



**Ladies Day**

**AS I SEE IT  
BY JIM WALKER**

There are all kinds of ladies. You have young ladies, middle-aged ladies, old blue-haired ladies, ladies in waiting, bag ladies, ladies of the night, the Patron Saint, Our Lady of Perpetual Motion, the First Lady, the cleaning lady, the church lady, the lady upstairs, the lady downstairs, the lady across the street, and on and on like that.

If you live in South Florida and you make your living growing grass, plants, trees, or vegetables, whether it's on a golf course, in a park, at a nursery, or in the fields of the Redlands, Homestead, or Florida City, one of your favorite ladies is the CEU Lady!

That's correct sir, the CEU LADY is way up there on your list. Kind of unusual that a lady is running the educational show for the University of Florida Miami-Dade County Extension in Homestead, but that's what Dr. Mary Lamberts has been doing for the past 23 years. I love it when you find a lady horning in on any predominately male line of work. Let's face it; there are not many lady superintendents, nursery owners, farm owners or CEU educators in our area or anywhere else that I am aware of, though Mary tells me things are changing.

Mary was born in Michigan of Dutch ancestry. Ironically, the day Mary was born; her father was accepted to graduate school. With his doctorate in linguistics, he taught at Northwestern and Arizona State. Consequently, Mary attended grade school in Illinois and high school in Tempe, Ariz. After receiving her B.A. from ASU, she was

off to the Peace Corps in Thailand. There she taught English as a foreign language. Yes, that means Mary not only speaks Thai, but also a little Dutch and some Spanish.

After her stint in Thailand, she was off to Nepal for two and one-half years where she worked at "various" jobs. During her time in the Far East, she became very interested in plants and horticulture in general. She applied to and was accepted at Cornell (my old pal Alan Weitzel's alma mater) and there she received her doctorate in vegetable crops.

After she graduated, she moved to Miami (Homestead) in 1983 and went to work for the state at the Ag Extension facility there. Since 1984, she has been the chief trainer for pesticide certification.

I have wanted to do a story about Mary for several years but something always kept coming up to prevent it. You may ask why write about someone who teaches General Standards, Ornamental and Turf, and other license categories. What's the big deal about that? The big deal is she is so good at it!

I told her when I finally got a commitment to move ahead with the project that I have always had a great deal of admiration and respect for her. She is old school. She cares about the people who come to her classes. Concern for their safety, the people they supervise, the public who could be harmed and the environment are important to her.

Her message always comes across loud and clear. Now it's easy to be up for a class now and then, but I have sat in on at least 16 of Mary's presentations over the years and they are always super. They are top shelf because her genuine commitment to her profession would not allow her to give less than her best every time. She is not just going through the motions to collect a paycheck on the first and the fifteenth. She is the real deal.

She doesn't hide the sad truth about how things were before pesticide certification came to our profession. Some of the stories she tells about the abuse and lack of caring for the

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people who worked harvesting crops, ornamental plants and trees, and on our golf courses when she first arrived in South Florida made my skin crawl. It really drove home how dangerous things were back then, mostly because of ignorance.

I remember years ago having to chase a worker out of the enclosure where we stored our fertilizer because he would go in there on his lunch break and take a nap on the bags.

The horror stories about the home and office pest-control applicator makes one wonder why people did not get sick or worse on a regular basis.

I asked Mary to sum up her feelings about the past 23 years teaching people and genuinely making them believe pesticides can be very dangerous and this is what she said:

"My motivation now is stronger than ever. I love my job and go to it happily every day. My main objective is to get people to read and understand pesticide labels before using a product. I change my presentations periodically to keep them fresh not only for myself, but also for the people who attend my classes.

"The University of Florida is constantly updating its workbooks and the tests for each of the pesticide categories, so I do the same thing. I attend workshops and seminars and get ideas on how to improve my presentations and come up with new concepts. I also take great pride in the proteges I have spawned along the way and it is one of the things I am most proud of."

If you have not met Mary, it is your loss to have missed a beacon of knowledge akin to the grand lighthouses of this world that stand guard on their rocky and treacherous coastlines, bringing forewarning to those who sail her waters. "Mother, mother ocean, I have heard you call."