

# “Pesky Peppers Pickled”

by Peggy Lantz

Copies of two columns by Sally Swartz that appeared in a Stuart newspaper were sent to your editor by FNPS past chapter president Mabel Witham. The first article appeared May 16, 1988.

It seems that week was Spruce Up Stuart Week, and residents cleaned up, fixed up, and painted, and volunteers spruced up the public parks.

And here I must quote Sally:

“But there’s an interesting and useful new service this year: A pair of expert Brazilian pepper tree exterminators are on call, ready to kill any pesky peppers inside Stuart city limits.

“Since the service is free, we can’t call the daring do-in duo ‘killers for hire,’ but those native plant enthusiasts, Martin County Commissioner Maggy Hurchalla and Mabel Witham, stand ready, willing, able and downright eager to poison your peppers.”

Mabel and Maggy’s phone number followed, with an explanation of why environmentalists don’t like Brazilian peppers, and a description of a neighbor who’s trying to chop a Brazilian pepper stump out of a hole that’s taller than he is, with new trees continually sprouting from the stump.

The follow-up article was just as delightful:

“Those irrepressible tree hit women, Martin County Commissioner Maggy Hurchalla and her sidekick, Mabel Witham, stopped by the office the other day — toting their hatchets and talking of trees they’d killed.

“The two women volunteered, as part of Spruce Up Stuart Week, to do in Brazilian peppers for anyone who is trying to get rid of one of the pesky trees.

“Response to the tree-killing offer was outstanding, the two said. They had 20 calls, did in 18 trees and acquired two wasp stings. Mabel, despite



MILT PUTNAM/Staff Photographer

her cover-all outfit of bell-bottomed blue jeans, long-sleeved denim shirt, yellow rubber gloves and floppy straw hat, ran afoul of some native wasps and had a bandaged shoulder to show.

“Maggy had no injuries, but she admitted to climbing a fence to kill a Brazilian pepper that was on Stuart city property. Neighboring property owners were upset because the pepper was encroaching on their territory, as those persistent peppers will do.

“‘Some women wanted us to poison their neighbor’s trees,’ Mabel said, ‘but of course we couldn’t do that. Other people told us all the things they’d tried to get rid of the peppers — cutting ‘em down, driving nails into them.’

“‘Actually,’ Mabel said, ‘it was rather fun’ poisoning the pepper trees. ‘We generated some interest. Everyone wanted to know what we were up to.’

“The county commissioner startled the Boss somewhat when she walked by his office, hatchet in hand, and said, ‘About that editorial. . .’”

Mabel Witham’s note to me said they’re still getting calls and referrals.