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# Gardening on a Coral Rock: The Garden Club of the Upper Keys

by Karen Beal

Anyone who has lived here a while enjoys connecting with the natural beauty of the Keys, and one of the best places to do that is at the Francis Tracy Garden Center, home of the Garden Club of the Upper Keys.

The club's roots go back to 1952, when a group of locals began meeting in private homes to share their passion for gardening. Numbers grew so quickly that just two years later, they split off into a separate Upper Keys chapter. In the early 1960s, a generous offer of land at the 94 mile marker byside, led to the establishment of the Francis Tracy Garden Center, a dedicated space for meetings, Master Gardener workshops, and exhibits that still serves our community.

The Garden Club is committed to the appreciation of tropical plants, education and conservation. Their regular meetings, open to the public, are on the third Tuesday, September through May, and feature speakers sharing their expertise on a wide variety of topics. Typically, the Master Gardeners offer a plant clinic 9-11am, social hour is 10-11a.m, and the

speaker starts at 11am. Other frequent club activities include Garden Get-togethers and Crafty Tuesdays. For details and membership information: gardenclubupperkeys.org.

The club will be hosting several events to fund their educational programs and maintain the building and property. The first event of the season will be Saturday, November 1st from 9am to 1pm when the membership will offer a huge Yard Sale full of deals on all the plant items you could want, plus much more.

Saturday, December 6th will be the epic Holiday Market where 40 vendors from South Florida meet up with local crafters to offer the answer to all your holiday shopping - and some self indulgence. If you don't believe it, just stop by!

Our island habitat offers some challenges and some blessings when it comes to gardening. There is no better way to learn about what to grow in the Keys than to talk to the members of the Garden Club of the Upper Keys at one of their gatherings.



The gardens themselves are a work of art, with members maintaining different sections, showcasing a variety of native and exotic plants that thrive in our unique climate.



The Holiday Market (coming on December 6th) brings vendors from South Florida to the Keys.



Encouraging love of gardens at an early age, the Garden Club supported Key Largo School and Ocean Studies Charter School during the Great South East Pollinator Count.



Education, social time and a great selection of speakers makes for a full afternoon meeting. Matecumbe Microgreens teaches how delicious and nutritious your plants can be.



Sharing the garden grounds with artists just seems like a natural partnership.



Look who's talking! Our own contributing author, the talented Carol Ellis.