

INTRODUCTION TO FLORIDA NATIVE PLANTS

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WHAT IS A NATIVE PLANT?

By definition, a native plant is a plant species that occurs naturally in a geographical area. Our native plants have been established for hundreds of years and much of our wildlife has evolved at the same time. Therefore to sustain our birds, butterflies, and other wildlife members, it is important to furnish them with the food and natural shelter native plants provide them.

What are the benefits of native plants to us?

They can save you money and create a healthier place for yourself and your family.

- 1) **They require little to no watering and can withstand periods of drought.** (This saves money on watering and turfgrass irrigation systems.)
- 2) **They require little to no fertilizer.** (The main components of fertilizer are phosphorus and nitrogen. Both of these ingredients can run off and fuel excess algae growth, whether it be red tide or blue-green algae. When the nitrogen is not used up by the plants, microbes in the soil can convert it into nitrous oxide, a greenhouse gas that contributes to global warming.)
- 3) **They require little to no pesticides.** (The National Cancer Institute released a study stating households with lawns treated with pesticides had children with a 6.5 times greater risk of developing leukemia. All pesticides have a precautionary statement warning of health issues for humans and animals.)
- 4) **They require little to no herbicides.** (Herbicides pose a risk to humans and pets. The labels advise if the herbicide is in contact with skin, directly or by soaking through clothing, the first aid treatment is to rinse for 15 – 20 minutes and contact a physician or poison control center. It should never be allowed to run in to any body of water.)
- 5) **Freedom lawns consisting of native plants need less mowing.** (Turfgrass lawns require regular mowing and the amount of gasoline used for lawnmowers or other gas-powered garden tools has been shown to emit 5% of the nations air pollution from exhaust.)
- 6) **They give a beautiful array of colors and forms for human enjoyment** (Plus they provide free entertainment with all of the birds and butterflies visiting your native plants.)

GROUNDCOVERS AND WILDFLOWERS

Matchweed is also commonly called Turkey Tangle Fogfruit, Frogfruit, Sawtooth Fogfruit, Capeweed, Carpetweed, and Matgrass.

In Lee County, it is commonly found under the name Matchweed or Turkey Tangle. It grows well as a groundcover and can be used in place of turf grass.



Matchweed or Turkey Tangle

Groundcovers and Wildflowers



Matchweed has soft stems that grow along the ground similar to a vine with tiny white flowers. Be careful not to confuse it with tropical girdlepod.



Tropical Girdlepod – A Non-native plant with stiff upright stems resembling a tiny shrub and has little round clusters of white flowers.



Groundcovers and Wildflowers continued

Sunshine Mimosa has a fern-like leaf and upright purple flowers. It propagates by seeds as well as spreading with runners. This plant is very durable and can handle foot traffic as well as minimal vehicle traffic.

These plants in the photos were growing and blooming following Hurricane Ian on Fort Myers Beach.

Groundcovers and Wildflowers



Porterweed has stalks of bright blue flowers



Joint Vetch is a native food for deer and therefore is an acceptable fodder for livestock

More Wildflowers



Starry Rosinweed



Spiderwort



Beach Verbena

Groundcovers and Wildflowers continued



Tickseed



Scorpiontail



Cape Sable Whiteweed
(flowers come in several
colors including this blue)

Taller Flowering Plants

Tropical Sage in red, white and pink plus Goldenrod



There are four types of native Goldenrod.

Native Wildflowers or Invasive Weeds?



Beggarticks or Spanish Needles

This is a native plant. While many consider it a weed, it can be contained in a small area to support the pollinators that are attracted to it. In order for Florida gardeners and farmers to raise vegetables and fruits, they need insects to pollinate their crops. Many of the pollinating insects depend on specific native plants that they evolved with.

Native Wildflowers or Invasive Weeds?



Large Flower Mexican Clover

This is considered an invasive weed. It is native to South American countries, not Mexico.

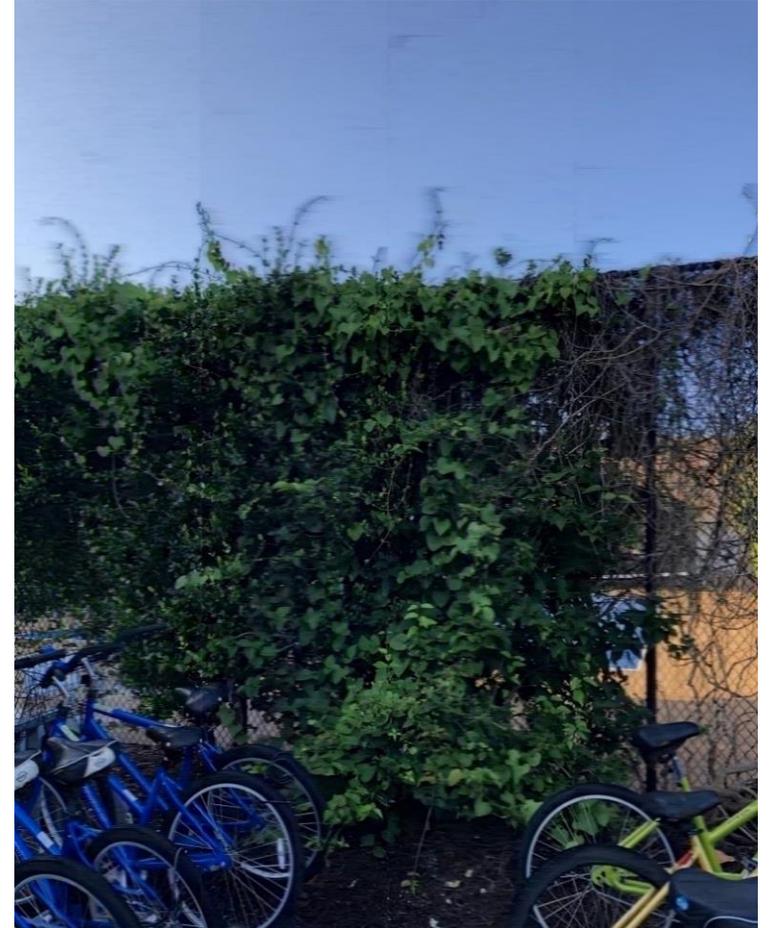
Vines



Maypop Passionvine – this plant has purple flowers 2 – 3 inches in diameter.



Crossvine



Dutchman Pipe Vine – this photo shows it covering the fence of a tennis ball court.

Dutchman Pipe Vine attracts Swallowtail Butterflies



Swallowtail caterpillar



Chrysalis of Swallowtails are great at camouflage – green if built on a green stem, brown if constructed on a tree trunk.



Emerging Swallowtail butterfly

Grasses



Coast Sandbur – the best way to maintain is by pulling off the sandbur or digging out the plant. It is native.



Elliot's Love Grass – a bluish-green grass.



Muhly Grass – this plant was blooming on Fort Myers Beach two weeks after Hurricane Ian.

Height Comparison of Grasses

Blue-Eyed Grass

6 to 12 inches tall



Fakahatchee Grass

4 to 6 feet tall

Muhly Grass 2 to 3 feet tall

Check to make sure you know the size of mature plants while planning your landscape.

Grasses continued

- Sea Oats are a perfect grass to have along the coastline because it helps to hold the sand in place to create sand dunes. It does not do very well growing inland.
- Sea oats are a protected plant species and people are not allowed to dig them up or take the seeds.



Dune Vegetation



Railroad Vine

Dune Sunflowers



Seagrape

Dune vegetation is extremely important in retaining sand on our beaches and sand dunes are preferred by sea turtles for a nesting site.

Ferns



Swamp Fern



Giant Sword Fern

Coontie Plant - also known as Florida Arrowroot

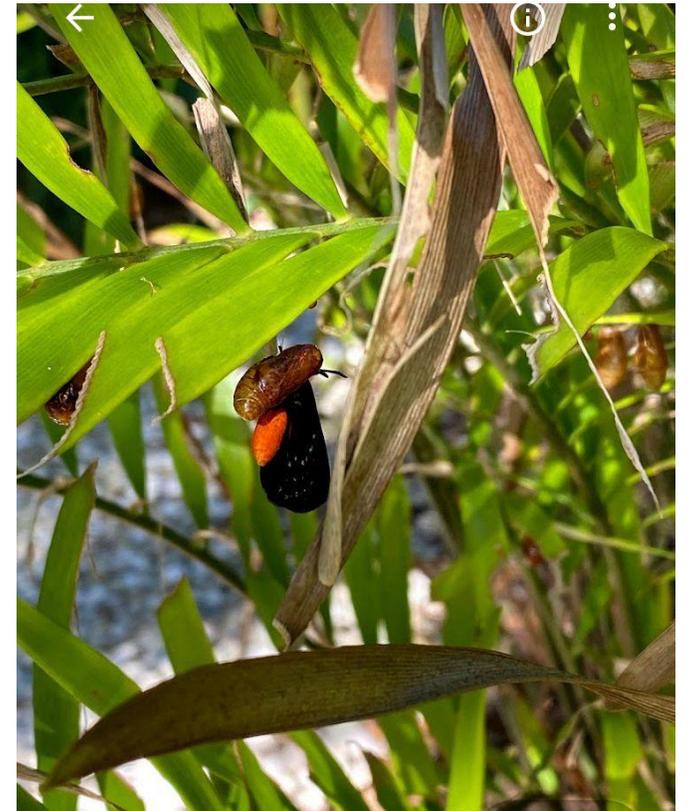
It is the only cycad native to the U.S. (specifically Southern Florida)
This plant is the natural host to the Atala butterfly, which was once considered extinct.



This plant was still growing following Hurricane Ian on Fort Myers Beach.



Orangish-red Atala caterpillars are feeding on the leaves.



Emerging Atala butterfly

Coontie Plant – an endangered species

- **The coontie plant is over 300 million years old.**
- **Our Seminole Native Americans used the root to make a flour for white bread.**
- **The technique of bread making was taught to early settlers.**
- **In the 1800's several mills were operational in Miami.**
- **During World War I an average of 18 tons of coontie plant roots were processed every day for the military.**
- **The coontie plant was nearly extinct.**

Spider Lily



Spider lily plant emerging after Hurricane Ian on Fort Myers Beach



Bulb of a spider lily

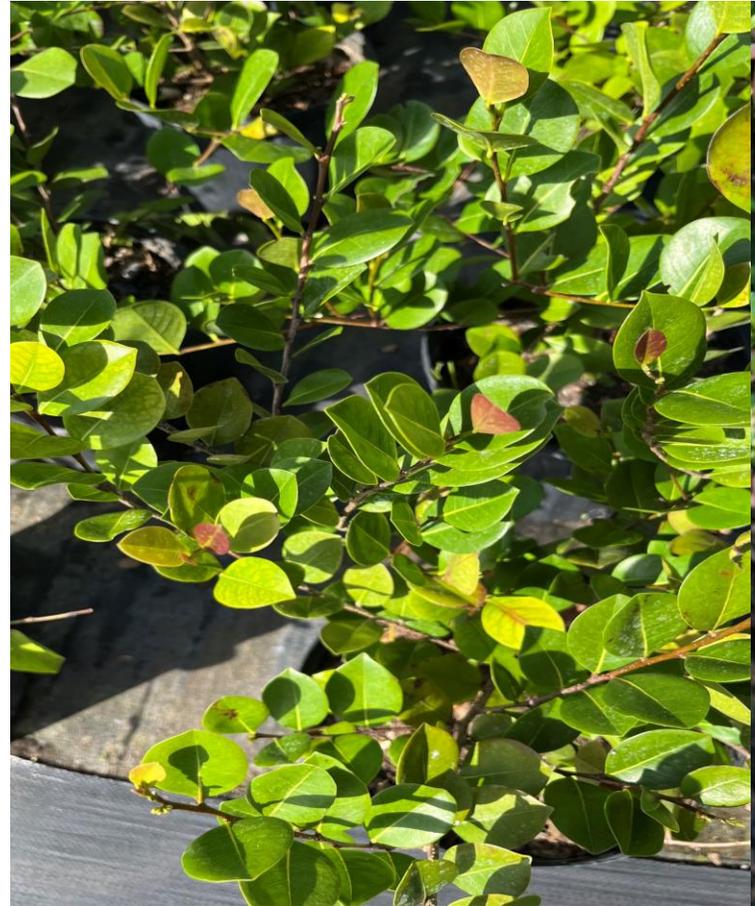


Flower of a spider lily plant

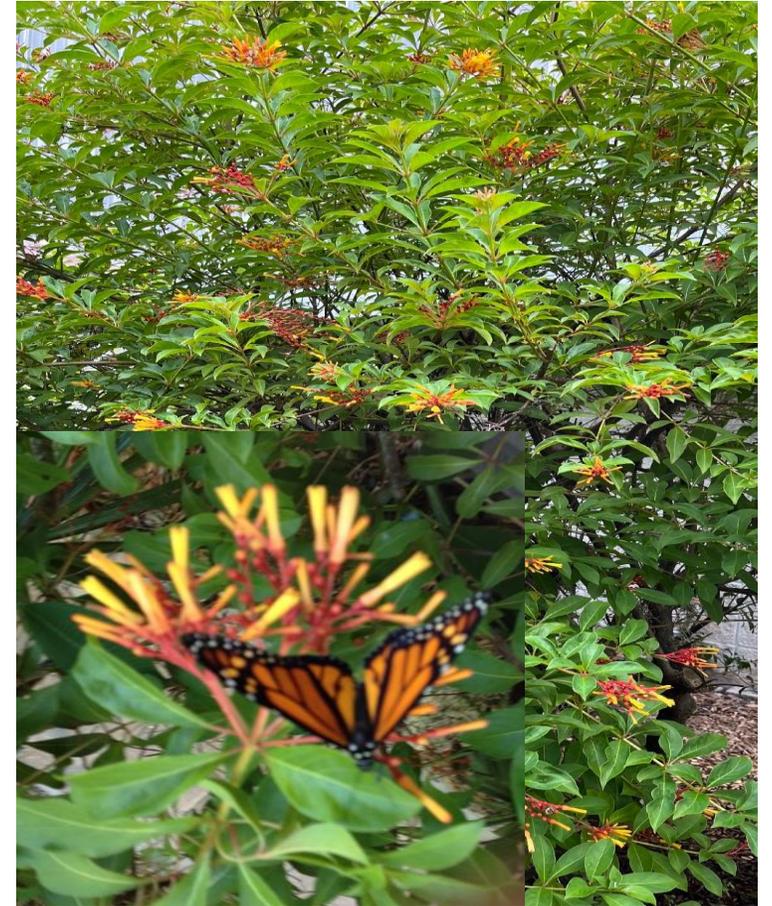
Shrubs that can be used for a privacy hedge



Walter's Viburnum



Cocoplum



Firebush

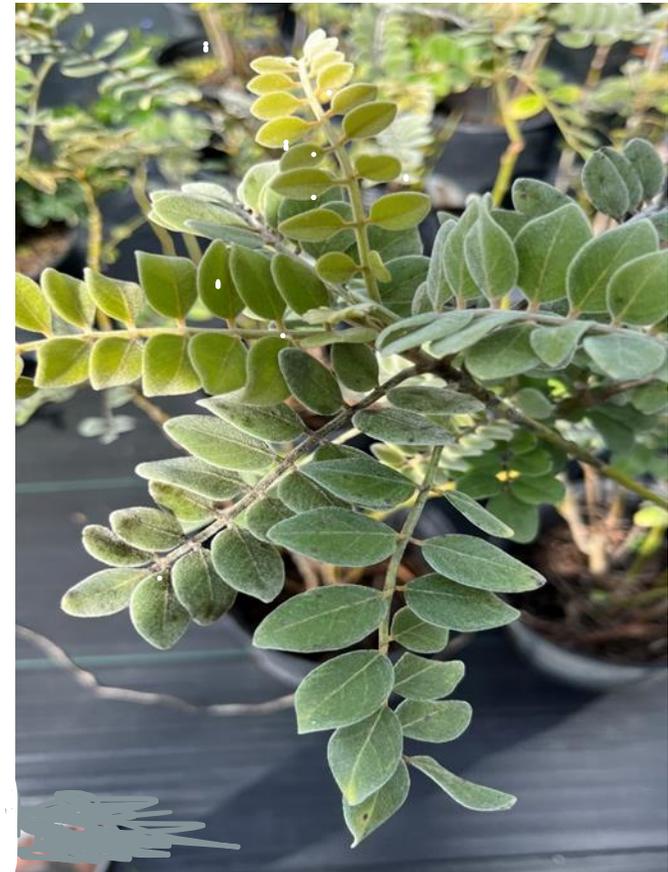
Shrubs continued



Tea Bush



Silver Buttonwood



Necklace Pod

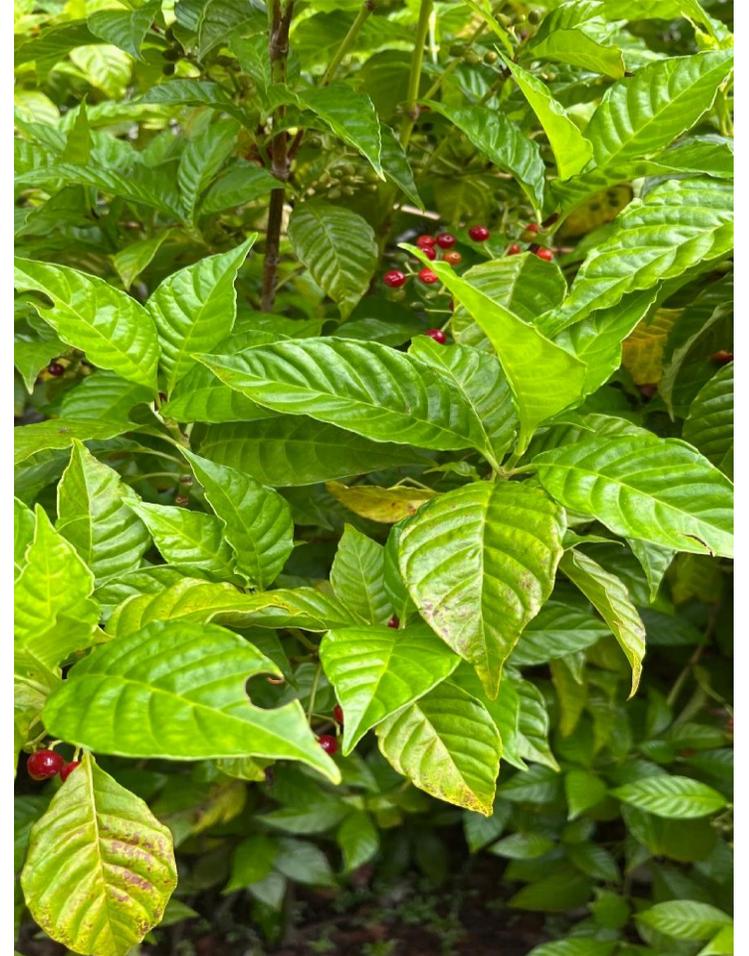
More Shrubs



Beauty Berry



Simpson Stopper



Wild Coffee

Palms



Cabbage Palm – many of these survived Hurricane Ian on Fort Myers Beach.



Silver Saw Palmetto – a low growing palm-like native plant.

It should be noted that coconut palms are not native to Florida.

Trees



Red Maple – this tree can grow to over 60 feet in height.



Orange Geiger – this is a smaller tree, generally under 30 feet in height, that has orange flowers attractive to hummingbirds.

Additional Trees



Longleaf Pine – this is a slow growing tree that can reach over 60 feet in height. Pine needles can be over 10 inches in length.



Gumbo Limbo – often called the tourist tree for the red bark that appears to be peeling off like the skin from a sunburned tourist.

What's the best way to plant native vegetation?

Follow the 9 Principles of Florida Friendly Landscaping

- 1) Planting the right plant/right place
- 2) Watering efficiently
- 3) Mulching
- 4) Recycling
- 5) Fertilizing appropriately
- 6) Using pesticides responsibly
- 7) Providing for wildlife
- 8) Preventing stormwater runoff
- 9) Protecting the waterfront

Sources of Information

- University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Science (UF/IFAS) <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/>
- Lee County Extension MGV Horticulture Help Desk - [#239-533-7505](tel:2395337505)
- Florida Native Plant Society website- www.fnps.org
- Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation – www.sccf.org
- Florida Wildflower Foundation website - www.floridawildflowers.com
- Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council website – www.fleppc.org
- Apps for cellular phones (Example – PictureThis, iNaturalist)

Where to purchase native plants?

1) All Native Plant Garden Center

in Lee County at 300 Center Road, Fort Myers, FL 33907 #239-939-9663

Open Daily: Monday to Saturday 9 AM to 5 PM, Sunday 10 AM to 3 PM

2) Local Native Plant Society Nursery (Coccoloba Chapter)

at River Oaks Preserve, 9541 Broadway Avenue E., Estero, FL 33928

Open Tuesdays and Sundays 9 AM – 1 PM

3) Native Landscapes and Garden Center

located at the Bailey Homestead Preserve, 1300 Periwinkle Way, Sanibel, FL

Open Tuesday – Thursday 10 AM – 3 PM

More locations to purchase native plants

4) ECHO Global Farm

17391 Durrance Rd, North Fort Myers, FL

Open Tuesday – Friday 9 AM – 4 PM, Saturday 9 AM – 3 PM

5) Edison and Ford Winter Estates Garden Center

2350 McGregor Blvd., Fort Myers, FL

Open 9 AM – 5 PM Daily

6) Bayshore Garden Center

5870 Bayshore Rd., North Fort Myers, FL

#239-543-1443 or email www.bayshoregardencenter.com

More locations where native plants are available

7) Calusa Nature Center

3450 Ortiz Avenue, Fort Myers, FL

#239-275-3435 or email www.calusanature.com

8) Hickory Hammock Native Tree Farm

13321 Peace Road, Fort Myers, FL

#239-894-8220 or #239-292-4462

9) The Nurseryman of SW Florida

22023 Tuckahoe Road, Alva, FL

#239-728-2122

More locations where native plants are available

10) Pine Forest Fruit and Flower Farm

6670 Chipper Lane, North Fort Myers, FL

#239-543-9910

11) Ace Hardware, Home Depot and Lowes Garden Centers

12) www.floridanativeplantseeds.com

WHOLESALE RESOURCES

1) Deep South Native Nursery at 2051 North Evalena Lane, North Fort Myers, FL #239-995-6886

2) Perkins Nursery at 2575 Case Road, LaBelle, FL #863-675-3006

In the future ...

There are approximately 3,300 plants native to Florida, however, only about 600 are currently in cultivation and available to help restore native habitat and add in to home and commercial landscapes. Construction of the Ruth Brooks Propagation Facility on Sanibel will increase the Native Landscape & Garden Center's plant-growing capacity by almost 30 percent. Rare and significant species will be targeted for propagation efforts. Stay tuned for project updates.

In closing this presentation, I hope all of you gained some useful information on native plants.

