



YOU CATCH MORE FLIES WITH HONEY AND YOU CATCH MORE HONEY WITH AN EXTENSION AGENT

BY DONOVAN BALTICH

It's easy to tell the difference between a person approaching a beehive for the first time and a master beekeeper. The beginner wears all the protective gear: boots, gloves, jacket and veil, while the master beekeeper usually wears the veil alone.

That's not to say just anyone should approach a beehive without protective garb. Master beekeepers have other tools in their belt, including smokers, a built-up tolerance to venom and more than anything — their experience, which helps them remain calm in stressful situations.

The Beekeeping Education Series in Alachua County helps residents from all over North Central Florida gain that indispensable experience.

The series is hosted by Tatiana Sanchez, a Doctor of Plant Medicine, and her work focuses on how integral bees are to food production and teaching beekeeping content to Extension agents at the University of Florida Institute for Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS). With her background in plant health, Sanchez advocates strengthening relationships between beekeepers and commercial growers.

"We have to improve and facilitate the connection between commercial beekeepers and growers," said Sanchez. "It's necessary for keeping our colonies healthy and for having good pollination."

Sanchez earned her D.P.M. through UF's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences. When UF established the program in 1999, it was the only university to offer just such a program. With the state of Florida's \$7 billion agricultural industry, graduates of the

D.P.M. program bring expertise to prevent the spread of plant pathogens and arthropod pests.

As a postdoctoral associate at UF, Sanchez's research had nothing to do with bees. She focused on controlling Fusarium-induced wilt of watermelon crop. And as the commercial horticulture extension agent for Alachua County, she continues deploying strategies to protect Florida's watermelon, and other crops against pests and diseases, through farm visits, all while continuing to provide the Bee Education Series.

The series comprises four classes that are strategically scheduled to help participants during their first year as beekeepers. In the fall, the beginner beekeeper class introduces them to bee biology and teaches them how they can order their own bees for spring.

The winter class teaches them about swarm and colony management. The spring class teaches how to extract the honey and the summer class teaches about maintaining hive health by combatting pests and diseases.

"If you're going to work with bees, you really need to study them," Sanchez said. "Some insects are pests and your goal is to get rid of them. Bees are your livestock — you're raising them."

To find out more and to sign up for the Beekeeping Education Series, hosted by the Alachua County IFAS Extension Office, visit the [IFAS blog](#).

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—TATIANA SANCHEZ, D.P.M.

