



CLUE

CENTER FOR LAND
USE EFFICIENCY

COMMUNICATIONS

2020 Annual Report





A Message from the Assistant Director

The year 2020 was one of growth and new ideas in the CLUE Communications Office. We started off the year with a new science communicator, Madeline Iyer, and a new intern, Natasha Roberts, and quickly brought them up to speed with projects. Adding two new people to our team was challenging, but they both filled gaps in our skill and project areas. Madeline's background in science education and communication brought a new perspective on readability and accessibility, while Natasha brought a fun, student perspective to ongoing efforts. We have become a solid team, collaborating easily and contributing to one another's projects.

Like many at UF, we started working from home in March, but we also said goodbye to Mehrhof, the building we've occupied for 15 years. Our team easily shifted into a virtual work space and even expanded several of our initiatives. With Madeline's oversight, our social media presence boomed. Throughout the pandemic, we've continued hosting webinars, launched a virtual book club, and helped Extension agents transition to teaching through online platforms. While we weren't together, the products and efforts from the

communications office were outstanding.

As the team veterans, Jen and I provided consistency and historical knowledge to our work. Jen has taken the lead on our accessibility initiative – even making it her project focus for the UF Strategic Communications Academy. She also served as president for the National Extension Technology Community during this difficult time and we're proud to call her the backbone of our digital platform efforts. And while I've always been involved with our virtual learning efforts and event planning, 2020 brought a whole new set of challenges. Having a solid, knowledgeable team made it possible to focus my attention on providing quality content virtually to our clientele.

We each bring something special to the table; that's what makes our unit work so well. With attention to quality, keeping the end user in mind, we continue to produce outstanding communication efforts in support of UF.

Emily Eubanks,
CLUE Assistant Director
of Communications





4

Helping Grow and Transition to CLUE

5

Meeting Communications Needs

6

CLUE Digital Content: Websites, Social Media, and Newsletter

9

**New Center, New Blog
Responding to a Pandemic: Sustainable Home Food Production**

11

Launching the Florida MGV Book Club

12

Improving Accessibility and Readability

13

Meeting Learners: Virtual Learning Events in 2020

14

SMART Communications Goals for 2021

15

Meet the CLUE Communications Team

Helping Grow and Transition to the Center for Land Use Efficiency

Organizationally, our center grew tremendously in 2020. At the end of 2019, we transitioned to the Center for Land Use Efficiency.

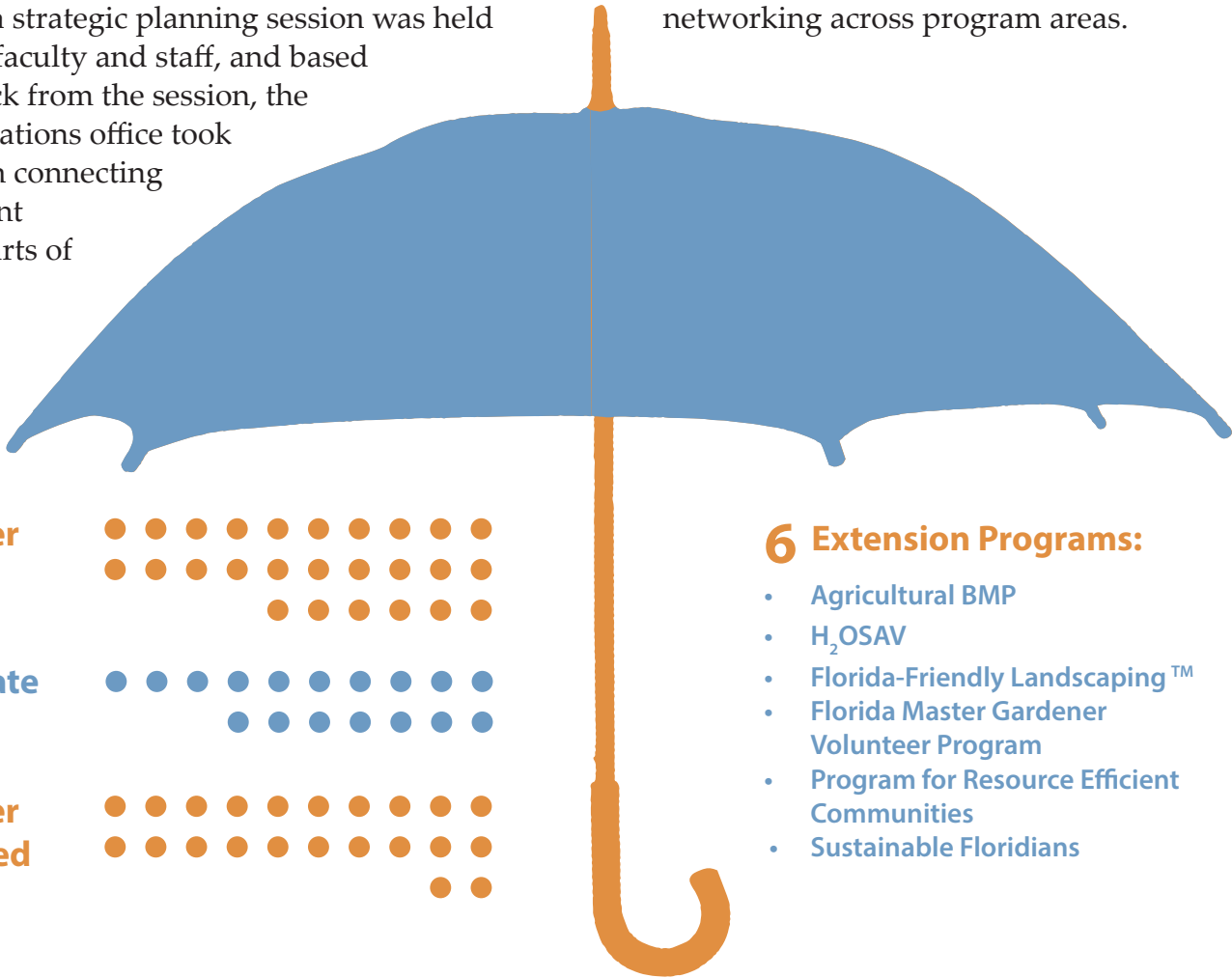
Our office now supports six major Extension programs – Florida Master Gardener Volunteer Program, Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program, Sustainable Floridians, the Program for Resource Efficient Communities, H₂OSAV, and the Agricultural Best Management Practices Program. In addition, we support **26 center faculty** and **17 affiliate faculty**.

One of the challenges for the communications office this year has been to bring a cohesive identity to all of our programs and faculty. In late 2019, a strategic planning session was held for CLUE faculty and staff, and based on feedback from the session, the communications office took the lead on connecting the different moving parts of

the new center. Through website development, social gatherings, and increased email communication, a team identity was formed.

One other major development for the center was a physical move from the location we had occupied for 15 years to a satellite campus location. This move included combining two groups once in separate buildings to the new location, 32 people in all. Emily assisted with logistics of the move, space and furniture disbursement, communication about new building features, IT coordination, and general move assistance.

This endeavor will ultimately bring our center together for more collaboration and networking across program areas.



26 Center Faculty



17 Affiliate Faculty



22 Center Combined Staff



6 Extension Programs:

- Agricultural BMP
- H₂OSAV
- Florida-Friendly Landscaping™
- Florida Master Gardener Volunteer Program
- Program for Resource Efficient Communities
- Sustainable Floridians

UF/IFAS CENTER FOR LAND USE EFFICIENCY

Meeting Communications Needs

Support Documents

Throughout the year, we are called upon to create documents supporting the center. These have included legislative justifications, diversity plans, letters to the industry, strategic plans, and more. These administrative and support communication items make up a vital part of the center's operations. We create, edit, and publish accurate and clear documents, often on a tight deadline.

Copyediting

This year we worked with PREC staff to improve the readability of their H₂OSAV materials. We also worked with Dr. Brett Wells Bultemeier, Extension Assistant Professor Pesticide Information Office, to edit and improve readability on his articles, "Not All Roundup® is Glyphosate" (Gardening Solutions) and "Are Homemade 'Pesticides' Legal?" (EDIS).

Digital Media Resources

In 2020 we uploaded, edited, and published **39 original videos** to the CLUE YouTube channel, making the video content of several Extension programs available and accessible to the public. We also created and curated video playlists for programs negatively impacted by COVID-19, including Victory2020Gardens, Sustainable Home Food Production, 4-H Resources, and more.

Reporting Analytics

Ultimately, the communications staff's efforts are to tell the story of Florida's home landscapes, engage residents with their state, and to show them how to enjoy and best care for it. But sometimes a distillation of our progress must be created for government and administrative audiences. Web analytics can give a quick report on what's working and what more is needed.

"Many thanks for this new edition."

- Vickie D.

Jen creates a quarterly report for the FFL program; they use these numbers in their reports to state agencies. But our reports are also shared with CLUE director Michael Dukes, program leaders, and content creators. The analytics show how many people visit our websites and social media accounts, how they engage with the information, and give us an idea of what is popular with our audiences.

But numbers alone can't inform – context on what they mean is needed as well. Jen doesn't merely send a list of numbers but tries to convey why they're important. Seeing that "Vegetable Gardening by Season" received **113.8K unique views** in 2020 doesn't tell you much unless you also know that the next most-seen article on Gardening Solutions for 2020 received **50.8K unique views**.

CLUE Digital Content: Websites, Social Media, and Newsletter

Our Websites

Gardening Solutions (<https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu>) is the flagship website for the CLUE communications office. Gardening Solutions brings Florida homeowners and gardeners the best information about Florida-Friendly plants, sustainable landscape practices, and ways to beautify their yards and gardens. In 2020, **2.2 million people** visited the site. With over 2,000 pages, the most popular are about native plants and vegetable gardening. With more than 60% of visits now coming from mobile devices, the next step for Gardening Solutions is a responsive redesign.

The Master Gardener Volunteer (MGV) website (<https://mastergardener.ifas.ufl.edu>) not only provides information about the program, but is also home to the Neighborhood Gardener newsletter, the MGV book club, the center's gardening and landscaping webinars, and a very popular event calendar. As the pandemic closed the doors of our county Extension offices, agents and Master Gardener Volunteers moved their educational events online, making the event calendar a central location for counties to share their efforts. With nearly **400 pages**, the site received over **100K visits**, with the top pages being the webinar listing, the event calendar, and information on how to become an MGV.

The new CLUE website (<https://clue.ifas.ufl.edu>) launched January 2020. Created in Bootstrap, this is Jen's first foray into responsive design. There have been issues with analytics, so we don't yet have a clear picture of the site's traffic. There were over **600 visits** in the fourth quarter of 2020, with the faculty listing and Urban Landscape Summit pages receiving the bulk of traffic. Plans for the CLUE site include incorporating the Program for Resource Efficient Communities (PREC) and H₂OSAV program's web content.

The communications office took over production of the Agricultural Best Management Practices website (<https://bmp.ifas.ufl.edu>) in December of 2019. The site is small and

Master Gardener Volunteer Program managed accounts, most popular post of 2020:

"The colorful eastern lubber is one of the most distinctive (and destructive) grasshopper species in the southeast United States. They occur in such significant numbers that they can cause significant damage to citrus and vegetable crops as well as ornamental plants.

How do you manage these pests? It's important to catch them in their juvenile stages. Learn more on Gardening Solutions: [link to Gardening Solutions article]."

FB: 44.5K reach 2.1K reactions

IG: 2.9K reach, 383 reactions

simple. However, the content management system (T4) is difficult and cumbersome to use. There are no plans to grow this site within T4 at this time.

Social Media

In 2020, COVID-19 kept millions of Americans at home, pushing them to connect virtually in record numbers. In response to social distancing, content published by CLUE on social media this year was more engaging than ever before.

We published weekly DIY articles to encourage garden therapy during periods of heightened stress. A surge in home vegetable gardening led us to prioritize content for new and novice vegetable gardeners. We also launched a weekly plant identification trivia game and a book club for Florida's gardeners (see Launching, pg. 11). All of these efforts engaged an entirely remote audience.

Social media accounts managed by the CLUE communications office saw significant growth in 2020. The MGV Program's Facebook account **gained 10K followers** in 2020, putting the end-of-year total at **26.5K**. During this period, **109K** people clicked on posts and we made a total of **1,879,811 impressions**. For comparison, total impressions in 2019 was only 154K.

We also resumed our Instagram activity late in 2019 and experienced growth on this platform. The MGV account started the year with 2.1K followers and ended with **5.5K followers**. The MGV Twitter account also saw significant gains, from 1.8K to **2.1K followers**.

Our office also maintains a CLUE Twitter account and YouTube channel. The CLUE Twitter account promotes the work and accomplishments of our faculty, as well as webinars and events like the Urban Landscape Summit. The CLUE YouTube channel supports a variety of Extension efforts by making their video content available and accessible. In 2020





we added **39 original videos** to the channel and curated content for a variety of Extension programs (see Launching, pg. 11).

Neighborhood Gardener Newsletter

Launched in August 2008, the Neighborhood Gardener newsletter of the Florida Master Gardener Volunteer Program **reaches more than 8K people** with an impressive **44% open rate** (industry average open rate is 26%). We also improved the readability of our content, making the newsletter accessible to a broader audience (see Readability, pg. 12).

One of the hallmarks of the Neighborhood Gardener and pieces published to Gardening Solutions has always been our commitment to review by UF/IFAS experts. Before content is published it is sent for review to Extension specialists on the subject. Changes they suggest are written into the article and, if necessary, sent back for further review. Each piece is then read and edited by Wendy Wilber, Florida Master Gardener Volunteer Program state coordinator and state specialized agent. References to relevant UF/IFAS content and EDIS documents are provided at the bottom of each article

to assist readers in visiting our sources and learning more about related topics.

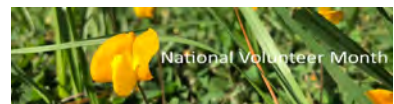
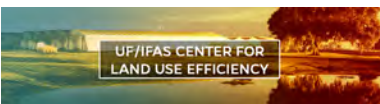
In 2020 we expanded the newsletter selection to help our vulnerable Master Gardener Volunteers continue their education from the safety of their home. We published pieces with high reader engagement, such as DIY articles, in 9 of our 12 issues. We also ran a two-month segment featuring webinars from our archive to encourage continued education during quarantine. All told, we wrote and published **79 new articles** in 2020 and revised a dozen more.

*"Thank you.
We needed this
more than ever."*

- Nancy R.

Popular Newsletter Articles in 2020:

- Introducing the Florida MGV Book Club
- Florida's Wildflowers by Bloom Season
- Yaupon Holly and Tea Plants for Florida
- Seminole Pumpkin Pie



New Center, New Blog

In 2020, we launched a new blog for the reorganized Center for Land Use Efficiency (<http://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/CLUE>) on the IFAS blog platform. Because of the varied nature of the center’s audiences and different program needs, the blog features every aspect of CLUE’s research and work.

Our blog is used to promote events, recap presentations, and feature faculty and programs. In this first year, **22 blog posts** were written – many of them were summaries of presentations from the Virtual Ag BMP Summit. The blog

helps to briefly share some of the center’s activities. It also allowed our intern, Natasha, to gain experience writing articles and interacting with content specialists for information.

We also worked with UF/IFAS Communications Services to create a global tag for the MGV program. This global tag allows any article tagged with “Master Gardener Volunteer” to be included in the MGV global feed. As agents and specialists begin using the tag, more content will be pulled in, capturing content from all over the state.

Responding to a Pandemic: Sustainable Home Food Production

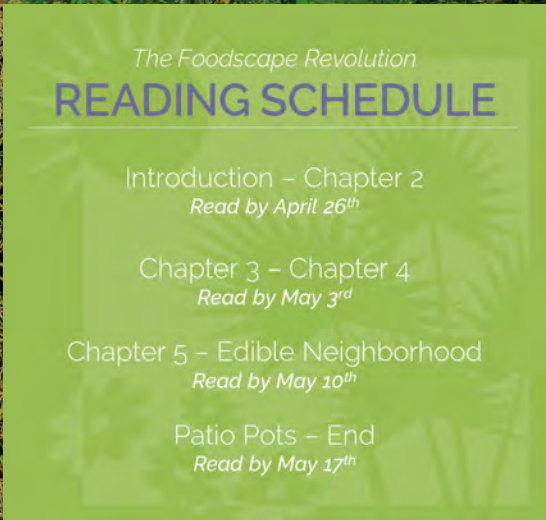
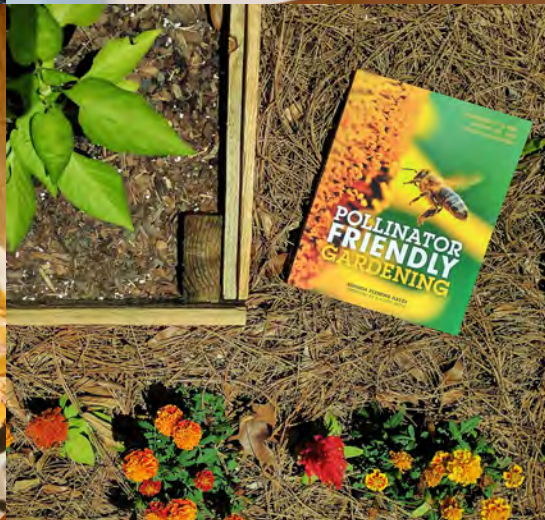
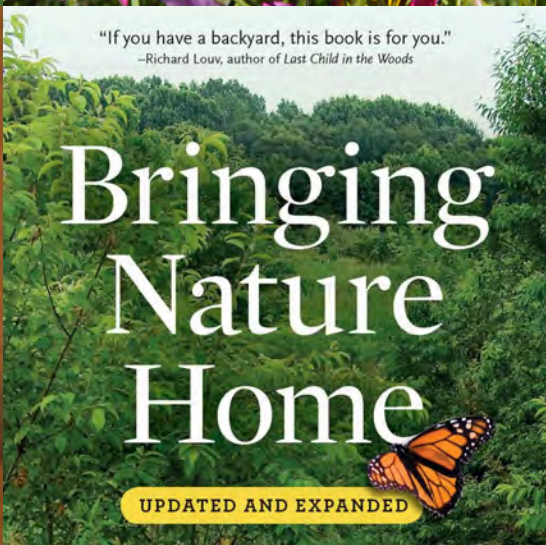
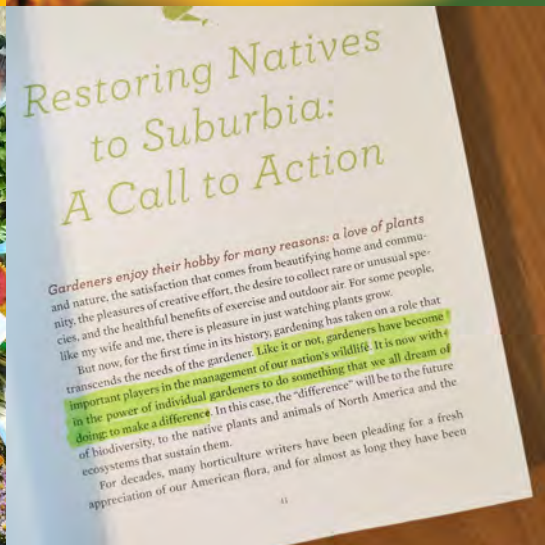
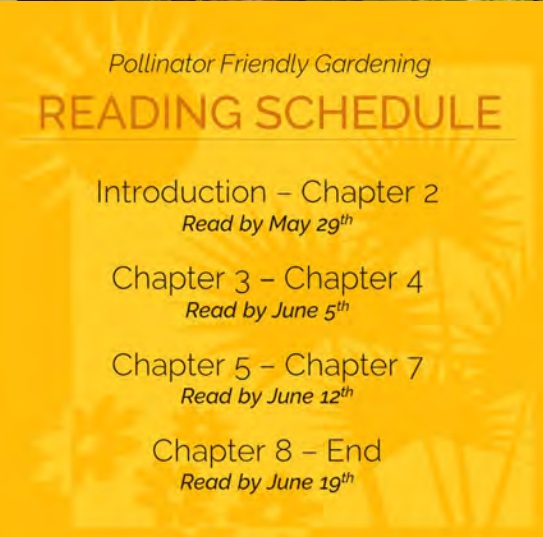
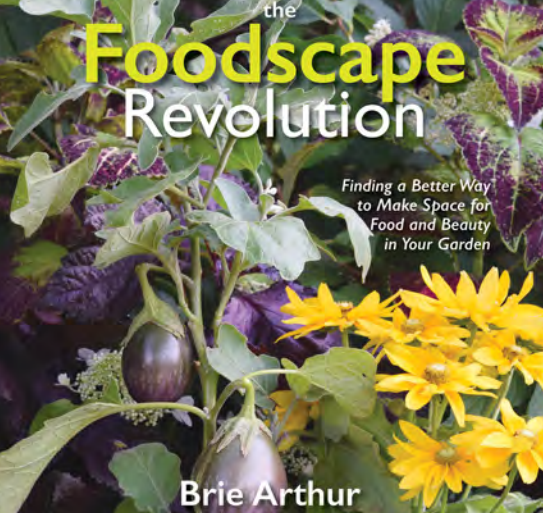
In late March, Dr. Saqib Mukhtar, associate dean and agriculture program leader for UF/IFAS Extension tasked a statewide committee to create an online source for information on “sustainable home food production.” The pandemic had caused shipping delays in retail, including groceries, growing concern over food shortages.

With food insecurity growing, our office worked quickly to pull together resources within the short timeline proposed and created a central presence on Gardening Solutions for Florida residents newly interested in growing their own food. Working with Wendy representing the committee, Jen took their ideas and directions and developed “Get Growing,” a web portal exclusively for sustainable home food production content. Linking to Gardening

Solutions’ deep wealth of gardening information, and building pages for new content from the committee, “Get Growing” was a single URL that Extension agents and UF/IFAS staff could share with their clientele the wealth of information from UF/IFAS Extension. .

“I am just writing to thank you for such a great website and resource for all of us gardeners who need lots of help.”
- Linda B.

The response from Florida gardeners and resulting web traffic made these efforts worth it. More than **3.8K users** visited the “Get Growing” home page. The most popular article written expressly for the series, “The Quick Start Guide to Home Vegetable Gardening,” was read by **2.5K visitors**. We are proud to have been able to help Florida residents work through their food security concerns and enjoy the physical and psychological benefits gardening has to offer, especially during these difficult times.





Launching the Florida MGV Book Club

Early in 2020 the Florida Master Gardener Volunteer (MGV) program invited Florida’s gardeners to a community reading. Our efforts to keep volunteers and residents connected and safe throughout 2020 catalyzed the formation of the Florida MGV Book Club.

Together we selected four titles that we hoped would appeal to our MGVs and their gardening communities: “Foodscape Revolution,” by Brie Arthur; “Pollinator Friendly Gardening,” by Rhonda Fleming Hayes; “Seeds,” by Thor Hanson; and “Bringing Nature Home,” by Douglas Tallamy. Each work aligned with Extension’s mission of supplying science-based solutions to everyday problems and touched on a seasonally appropriate area of gardening.

Social media platforms (primarily Facebook and Instagram) and live-streaming services served as virtual meeting places for member interactions and organic promotion of the club. We invited readers to share their thoughts as they read along by publishing a reading schedule and posting regular prompts. Weekly

posts offered relevant Extension content as well as questions and excerpts for discussion. A final live discussion with the author or an Extension expert concluded each title and included members in the discussion.

Over the course of nine months, we produced over **200 posts** and received thousands of comments, posts, reactions, and shares in response. Live-streamed meetings with the authors were particularly popular, with a peak of **108 taking part in the live discussion**. As a result, members report adopting a variety of Extension recommended practices. Volunteers and Extension agents shared plans to implement their learning in outreach and home landscapes. Some county Extension programs started local book clubs following the statewide example.

Launching a book club was no small undertaking, but we couldn’t be more pleased with the response from Florida’s gardeners. We estimate a **membership of 597** and the Florida MGV Book Club will continue to read in the new year.



Improving Accessibility and Readability

Digital Content Accessibility

At its most basic level, accessibility is about use – can our intended audience access this information? Accessibility is an umbrella term, covering a number of audiences. It doesn't merely refer to the visibly disabled, but any user having trouble. So yes, a blind user, but also an older user with fading vision, a new gardener whose first language is not English, readers with color blindness, and other groups. Think of how difficult it can be to convince a Florida homeowner to care about water conservation. Now consider the fact that, even if they were curious, they can't read the article with steps on how to do so.

We're pleased to report that all three of our websites (Gardening Solutions, Florida Master Gardener Volunteer program, and the Center for Land Use Efficiency) meet basic accessibility standards. However, there is room for improvement in areas like color contrast and labeling for easier navigation, for both visual readers and assistive technologies.

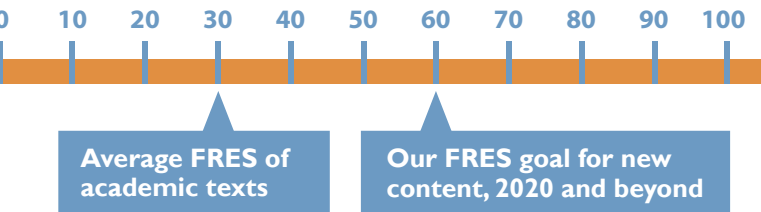
With actions such as taking a W3C-led course on accessibility and deploying testing software, Jen is committed to ensuring that our web content is accessible to all gardeners. The topic of accessibility continues to expand as users find their voice to ask for more access; their addition to the conversation opens developers' and designers' eyes to obstacles we didn't realize we were putting up on our websites. New learning opportunities appear, and Jen is eager to learn more.

As we help individual programs expand, our focus is on making sure new communications are as accessible as possible. For example, all titles selected by the Florida MGV Book Club in 2020 were available in audio or digital formats, facilitating large-print and text-to-speech (TTS) accessibility options. We have also created an intern position to begin proofing the closed captioning of our webinar archives to make these more accessible.

Reviewing for Readability

An estimated 1 in 5 Americans struggle to read at the most basic level. In addition to broader accessibility goals, we made it our mission this year to improve the readability of new online content, with Madeline taking the lead.

One tool that we have found helpful in achieving higher readability is the Flesch reading ease (FRES) scoring method. This metric gauges how accessible a document is to readers of varying proficiencies. This year we ran readability tests on content to be published to Gardening Solutions and the MGV newsletter. Our goal was to bring the FRES of



all new material written with non-professional readers in mind up to at least 60 FRES, considered "plain English" and readable by the general public. Madeline put her background in education to use editing these documents.

Some articles, due to vocabulary or lists of scientific names, fell below the 60 FRES mark. Still, we are proud to say that the vast majority of articles published in 2020 score well above the mark for plain English, making our content significantly more accessible to the public.

Meeting Learners Where They Are: Virtual Learning Events in 2020

In 2020, the communications office hosted **64 virtual learning events** with **14.3K live participants and recorded views**. Virtual learning events included webinars, virtual conferences, book club meetings, and other events. As lead for virtual learning, Emily coordinated brainstorming, registration, marketing, presenter preparedness, technology, evaluation, video post-production, and curation for all events.

Webinars are our most popular virtual learning event and were held weekly throughout the year. Each series of presentations met the needs of a specific audience group. Monthly webinars are offered to Florida Master Gardener Volunteers and Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Professional Landscape audiences.

In addition to webinars, we assist with several large virtual conferences including the Ag BMP Summit, the Master Gardener Volunteer Leadership School, and the Northeast Regional Master Gardener Volunteer Conference. These conferences were offered in a variety of ways including weekly webinars for three months, two days of intensive learning, and other variations.

One unique aspect of our team is that we coordinate or assist with all aspects of learning events – from brainstorming all the way to reporting. Having this holistic view of events allows us to offer customized recommendations for each program area and audience.



COMMUNICATIONS 2021

SMART Goals for the CLUE Communications Office

Digital Content

1. Theme MGV and GS social media, newsletter, and website content seasonally across platforms for every month of 2021.
2. Increase the MGV Instagram followers to 10,000 by end-of-year 2021.
3. Increase the YouTube channel viewership by 20% in 2021 by curating playlists for each of the supported Extension programs and integrating YouTube content with existing communication efforts.

Accessibility

1. Launch the CLUE suite of websites (CLUE, MGV, GS) in a responsive site format by end-of-year 2021.
2. Post new videos with closed captioning and accessibility requirements throughout 2021. Review past videos for accuracy and then curate, make accessible, and post throughout 2021.

Program Support

1. Provide strategic communications expertise and content integration to CLUE Extension and research programs on an ongoing basis.
2. Continue to extend our support to CLUE faculty, the Florida Master Gardener Volunteer Program, the Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program, the Agricultural BMP Program, Sustainable FloridiansSM, the Program for Resource Efficient Communities, H₂OSAV, and the Future of Urban Landscapes.

CLUE Communications Team

Emily Eubanks, Assistant Director of Communications

Emily manages the communications office and serves as project manager for CLUE's strategic communications efforts and the Agricultural BMP program. She provides virtual and on-site learning initiative support through webinars, event management, and consultation. Emily also handles many of the administrative functions of the center including facilities, assets, security, and IT.



Jennifer Sykes, Communications Manager

Jennifer is responsible for the creation and maintenance of the CLUE, Gardening Solutions, and Florida Master Gardener Volunteer program websites. She previously worked in communications for Florida State College in Jacksonville before moving to Gainesville. She serves as executive editor for all our written communication, including original content for the websites and the Neighborhood Gardener newsletter.



Madeline Iyer, Science Communicator

Madeline is responsible for researching and writing new content, readability efforts, and social media. Madeline worked previously in research with the UF Environmental Horticulture department. She has also worked as a science teacher and youth programs coordinator. She applies her experience in communication and community building to encourage Florida gardeners to enjoy all that our beautiful state has to offer.



Wendy Wilber, Faculty Advisor

Wendy provides content direction and editorial calendar review for the communications office. She serves as faculty editor on the Neighborhood Gardener e-newsletter. Wendy is currently the Florida Master Gardener Volunteer Program state coordinator and state specialized agent.



Natasha Roberts, Communications Intern

Natasha served as the 2020 CLUE communications intern. She produced videos, wrote blog posts, and assisted with weekly plant trivia social media efforts. She provided administrative and clerical support to the Florida Master Gardener Volunteer Program.





CLUE

The CLUE Communications Office is proud to meet the needs of these research and Extension programs, faculty, and staff.

The Center for Land Use Efficiency (CLUE) was created to bring UF/IFAS agricultural and urban BMP programs together.

CLUE currently houses the Florida Master Gardener Volunteer Program, the Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program, the Agricultural BMP Program, Sustainable FloridiansSM, the Program for Resource Efficient Communities, and H₂OSAV, as well as growing and maintaining the Gardening Solutions website.

