

3rd Annual Southern Seed School Presenters



Melissa DeSa

*Community Programs Director at
Working Food*



A self-taught gardener, seed saver, and entrepreneur, Melissa holds a Masters degree from the University of Florida in Interdisciplinary Ecology. She spent many years as a biologist prior to her career in the nonprofit world. She has worked for Florida Organic Growers, the Florida Museum of Natural History, and the UF Horticulture Department, becoming grounded and experienced in a broad range of ecological and community systems prior to co-founding Working Food. She oversees two key programs: the Southern Heritage Seed Collective and an afterschool youth garden initiative. She currently serves on the advisory board for Southern SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education), the Southeast Slow Food Ark of Taste, and Grow-Hub.

Timothy Noyes

*Garden Explorer, Self-Taught Plant Breeder,
Educator, Local Tomato Expert*



Tim is a Senior Management Analyst Supervisor with the Department of Children and Families. In his spare time, he grows an abundance of plants in his garden, with the goal of discovering unusual varieties that perform well in our climate. He is a self-taught plant breeder with a passion for tomatoes, running his own tomato breeding program here in Gainesville! Tim contributes to seed saving efforts locally and nationally, and shares his knowledge by teaching classes and workshops alongside Working Food, Grow Gainesville, Seed Savers Exchange and The Dwarf Tomato Project.

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Dr. Héctor E. Pérez

Associate Professor in the Environmental Horticulture Department at the University of Florida



Hector's research focuses on seed biology, specifically on how a changing climate influences germination and seed dormancy dynamics, what enables seeds to tolerate various abiotic stresses, and why seed quality varies so much in wild species. A new project focuses on enhancing seed production of regionally adapted crops in the southeastern farmer seed system. Héctor enjoys working with seeds of native plants, rare and endangered species, and important horticultural crops.

Joseph Pierce

Permaculturalist, Educator and Baker at Mosswood Farm Store



Joe has been growing in Alachua County for nearly 30 years. A passion for perennial food crops and exotic fruits and vegetables, drives his experimental gardening style. He and his family own and operate Mosswood Farm Store, a small coffee shop and bakery, with a beautiful garden nursery in Micanopy. Joe teaches many workshops related to sustainability ranging from cob oven building to growing bananas and producing biochar.

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Dr Esteban Rios

Assistant Professor in Forage Breeding and Genetics, in the Agronomy Department at the University of Florida



Esteban is from Misiones, Argentina and he holds a BS degree in Agronomy Engineering from Universidad Nacional del Nordeste. Esteban did his MS and PhD in the Agronomy Department at UF working on breeding and genetics of forage and turfgrass species. He currently is working on projects aimed at developing forage and cover crop cultivars, with special focus on legume species. He teaches three classes: Field Plot Techniques, Advanced Plant Breeding and Plant Chromosomes and Genomes.

Terry Zinn

Florida Wildflower Foundation



Terry has served on the Florida Wildflower Foundation Board since 2007 as a representative of the Florida Wildflower Seed and Plant Growers Association. He has practiced environmental law since 1984 and holds a degree in wildlife ecology. Terry has been researching and producing native wildflower seed for 13 years, growing more than 30 species of native wildflowers on his seed farm in Alachua.

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University of Florida Plant Science Council Student Presenters

Jessica Chitwood-Brown

Jessica is a PhD candidate in Dr. Sam Hutton's tomato breeding program. Utilizing conventional and molecular breeding tools, her research works with genetic resistance to several tomato pathogens, including fusarium wilt, in order to offer improved varieties for tomato growers. Jessica received a B.S. in Biology from the University of Arkansas - Fort Smith and a M.S. in Horticulture from the University of Arkansas.

Gurleen Kaur

Gurleen is a PhD candidate under the guidance of Dr. Tong Geon Lee in the Tomato Genetics and Genomics Lab. Her research includes improvement of tomato morphology for mechanical harvest. She received her Bachelor's degree in Plant Breeding and Genetics from Punjab Agricultural University, India, and a Masters degree in peanut breeding at New Mexico State University.

Brett Lane

Brett is a PhD candidate under the guidance of Dr. Erica Goss. His research is focused on characterizing the genetic diversity of a fungal pathogen on various grasses along the Eastern coast of the United States. Brett grew up on a farm in rural Indiana and received his Bachelor's degree in Biochemistry from Hanover College, Indiana. He then received his Master's degree from Purdue University where he studied fungal diseases of stored grain.

Katie Rogers

Katie is a PhD candidate under the guidance of Dr. José Chaparro in the Fruit Tree Breeding and Genetics Program. Her research is focused on characterizing flowering in citrus with the goal of developing applications to shorten the generation time in citrus and accelerate breeding efforts. Katie received her bachelor's degree in Horticultural Sciences, Plant Molecular and Cellular Biology at the University of Florida.

Natalia Salinas

Natalia is a PhD candidate under the guidance of Dr. Vance Whitaker, and Dr. Seonghee Lee in the strawberry breeding program at the Gulf Coast Research and Education Center in Wimauma, Florida. Her project focuses on discovering and characterizing genetic loci for resistance to anthracnose fruit rot caused by the fungus *Colletotrichum acutatum*. She received a Master of Science in Horticulture with emphasis in Plant Breeding and Genetics at Oregon State University. She was born in Quito, Ecuador where she obtained a degree in Engineering in Biotechnology.