EDEN is funded by the USDA and is a collaborative multi-state effort by cooperative extension services across the country to improve the delivery of services to citizens affected by disasters.

Dr. Lindsey highlighted the important connection that agricultural extension agents have throughout the State of Florida. "We learn so much from our Extension agents and the work that they're already doing throughout the state and the work that they do within their own communities for disaster preparedness, recovery, and response," said Dr. Lindsey.

To view the video for yourself, and to like or comment, please visit:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SI1Xsjd-FCw

Food Safety and Food Defense Report

FDACS Division of Food Safety is responsible for assuring the public of a safe, wholesome, and properly represented food supply through permitting and inspection of food establishments, inspection of food products, and performance of specialized laboratory analysis on a variety of food products sold or produced in the state. The Division of Food Safety monitors food from the farm gate, through processing and distribution, to the retail point of purchase.

Food Safety for Holidays and Festivals

Spending time with friends and family over a meal is part of many holiday traditions. Help reduce foodborne illness by following these tips:

Turkey (Poultry) Safety Resources:

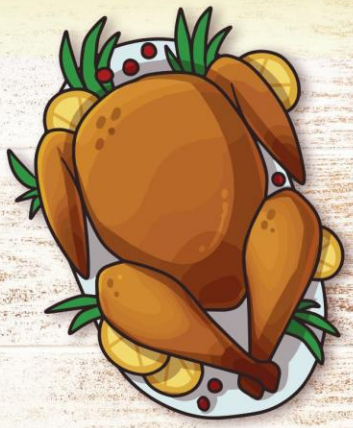
- Florida Osceola Turkey with Citrus Brine Recipe
- Gobble It Up Flyer on Holiday Food Storage
- Stay Food Safe with Your Holiday Turkey Flyer

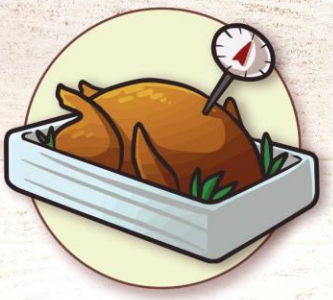
Thawing Your Turkey Safely

Keep your turkey in its original packaging and thaw 4 lbs. of turkey per 24 hours in your refrigerator (at 40°F or below).

Allow your turkey the following times to thaw:

- 4-12 pounds 1-3 days
- 12-16 pounds 3-4 days
- 16-20 pounds 4-5 days
- 20-24 pounds 5-6 days





Cooking

Always wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds before and after handling your turkey to prevent foodborne illness. Cook your turkey to 165°F. Use a food thermometer to check the temperature in several areas of thickness to ensure it is thoroughly cooked for safety and quality.

Keep hot foods above 140°F. Refrigerate all cold foods until ready to serve (40°F).

Storing and Reheating Leftovers

Put away your leftovers within two hours to help prevent foodborne illness. Store large quantities in shallow containers to allow rapid cooling.

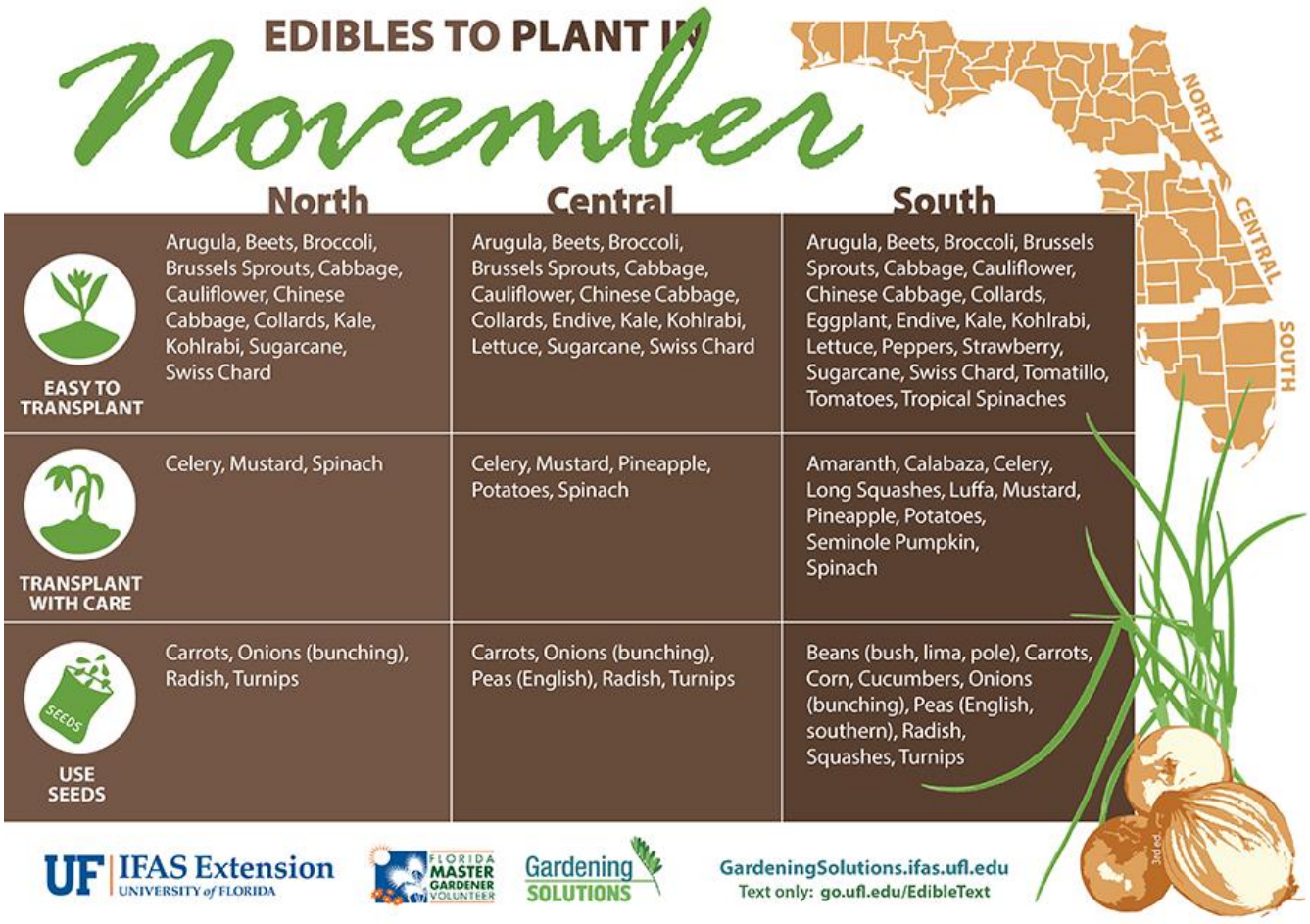
Eat or freeze leftovers within 3-4 days. Eat or freeze gravy within 2 days.

Reheat your holiday leftovers to 165°F.

Division of Food Safety

1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352) or
1-800-FL-AYUDA (352-9832)

FDACS.gov



UF/IFAS Florida Gardening Calendars

The Gardening Calendar publications on the UF/IFAS Solutions for Your Life website gives Florida gardeners a monthly guide for what to plant and do in their gardens and includes links to useful gardening websites, all based on University of Florida research and expertise. Three different editions of the calendar provide specific tips for each of Florida's climate zones—North, Central, and South.

What to Plant in November - University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (ufl.edu)

Counties, is your contact information up to date on the SART website?

Please review your county emergency contact information at: https://flsart.org/resource/countyinformation.jsp.

If you need to make changes to your county contact information, please send a request to LeiAnna Moorhead at LeiAnna.Moorhead@FDACS.gov. During an emergency, ESF 17 and SART provides necessary food and water to affected areas to help protect animals, agriculture, and pets.

SART Resources and Links

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza – USDA APHIS Flock Defender
https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/avian/defend-the-flock-program/outbreak-illness/outbreak-illness

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Dairy Cattle
https://ccmedia.fdacs.gov/content/download/115892/file/2024-HPAI-Dairy-Cattle-Announcement.pdf

Large Animal Incident Response Plan Template
https://flsart.org/resource/TLAER

Pet Sheltering Resources
https://flsart.org/resource/petshelter

Ask IFAS: Disaster Preparedness and Recovery
https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/entity/topic/disaster_preparedness_and_recovery

FDEM Vector Control Quick Guide
https://flsart.org/pdf/Vector Control Quick Guide.pdf

SART Response Equipment List and Request Information
https://flsart.org/resource/equipmentrequest.jsp

Please log in and update your membership information online at:

www.FLSART.org

About the *SART Sentinel*

The *SART Sentinel* is an email newsletter prepared monthly by the members of the **Florida State Agricultural Response Team** on the Florida SART website at www.FLSART.org.

If you have a story or photo that you would like to have considered for publication in the *SART Sentinel*, please contact the editors.

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