

EXPERIMENTING WITH YOUR FOREST GARDEN UNDERSTORY



INTRODUCTION

Planting a tree in your Florida landscape is a great way to bring the benefits of the natural world closer to your home.

Trees improve the quality of the air we breathe, reduce and filter stormwater runoff, and create habitat for wildlife. Some even provide a useful yield of products and are good candidates for food forestry.

However, a tree in isolation is still an ecological island and will require more management to truly thrive in the landscape.

Planting a thoughtful understory can transform a single tree into a bustling community woven together by complex interactions that better mimic natural ecosystems. The result is a low-maintenance garden that saves on space by making use of different vertical layers.

But enough theory! How do we put such big ideals into practice?

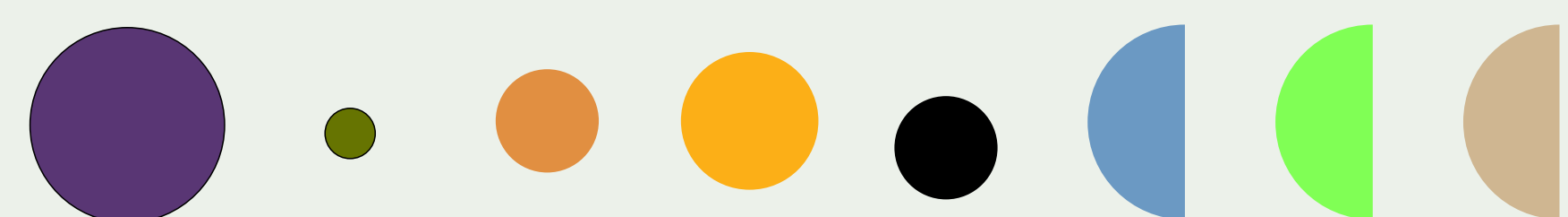


BELLY FILLERS

There are few things more gratifying than harvesting from your own garden.

While food is the most obvious "belly filler", this category encompasses the whole gamut of potential human uses: fresh cut flowers, natural dyes, medicinal products, and poultry forage are all examples.

Belly filler plants tend to be more highly bred towards their useful or edible parts and hence more high-maintenance. Planting them in thoughtful association with soil builders and insect bringers fills in the ecological holes of a traditional forest garden.



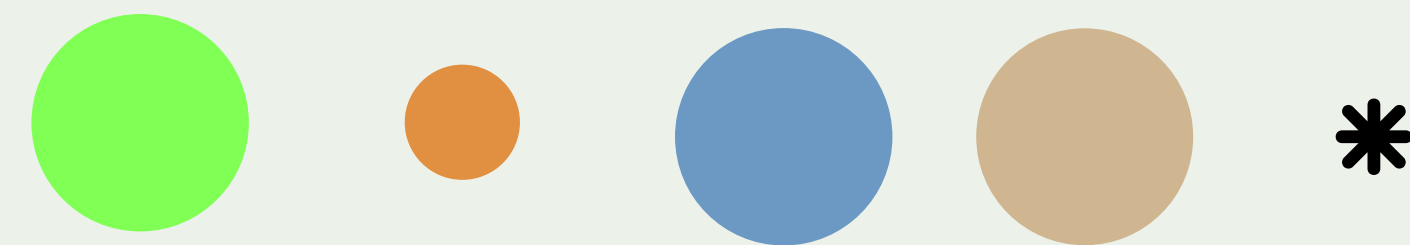
SOIL BUILDERS

Healthy soil is the most valuable investment to make for strong, healthy plants.

Unfortunately, most backyards are endowed with disturbed, poor quality soil that needs to be built up over time.

It is only through the accumulation of organic matter (think falling leaves in a forest) that life and fertility may return. We can harness and accelerate this process using soil building plants!

Soil builders tend to have deep root systems, produce lots of leafy material, and/or fix nitrogen. If you have vigorously growing weeds in your garden, you may also use this to your advantage by regularly "chopping and dropping" them into your garden before they set seed.



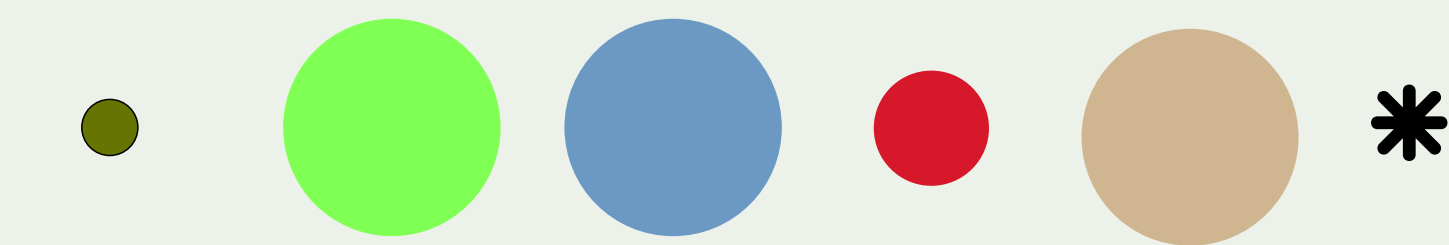
INSECT BRINGERS

A diverse insect community is a boon to the garden.

Natural predators and parasitoids keep pest populations down. In addition, pollinators boost fruit set and quality. Of course, there is also a certain thrill to observing the garden abuzz with activity. Many insects are unique or interesting specimens to watch and attract local birds on the hunt for grub.

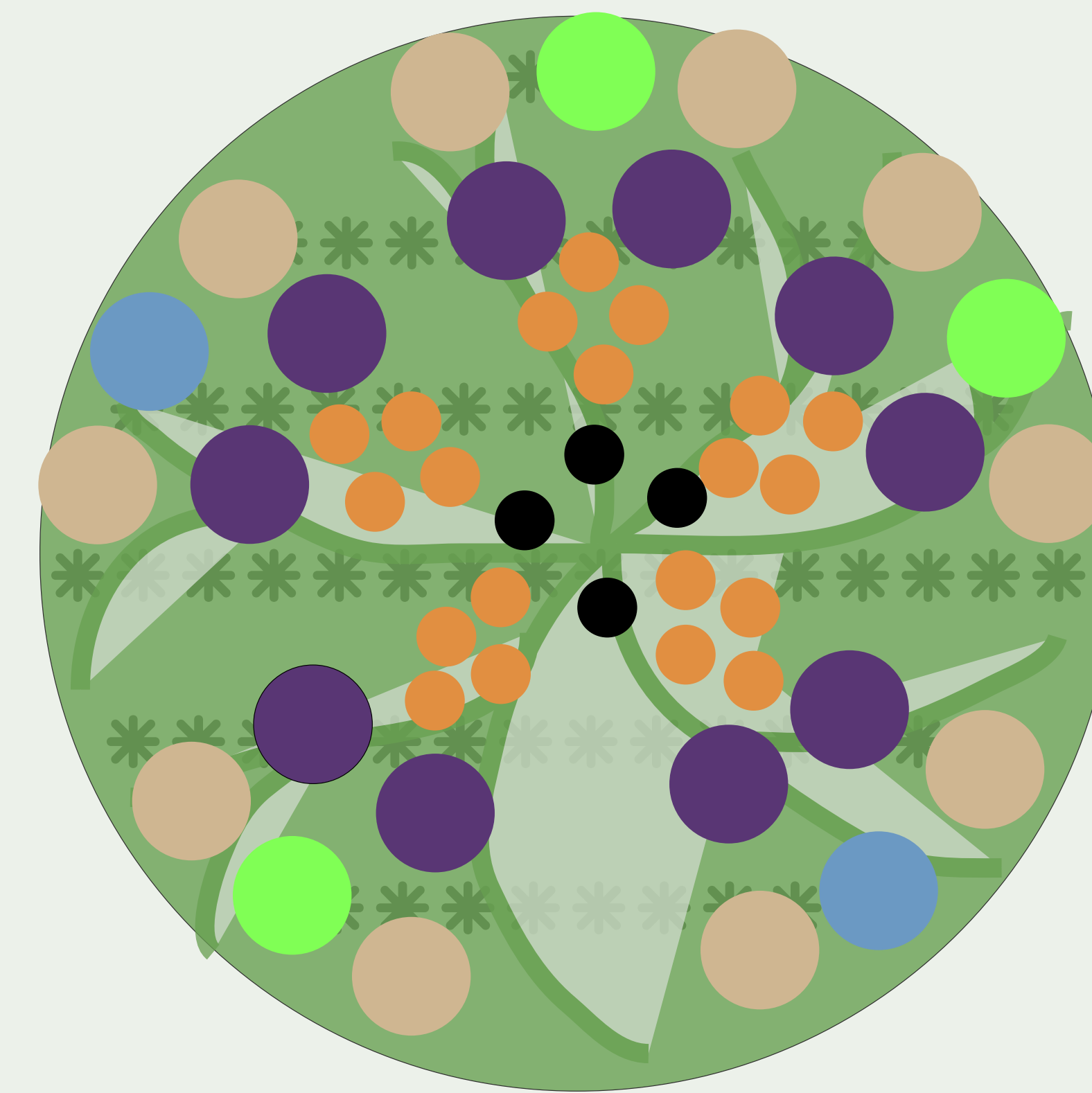
Insect bringer plants offer pollen, nectar, and/or foliage for beneficial insects to eat. Some examples of these beneficial insects are lady bugs, hoverflies, and lacewings.

Try to choose a mix of insect bringers that flower at different times to maintain year-round beneficial insect activity.

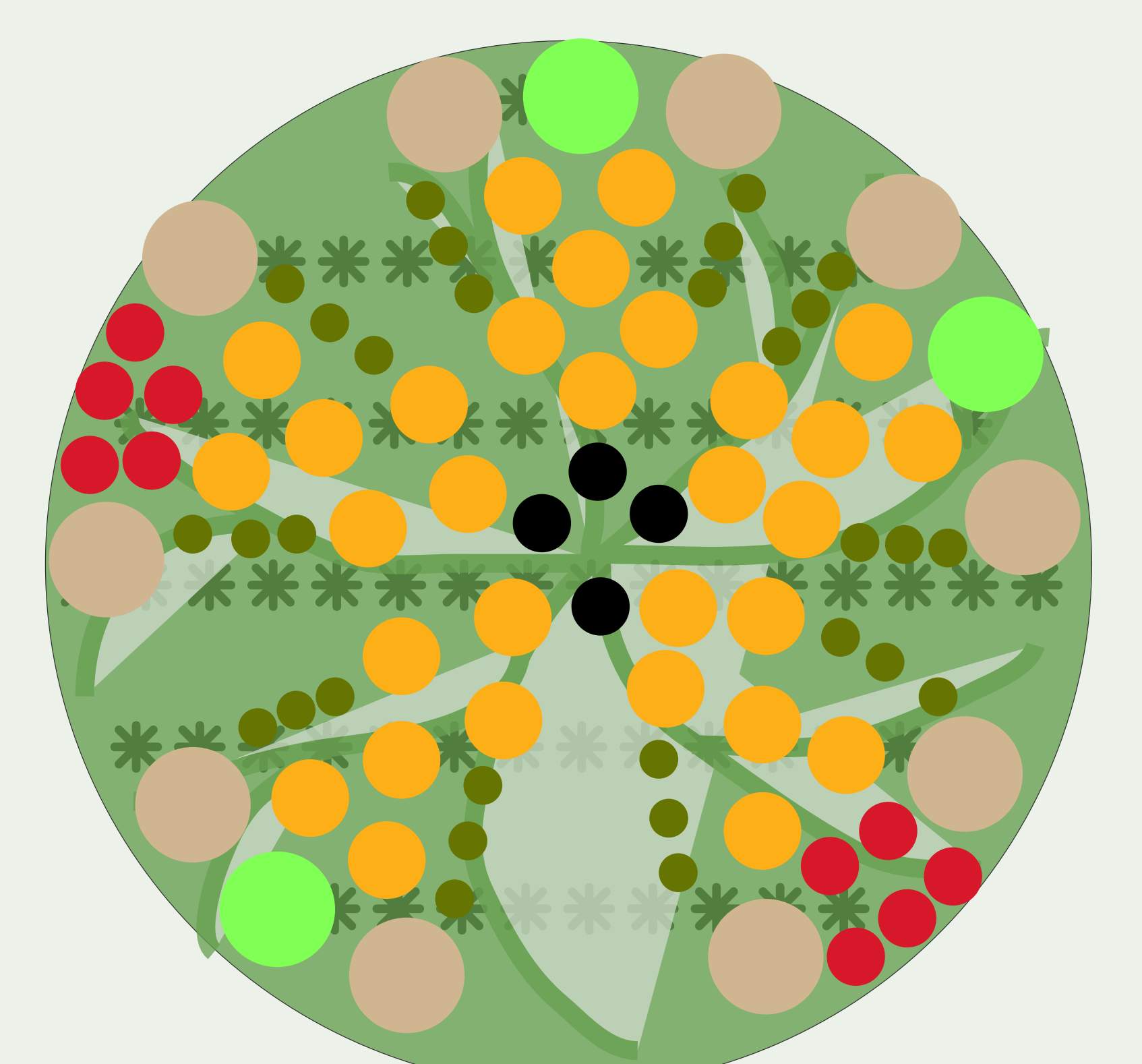


PUTTING IT TOGETHER: A WHITE MULBERRY UNDERSTORY

Warm Season



Cool Season



● Okinawa Spinach

● Lemon Balm

● Yardlong Bean

● Borage

● Yarrow

● Turmeric

● Dill

● Lemon Balm

● Lettuce

● Sweet Alyssum

● Yarrow

● Turmeric (Dormant)

*** Natural groundcovers: hairy vetch, perennial peanut

⌋ indicates a more experimental application of partial or inconclusive strength