



FYN Garden Q & A Series

Thomas Becker
Extension Agent, Florida
Yards & Neighborhoods



FYN Topic: Mallard Duck Chooses Coontie

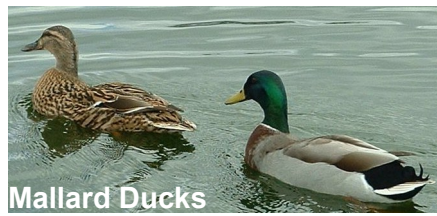
Question: Why would a mallard duck nest in a shrub in front of my house so far from our community's lake? I'd estimate 70 feet to the water's edge. It is nesting in a low-growing coontie shrub just a few feet from a shared entrance walkway to our condominium. No other plants are nearby. The duck would have remained unknown to me had I not decided to water the coontie. She immediately flew a few feet away. Her 'stand your ground' behavior was protecting four cream-colored eggs hidden within the coontie. However, I saw no nesting materials. What's up with this duck? What would you do? —Tony from Ft. Myers

Answer. Apart from its proximity to the front door, a mallard hen using a coontie clump to protect her nest is perfectly normal. Mallards prefer to make a nest in any natural depression right on the ground. Mallards prefer sparse vegetation for nesting within 100 yards from a lake, retention pond, marsh or shallow drainage ditch with water. Coontie plants are clump-forming. With age, mulch builds up around it sometimes forming a natural depression in the center. Your coontie replaced more typical nesting habitat like low-growing grasses and sedges along the shoreline.

Congratulations on unwittingly attracting native wildlife to your front yard. All native birds are protected by the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty Act. It would be illegal to remove or destroy the nest. If people walking nearby disturb the hen, make a temporary pathway around the nest. Or, start using your back door. Ducklings hatch in 23-30 days. Once all hatch, the hen will lead the brood to water. Delay further watering, fertilizing or pest control until after she leaves with her brood.

Learn more about attracting wildlife to your yard at this month's Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Introductory Class on Saturday, April 14 from 9AM – Noon at Rutenberg Park. Cost is \$8 per household.

Pre-register by using the Webtrac link at the bottom of our homepage, <http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu>.



Useful Links

- <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/UW/UW28700.pdf>
- <http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu>
- <http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/FYN/FYNHome.shtml>

- <http://www.floridayards.org>
- <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/>
- <http://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu>

Thomas Becker is an extension agent for the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods (FYN) program at the Lee County Extension Service. Submit questions by calling the Horticulture Help Desk at 533-7504 between 9 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. or by emailing Extgardener@leegov.com. Visit his Web page at <http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/FYN/FYNHome.shtml>

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A. & M 04/07/2012.