

Resources & Tips to Get You Started with Florida Native Plants

Welcome to the wonderful world of native plants. Whether your interest is ecology, natural history, gardening, sustainable landscaping, or Florida history, the Florida Native Plant Society (FNPS) has information, programs, and people to help you. In this brochure, you'll find some basic information and tips, as well as a lengthy list of books and other sources of information. A lifetime of enjoyable learning lies ahead, so let's get started!

Information in this brochure was provided by volunteers in the Conrodina, Dade, Hernando, Pinellas, and Serenoa Chapters of the Florida Native Plant Society.

What is a Native Plant?

"Every plant is native to some place in the world. When it is moved beyond its normal range, it is called an exotic. When a plant lives in its natural range and habitat, it can grow and reproduce without outside aid. It is in balance with its surroundings. It is neither aggressive nor overpowered. In its own special place, it is always a thing of great beauty." - Nancy Bissett, owner, The Natives

For most purposes, the phrase *Florida native plant* refers to those species occurring within the state boundaries prior to European contact, according to the best available scientific and historical documentation. More specifically, it includes those species understood as indigenous, occurring in natural associa-

tions in habitats that existed prior to significant human impacts and alterations of the landscape.

To determine the nativity of a plant, consult the *Guide to the Vascular Plants of Florida*, Richard P. Wunderlin, University Press of Florida, 1998, or www.plantatlas.usf.edu.



Attracting Birds and Butterflies to Your Garden Using Florida Native Plants

To attract birds, butterflies, and other wildlife to your garden, you need native trees and shrubs with flowers and fruits. So you planted a nice native shrub with flowers right in the middle of the front yard, and you still don't see any creatures? Consider these ideas:

Diversify. Plant a variety of native species to provide year-round food and cover. Different plants flower, fruit, and drop their leaves in different seasons. Plan on a full menu and color palette of plants for every season.

Cater to every taste. Most native plants listed as "wildlife attracting" have fruits or nectar eaten by birds and butterflies. However, insect-eating birds need plants that attract insects. Consult your FNPS chapter for insect-attracting suggestions and remember, no pesticides!

Feed the baby. To have adult butterflies, the species-specific larval food plants need to be available. Larval food plants can be denuded by hungry caterpillars! Relax and enjoy the fact that you are

feeding baby butterflies. Your plants will grow back (remember, they're naturally adapted to this treatment).

Spare that weed. Ralph Waldo Emerson said that a weed is a plant whose virtues have yet to be discovered. Leaving some native "weeds" in your garden, such as Spanish needles (*Bidens* spp.), helps ensure that there is always something in bloom for butterflies to nectar on. Some weeds are also butterfly larval foods.

Make a hiding place. Have areas where plants are close and dense, to provide birds with cover from the elements and predators. Trees and shrubs which provide dense foliage all year are especially valuable. And don't forget bunchgrasses and other low-growing plants for ground-dwelling critters.

Give them a drink. If you can't create a pond, use a large plant saucer, filled with water with some rocks in it, for birds, and a dish of wet sand for butterflies. If possible, provide a variety of water sources at different levels, with at least one source of moving water (trickling, misting, or dripping). A fountain or waterfall will help you relax while you watch the birds!

Please your plants. Plants known for their flowers usually need sun. Passion-

flower vines need support, whether a chain-link fence, trellis, or tree. Some plants need dry soil to thrive and flower. Learn and serve each plant's needs.

Plant a native with red tubular flowers. Depending on your location, you might choose coral honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*), cross vine (*Bignonia capreolata*), firebush (*Hamelia patens*), or tropical sage (*Salvia coccinea*). Everybody loves red flowers - hummingbirds, butterflies, and people!

Leave a snag. Removing a dead tree or tall shrub? Reconsider! Dead trees provide important nesting sites for many birds. At least consider leaving a tall stump in its place. As the stump decays, it will provide a perch as well as a home for insects that feed woodpeckers and other insect-eaters.

Recognize there is no "yard waste." In nature, everything feeds back into the system of life. Fallen leaves, limbs, and logs; spent flowers, stems, and seeds, berries and acorns on the ground - all provide food and fertilizer for a variety of creatures. Stop fighting nature and avoid unnecessary labor by learning to live with and appreciate all of nature.

Don't use cypress mulch! Cypress trees in productive wetlands are being cut and ground into mulch, not as a byproduct of lumbering, but solely to decorate urban gardens. Use Melaleuca mulch, eucalyptus mulch, pine straw, pine bark, chips from tree services, or recycled "yard waste."