



NEW MEMBER PACKAGE

An Introduction to the Florida Native Plant Society
and Florida Native Plants



Florida Native Plants by Kim Heise

Prepared by the FNPS Council of Chapters
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Welcome!

Welcome to the Florida Native Plant Society!

You are now part of a community of like-minded people working together for the benefit of Florida's native plants and to make a difference for butterflies and birds, the environment, and the beauty of natural Florida. This package provides an overview of useful information about the Society and Florida native plants. Topics are not covered in depth, but the basic information provided will help introduce you to the complexity of our mission and provide the knowledge needed to speak and advocate confidently about Florida native plants. You may already be knowledgeable about these topics, but perhaps one or more of them will catch your imagination, make you curious, and encourage you to use the resources listed in the last section to learn more and discover how you can make a difference.

Details about the organization, programs, and volunteer opportunities can be found on the FNPS website at www.FNPS.org. Check the website regularly for Society news, additions, and updated information.

Make the most of your membership by taking advantage of all the available benefits. Talk to your chapter about members-only events and discounts and see the **Benefits of Membership** list on the FNPS website.

Florida Native Plant Society

The Florida Native Plant Society (FNPS) was started in the summer of 1980 by a group of scientists, educators, and conservationists concerned about the loss of Florida's native plants and the introduction of non-native species overtaking natural areas.

FNPS Vision

We envision a future where people have a greater knowledge of and appreciation for Florida's natural environment and where diverse native plants, communities, and ecosystems thrive.

FNPS Mission

The Florida Native Plant Society's mission is to champion Florida's native plants and their habitats.

The Society fulfills this mission by sponsoring, promoting and supporting:

- Education about native plants, wildlife, and ecosystems;
- Local landscaping practices and policies that preserve Florida's native plant heritage;
- Conservation land acquisition;
- Native plant rescues and habitat restorations;
- Land management that preserves and enhances habitat suitability for native plants;
- Public policies that protect our native flora, especially rare species; and
- Research on native plant species.

FNPS Values

The Society's vision is to transform Florida into a State where:

- Learning – Expanding our collective knowledge of native plants, landscapes, and habitats in Florida.
- Accuracy – Anchoring our work in science, research, and fact-based information.
- Enthusiasm – Cultivating excitement and love for native plants and their habitats.
- Inclusivity – Becoming stronger as a whole because we welcome and embrace all people.
- Integrity – Holding ourselves consistently accountable to high standards in all our endeavors.

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- Stewardship – Responsibly acting as the voice for conserving and restoring native plants and their habitats.
- Sustainability – Operating in ways that minimize harm to our natural environment.
- Community – Fostering collaborations and nurturing productive relationships that connect to our native plant heritage and FNPS.

Society Organization and Mission Support

FNPS is a grassroots organization – the majority of mission support is provided by volunteers. Member volunteers serve at all levels of the organization to supplement the Society’s small paid staff in fulfilling the mission through a variety of programs and activities.

Membership dues and member donations are the Society’s largest source of revenue. Membership dues fund Chapters (26%), publishing the Palmetto (20%), Administrative Services for dues processing and membership tracking (16%), websites (x%), brochure printing (6%), insurance (x%), and other costs and support (X%). **NUMBERS NEED UPDATING.**

The “nuts and bolts” of mission support, as well as more information about the support areas outlined below, are detailed on the **FNPS website** and in the **FNPS Handbook**.

FNPS Chapters: the Heart of our Society

It is through our chapters that we provide most of our opportunities to participate in preserving Florida's native flora, opportunities to learn about our natural heritage and teach others, and the values inherent in interacting with others who have similar interests.

Many member benefits are provided by over 30 Chapters located throughout Florida. The FNPS website **Chapters Page** shows a map of where all the FNPS Chapters are located and includes links to their websites and contact information.

Chapter members include beginners and experts alike - all united in their interest in learning about and preserving Florida’s native plants. Each Chapter is unique and offers a local flavor, but most of them:

- Hold meetings with informative presentations and programs. Guests are always welcome.
- Organize educational field trips to interesting areas.
- Participate in local events as part of their outreach.
- Work on projects to showcase native plant landscaping and preserve native plants or habitats.
- Hold plant sales and/or plant swaps.
- Provide mentoring to Chapter members.

Member volunteers run the Chapters and plan, coordinate, and staff the activities. Read more about volunteer opportunities and benefits in the [Member Volunteers](#) section below.

Council of Chapters

Each Chapter has one Chapter Representative on the Council to provide their unique local perspective.

The Council of Chapters facilitates communication among the chapters and with the FNPS Board. It serves as a conduit of information that supports and strengthens the FNPS Chapters, and elevates local and regional issues and shares solutions throughout the Society.

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FNPS Board of Directors and Committees

Through its committee focus, the FNPS Board and committees support and guide the organization and mission fulfillment. Chaired by FNPS Board members, each committee also welcomes members to participate in their meetings.

Communications. The Communications committee maintains and updates the FNPS website (including the native plant database), provides technical support for individual Chapter websites, the membership database, FNPS social media platforms, and other sites, and establishes branding standards for all FNPS communications.

Annual Conference. The spring FNPS Annual Conference is Florida's premier event focusing on the preservation, conservation and restoration of our natural lands, ecosystems, and local communities. Speaker presentations, workshops, field trips, and innumerable networking opportunities are the highlights.

Conservation. The conservation efforts of the Society to protect individual species (especially rare, endemic, or keystone species), native plant communities, and Florida's biodiversity are promoted, supported, monitored, assisted, and focused by the Conservation Committee.

Annual Conservation Grants, funded by donations, provide important benefits to the flora of Florida. See more about FNPS conservation efforts and projects at <https://www.fnps.org/what-we-do/conservation>.

Education & Outreach. The FNPS Education Committee develops resources, advocacy materials, and information to provide accurate, clear and relevant educational materials to members, land managers, homeowners, and landscape professionals. Printed copies of FNPS *Brochures* are sent to Chapters for distribution to members and at outreach events.

Landscaping. The Landscaping committee provides resources and information to encourage environmentally sustainable landscaping with Florida native plants. The committee also works with Chapters to provide Landscape Industry professionals, Homeowner Associations, and City/County government staff with resources to advocate for the inclusion of native plants and exclusion of non-native, invasive plants from landscape ordinance plant lists.

Landscape Awards recognize excellence in native plant landscapes using criteria established by the committee. The Landscaping Committee establishes criteria, manages the application process, judges the submitted applications, and presents the awards. See more at <https://www.fnps.org/what-we-do/landscaping>.

Policy & Legislation. The Policy and Legislation Committee works through advocacy and effective coordination with other non-profit organizations, governmental agencies and elected officials. While the focus is on high-level issues with state-wide and/or federal implications on native plants conservation, the committee also provides guidance and assistance to chapters in support of their efforts to influence mission-related local policy and decision-making. See more about Policy and Legislation work, including lobbying on state policies and effective citizen action at <https://www.fnps.org/what-we-do/policy>.

A key feature of FNPS and Chapter outreach is to make members and Florida residents aware of state legislation and state and regional-scale issues. Sign up for **FNPS EcoAction Alerts** to receive notifications about issues of significance to Florida's native plants and native plant communities.

Science & Research. FNPS is one of the few organizations that funds scientific research on Florida native plants. With funding and volunteers, FNPS supports research needed to better understand the distribution, genetics and management needs of native plants. See more about FNPS research projects and Research Grants at <https://www.fnps.org/what-we-do/research>.

Many FNPS members bring botanical knowledge and years of experience to research projects, but also trains and relies on volunteer Citizen Scientists to conduct needed studies. See more about FNPS citizen science projects at <https://www.fnps.org/what-we-do/citizen-science>.

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Staff/Administration

FNPS has no centralized offices. A small administrative staff keeps FNPS running. Paid and contract staff include an Executive Director, Director of Communications and Programming, Director of North Florida Programs, Bookkeeper, Administrative Services, and part-time consultants.

This staff manages finances, memberships, insurance, contracts, grants, fundraising, and many other facets of FNPS business. Administrative Services (info@fnps.org) receives communications and payments and responds to questions and requests from Chapters and individual members.

A consultant editor produces the quarterly Palmetto (with articles on subjects of interest to members) and staff publishes the bi-monthly Sabal Minor (Society and Chapter news and announcements and articles on FNPS activities and policies) to provide regular communication.

FNPS staff and volunteer speakers provide a valuable educational resource for members with live on-line Lunch & Learn and FNPS After-Hours programs. Links for the live programs are emailed to members. Recorded programs provide a rich educational resource which can be viewed at the **FNPS YouTube Playlist** or with links from the FNPS website.

Partners and Supporting Organizations

FNPS partners with many business and non-profit organizations to promote and collaborate on FNPS's mission. In 2022 FNPS formalized its longtime partnership with the Florida Wildflower Foundation to collaborate on projects compatible with their missions while continuing to pursue their own goals.

Land management partners work with FNPS to manage properties with rare native plant species. Land-owner partners also allow FNPS to rescue native plants from properties being developed and relocate them to areas of public ownership where they have the potential to increase biodiversity and exist in perpetuity.

Member Volunteers

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." Margaret Mead

As a volunteer organization FNPS relies on members to further the mission – locally and State-wide. We need a collective effort to effect change and further the FNPS mission. No matter what skills you have (or want to develop), FNPS and your Chapter can use your help and find you a role that suits your time availability and interests. Your involvement will not only benefit the organization, it will benefit you!

FNPS recognizes members and chapters for outstanding contributions to the FNPS mission through Palmetto Awards. **Green Palmetto, Silver Palmetto, and Mentor Awards** are given annually to encourage and acknowledge contributions to the conservation of natural areas and native plants and educating to these objectives.

Florida Native Plants

What is a Florida Native Plant?

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

– Definition of "Florida native plant" as adopted by the Florida Native Plant Society.

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In her book “Climate-Wise Landscaping”, author Ginny Stibolt defines native plants in a way that speaks more plainly to habitat value. Per Ginny, “Native plants are species that have no known history of importation and have lived in a place long enough to develop the particular relationships with other species that constitute the working of nature.”

There are about 3,300 Florida native species (out of about 4,800 listed plant species) documented in the Atlas of Florida Plants (see [Plant Databases](#)), a searchable database of plants in wild populations in the state of Florida. The Atlas provides a scientifically-verified record of the plant species that grow in Florida, their natural ranges, and their native status. There are 418 endangered plant species in Florida and of these, 104 are endemic – meaning they occur only here and nowhere else in the world. In fact, Florida has more threatened and endangered native plant species than any state except California.

Why Do Native Plants Matter?

Florida’s native plants and their native plant ecosystems provide us with clean air, drinking water, stable soils, protection from floods and rising seas, recreation, and year-round beauty. In addition to these ecosystem services, native plants also provide shelter and food for birds, butterflies, pollinators, and other wildlife.

“Learn More” Favorite: Read Doug Tallamy’s “Nature’s Best Hope” (see [Books](#)).

Florida Native Plant Communities

A natural community (also referred to as an ecosystem or habitat) is an interactive assemblage of organisms (plants, animals, fungus, and microorganisms), their physical environment, and the natural processes that affect them. Factors such as soil type, bedrock type, moisture level, slope, climate, and the natural disturbance regime (especially fire) play a key role in determining which organisms are able to survive and how they have adapted over thousands of years to form complex, living systems. Plant communities are the “floral” components of natural communities.

Drier upland ecosystems include hardwood and pine forests, sandhill, scrub, dry prairie, and rocklands. Wetlands (swamps, marshes, ponds, lakes and river floodplains) hold, filter and slowly release rainwater into the aquifers that are central and southern Florida's sole fresh water source.

Compared to other states, Florida has a rich variety of native plant communities. FNAI, the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (see [Internet Resources](#)), currently recognizes 81 different Florida plant community types, 43 of which are land-based. Native plant communities are distinct, but share characteristics and blend in transition from one to another. Natural communities are named for the characteristic plant species within them or for characteristic environmental features and are categorized based on species composition, location and elevation, soil types and moisture levels, and the site’s relationship with fire.

Rapid development, invasive exotics, and fire suppression threaten many of the Florida’s diverse and unique plants and plant communities through habitat loss and/or degradation. Fire suppression and outright exclusion from wild places is a major cause of habitat degradation. Natural burn cycles provide maintenance by promoting nutrient recycling and reducing competition, thus improving both plant and wildlife habitat. Some species require fire for seed germination.

Plant communities vary by region. You can learn about some of your region’s native plant communities in the Good Citizen Guide Inserts (see [Brochures](#)). You can get to know your region’s plant communities by going on field trips.

“Learn More” Favorite: Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) “Guide to the Natural Communities of Florida” (see [Internet Resources](#)).

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Terminology

Learning the plant terms below will help you develop an accurate vocabulary to use in conversations about native plants as well as introduce you to some of the concepts and issues important for appreciating and advocating for Florida native plants. Some of the definitions below refer only to native plants, while others refer to non-natives.

Aggressive Plants are simply plants that grow and reproduce rapidly and are difficult to control. Aggressive plants spread faster than preferred and into areas where they are not wanted. Interestingly, a plant may be aggressive in one area of a garden or neighborhood, and well-behaved in another. Both native and non-native plants can be aggressive. Note that aggressive is not the same as invasive – confusing these two words is probably the most common misuse of terms.

Biodiversity refers to the variety of life in the world or in a particular habitat or ecosystem.

Commercially Exploited Plants are native plant species that are subject to being removed in significant numbers from native habitats in the state and sold or transported for sale. There are 9 species on the current FDACS list (see [Internet Resources](#)).

Cultivar refers to a variety of a single plant species that has been produced in cultivation by selective breeding for desirable characteristics such as color or flower shape. Cultivars and clones are produced to retain a single set of genetic composition. Cultivars often have floral or leaf traits different from wild plants in ways that may compromise their ability to support pollinators and other wildlife.

Ecosystem refers to a biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment.

Endangered native plant species are in imminent danger of becoming extinct. The Florida Endangered Plant Advisory Council (EPAC) reviews the list annually. There are 449 State-listed species and 54 Federal-listed species on the current FDACS list (see [Internet Resources](#)).

Endemic Florida native plants are those whose natural range is restricted to Florida or an area within Florida. Many Florida native plants are native to other states as well. Most endemic plants in Florida are associated with dry (xeric) habitats such as sandhill, scrub, scrubby flatwoods and pine rocklands.

Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ is a term used by several Florida agencies to encompass best management practices supporting water conservation, sensible use of fertilizer, planting plants appropriate to the sites they are being grown in, and avoidance of invasive species.

Florida-Friendly plant lists include both native and non-native species, but Florida-Friendly does not mean "native". The non-native plants on the lists are there by virtue of the fact that they do not spread outside of where they are planted. The caution for wildlife gardeners is that non-native Florida-Friendly plants are often listed because of aesthetics rather than habitat value.

Hybrid refers to a cross between two or more species achieved by cross-pollinating. Plant species are often intentionally hybridized to improve disease resistance, size, flowering, or other desirable characteristics.

Invasive Plants are almost always non-native/exotic plants that are naturalized and grow so profusely that they take over and damage natural areas causing environmental or economic harm. Being non-native does not mean that a plant is necessarily invasive, and not all naturalized plants become invasive. Unless listed, plants should not be referred to as invasive. Of the more than 20,000 plants that have been introduced to Florida, fewer than 300 are categorized as invasive. Learn more in the [Invasive Plants](#) section below.

Monoculture is the cultivation of a single plant species in a given area. Lawns are monocultures. While they can provide a stunning visual impact and simplify maintenance, single-species landscapes lack biodiversity and are more vulnerable to pests, diseases, and droughts.

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Naturalized plants are non-native plant species that are now growing on their own in nature. Naturalized plants are able to grow and produce a new generation without human aid such as watering, fertilizing, dividing, pest control or weed control. Not all non-native species introduced into Florida are tough enough to naturalize. And becoming naturalized does not make a non-native species native.

Non-Native, Exotic, Alien, and Introduced are all terms used to refer to plants whose natural range does not include Florida. These species have been introduced to Florida intentionally or accidentally.

Noxious Weed refers to any plant that is a serious agricultural threat in Florida, has a negative impact on endangered, threatened or commercially exploited plant species, or is a naturalized plant that disrupts naturally occurring native plant communities. Noxious weeds are listed by FDACS (see [Internet Resources](#)).

Opportunistic native plants are able to take advantage of disturbance to the soil or existing vegetation to spread quickly and out-compete other plants on a disturbed site. The destruction of natural habitat can open the door for opportunistic species.

Permaculture mimics patterns and principles found in nature. It promotes a diversity of plants for ecosystem sustainability, pollinator support, soil health, and water conservation.

Protected species are plants that are legally protected. Legal protection may be at the federal or state level and is afforded to plants on the lists maintained by The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. State and Federal listed (regulated) plants fall into three categories: Endangered, Threatened, or Commercially Exploited. Under Florida's Plant Protection Law it is illegal to dig up or destroy any of the plants on the regulated plant list without appropriate permits and permissions.

Threatened native plant species are in rapid decline and likely to become endangered. The Florida Endangered Plant Advisory Council (EPAC) reviews the list annually. There are 118 State-listed species and 14 Federal-listed species on the on the current FDACS list (see [Internet Resources](#)).

Weeds are, in the broadest sense, simply plants that are not valued where they are growing. Note that many "weeds" are valuable nectar sources or larval host plants.

Invasive Plants

Invasive plants (invasives) represent a significant demonstrated threat to the native plants and native plant communities that the FNPS organization and FNPS members work to preserve and protect because they disrupt natural communities and decrease the biodiversity of our natural areas.

While some non-native plant species have a minor impact on local ecosystems, invasive species have dire environmental and economic effects. Invasive plant species can permanently eliminate native species, diminishing Florida's natural biodiversity. Invasives affect wildlife by destroying their food sources, eliminating cover and nesting sites, and completely filling waterways, forcing animals to move or die out. Invasive plants are also costing Floridians a lot of money. In 2005 nearly 80 million taxpayer dollars were spent to remove or control them, especially if they are affecting agriculture or recreation.

Invasive plant lists are compiled and maintained by both Federal and State agencies. Plant species that have caused documented ecological damage and are altering native plant communities by displacing native species, changing community structures or ecological functions, or hybridizing with natives are categorized as *Category I*. Plant species that have increased in abundance or frequency but have not yet altered Florida plant communities are categorized as *Category II*. FISC, the Florida Invasive Species Council (see [Internet Resources](#)), maintains the lists for our State. The lists are revised every two years based on exhaustive studies by professional botanists and other experts.

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Unfortunately, many invasive plants have been widely planted in home landscapes and are still sold to uninformed gardeners. Even though they may seem controlled in your yard, removing them eliminates their spread (by wind, birds, and other vectors) to natural areas.

Once invasive plants have found their way into your yard it usually requires persistence and an effective removal plan to eradicate them. For information about control methods (mechanical, chemical, or biological) and proper disposal of removed invasive plant material (do not dispose of as yard waste, burn or compost) start with your local UF IFAS Extension Office and/or your regional Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area office (see [Internet Resources](#)).

You can help control invasives by learning to identify invasive plants in your area, checking your yard regularly, reporting infestations, and by volunteering for habitat restoration workdays to remove invasive plants in natural areas. Tools, including invasives lists, distribution maps, and identification and management information are available online (see [Internet Resources](#)).

“Learn More” Favorite: Watch the FNPS Lunch & Learn – “Noxious Weeds of Florida” with Patti Anderson, PhD (see [Videos](#)).

Plant Identification

Being able to identify plants help the gardener differentiate friend from foe to effectively weed, while on hikes and field trips it helps you understand what mature plants look like and identify what plants grow together in different habitats.

To make sure you have a common language when doing research and speaking with other native plant experts (and beginners) you need to become familiar with scientific names. Using common names can lead to misunderstandings since a Florida native plant may have multiple (regional) common names or share a common name with a non-native plant or plant native to a different State.

Scientific name (in italics or underlined): very helpful to research a specific plant

- *Genus* (always capitalized) - group of related plants with features or ancestry or both in common
- *species* (never capitalized) – can be followed by subspecies (subsp.), variety name (var.), referring to all species (spp.), unknown species (sp.), cultivar name (in single quotes), or hybrid (x)

Most databases (see [Plant Databases](#)) have both common and scientific names. Note that scientific names can change due to new taxonomic research.

Learning to identify plants is a matter of practice and repetition - learning a plant requires as many as 15 to 27 repetitions. It's easiest to identify plants in bloom or with seeds or fruit set and hardest to identify young plants and seedlings. Tips for learning how to identify plants:

- Find a mentor
- Go on Field Trips to natural areas and native plant nurseries
- Volunteer for workdays (community gardens, rescues, invasive removal, etc.)
- Focus on a few plants at a time – it is easier to learn in small doses
- Learn plant families, leaf shapes, etc.
- Use reference books (see [Books](#))
- Browse databases (see [Plant Databases](#))
- Monitor and browse identifications in apps like iNaturalist
- Monitor and browse identifications on social media
- Keep a list

Plant identification apps (see [Apps](#)) can usually help identify the genus of a plant, but identifying the species often requires additional research.

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"Learn More" Favorite: Watch the FNPS Conference presentation "[Plant ID for Beginners](#)".

"Learn More" Favorite References: Walter Kinglsey Taylor's "The Guide to Florida Wildflowers" and "A Guide to Florida Grasses", and Gil Nelson's "The Trees of Florida" (see [Books](#)).

Landscaping with Native Plants

"...we humans have disrupted natural habitats in so many ways and in so many places that the future of our nation's biodiversity is dim unless we start to share the places in which we live --our cities and, to an even greater extent, our suburbs -- with the plants and animals that evolved there"

— Douglas Tallamy

You can find gardens with good native plant displays, ranging from work by FNPS members to large, professionally designed and managed destination gardens, on the FNPS website [Native Gardens](#) map.

Why Landscape with Florida Native Plants?

There are many good reasons to grow native plants. In the settings they have adapted to over many thousands of years, native plants are less affected by Florida's droughts, hurricanes, sandy nutrient-poor soils, wet soils, hot sun, unpredictable cold snaps, floods, wildfire, and salty sea breezes. When you use native plants, you can have beautiful landscapes – and play a vital role in protecting Florida's environment. It is estimated that even a small landscape will benefit wildlife if it contains at least 70% native plants.

Less water and yard work. Florida native plants, planted in appropriate settings, don't need pampering. Natives grow quite well on rainfall, so they help conserve water because you can greatly reduce and sometimes eliminate the need to irrigate. Native plants do require maintenance, but not weekly mowing or annual replanting.

Fewer chemicals and less run-off. Florida native plants, planted in appropriate settings, eliminate or minimize fertilizer and pesticide use. Plants that grow naturally in Florida's nutrient-poor soils do so without the need for fertilizer. Because native plants have evolved natural defenses against Florida's diseases and pests, problems are usually minimal in native plants. Less fertilizer and pesticides means less run-off into our beautiful lakes and protects our water resources.

More butterflies, birds and other wildlife. Native plants provide critical sources of food, shelter and nesting areas for wildlife. Everything about native plants - from the shape and structure of flowers to the chemical content of the leaves to the leaf growth and bloom time - correlate with pollinator, bird and animal needs and cycles (such as migration and nesting season).

A yard that looks like "Real Florida." By planting native, we can preserve the character of the Florida landscape, put back and preserve some of what is rapidly disappearing, and celebrate the unique natural beauty of the "Real Florida."

A landscape that survives seasonal residents' summer absence. Because Florida native plants can survive without much human intervention, they make great sense for seasonal residents.

"Learn More" Favorite: Read Ginny Stibolt's "Why Native Landscapes are Important" PDF (see [Brochures](#))

How Do I Choose Native Plants for My Yard?

Even with native plants, "Right Plant, Right Place" is important. Not every Florida native plant is appropriate for every Florida yard. Florida native plants evolved with and are adapted to a variety of conditions from the panhandle to the Florida Keys, different plant communities, and different soil, sun and water requirements. Do your own research, know what each plant requires, and choose plants for more than just

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aesthetics. Choosing the right plants and planting them in appropriate settings will reduce frustrations and increase your enjoyment in gardening. Information from the [FNPS Natives for Landscaping](#) plant database and other sources will help you make a list of plants suitable for your yard.

What your natural plant community was or should be. Your property is occupying what once was a native ecosystem. If your property was formerly sandhill, for example, that knowledge can be a basis for selecting plants that are adapted to your yard's conditions. Just about every environmental challenge you might encounter in your yard has been "solved" in nature - the natural landscape provides a ready model for natural beauty that works.

Planting zone. Florida spans seven USDA planting or hardiness zones from Zone 8A in the north Panhandle to Zone 11 in the Florida Keys. Planting zones are based on the average lowest temperatures, so they indicate winter survivability.

Natural range. The [FNPS Natives for Landscaping](#) database shows a map of the natural range for each plant. If your property is located in a highlighted county on the map, then the plant is probably appropriate for your location. If climate change is a concern, especially with long-lived trees, consider species whose natural range extends south of your location.

Once you have a list, other considerations play a role in final plant selection and placement in your yard:

Sun requirements. Sunlight powers photosynthesis to fuel plant growth, repair, and flowering. Plant databases provide the information you'll need to locate different plant species where they will receive optimal sunlight. Making a sun map of your yard is a good place to start.

- Full sun – Plants need at least 6 hours of direct sun daily
- Part sun – Plants thrive with between 3 and 6 hours of direct sun per day
- Part shade – Plants require between 3 and 6 hours of sun per day, but need protection from intense mid-day sun
- Full shade – Plants require less than 3 hours of direct sun per day

Plants may survive in less than ideal sun conditions, but may grow differently (for example, leggy and leaning, not flowering, or growing larger leaves) if not getting enough sun. Note that new plants may need extra shade while they are getting established.

Moisture requirements. Water (soil moisture) needs vary by plant from always wet (aquatic) to extremely dry (drought tolerant). Soil type (sand, clay, loam) affects water retention. Plant databases provide the moisture tolerance ranges you'll need to locate the plants where the soil moisture is appropriate or easily provide supplemental water. Grouping plants by water needs makes adjusting any irrigation or hand-watering easier. Note that new plants may need extra water while they are getting established. Plants may need extra water during extreme heat and drought periods, which may increase due to climate change.

Soil requirements. Soil pH ranges from 0 (extremely acid) to 14 (extremely alkaline) with 7 being neutral and circum-neutral being 6.5 to 7.5. Your local UF/IFAS Extension Office (see [Internet Resources](#)) can help you get a detailed soil analysis or you can use an inexpensive soil pH test kits to get approximate readings.

Phenology. A plant's biology determines its life cycle and how a plant will look throughout its life. Understanding the natural timing for germination, flowering, and dormancy allow selection for seasonal color and winter look (evergreen or deciduous). Phenology also dictates seasonal maintenance needs.

Life span. Annuals flower and produce seed in one growing season. Biennials have a life cycle that takes two years. Short-lived perennials generally live for three to five years, while long-lived perennials can live for an exceptionally long time before they decline.

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Growth pattern. Knowing how a plant grows will allow you to select plants that locate them with plenty of room to achieve their natural size and shape. Mature size, spread, reseeding, growth rate, and tolerance to pruning are some of the considerations in determining how a plant will fit your landscape vision.

Other considerations. Plant characteristics such as thorns and spines, toxicity, salt tolerance In coastal areas, and maintenance requirements are other considerations for choosing and locating plants.

Requirements for the types of wildlife you want to attract. If supporting wildlife is your goal, make sure you are providing all the requirements for the wildlife you want to attract. Butterflies, skippers and moths need both nectar and larval host plants - Lepidoptera lay their eggs only on specific native larval host plants because they are the only plants that can sustain their caterpillars. Some bees need hollow stems to effectively overwinter or bare earth to nest. Different pollinators require different flower sizes, shapes, and colors. Birds need shelter and nesting sites in addition to food sources.

You can use the searchable [Plant Databases](#) to make or refine your list of appropriate plants for your yard. Many allow you to select your County and choose site conditions and special interest/needs to generate a plant list. [Books](#) and [Brochures](#) are also great resources if they include plants for your location.

“Learn More” Favorite References: Read Craig Huegel’s “Native Florida Plants for Shady Landscapes” and “Native Plant Landscaping for Florida Wildlife” and Stacey Matrazzo and Nancy Bisset’s “Native Plants for Florida Gardens (see [Books](#)).

Where to Find Native Plants

Get plants from reputable sources and make sure you’re getting plants from Florida native stock. Many Florida native plants are native to other areas as well, and plants grown from stock from another state may not be adapted to Florida. Also, be wary of cultivars and hybrids as they may not perform the same way as the original native. Note that the big box stores buy plants regionally, so even if a plant is labeled “native” it most likely comes from non-Florida seed stock. The source of seed stock may also be unknown with online and mail order plants, so check before you buy.

No plant should be taken from the wild, from roadsides, or from any private or public property without the land owner’s permission. Many preserves and parks have policies specifically banning collection of plants and sometimes seeds and flowers.

Native Plant Nurseries. Find a retail native plant nursery or native plant landscape professional near you at the **FANN website**. You can search for native plant nurseries in your area or use the Plants tab to search for nurseries that have a specific plant. Native nurseries are not only the most reliable source for native plants. In addition they usually have knowledgeable staff that can provide advice and can answer questions. Native nurseries may also provide landscaping services, and some provide maintenance services as well.

Chapter Plant Sales and Plant and Seed Swaps. Most chapters organize or participate in native plant sales and swaps, so check the calendars of your chapter and the chapters in adjoining areas.

Order Florida Wildflower Seeds. The Florida Wildflowers Growers Cooperative sells seeds in small packets or in larger quantities at <http://www.floridawildflowers.com/>. Note that the ideal time to sow many native plant seeds is in the fall/winter.

Design

Florida native plants are suitable for both structured and naturalized landscapes. In urban neighborhoods and subdivisions with HOAs, a wild garden can be seen as an unkempt landscape. The neighbors that admire their wide expanses of green lawns on the weekdays, and work on it all weekend, may not appreciate

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the wild patch you have started for the butterflies, or the brush pile for the snakes. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but we want to get along and change minds. Some tips:

- Frame the naturalized area. Keep the areas around the naturalized area mowed – mowed paths and borders to provide a neat appearance. This will show the neighbors that you are taking care of the place and not just letting it go.
- Plant colorful flowers and plan your garden with an eye to different textures, shades of green.
- Planting in odd-numbered groups create a more natural and visually appealing look.
- Give the naturalized area a boundary. Rocks, landscape timbers, railroad ties, fences (especially a natural-looking rustic wooded fence) give the naturalized area the appearance of being planned and tended.
- Keep the plants in the front of the house neat and trimmed.
- Provide focal points. Use an arbor, bench, lawn ornaments, birdhouses, signs, or other decorative items.

Site preparation, soil testing, weed removal, proper planting techniques, and mulching are all topics to learn about in planning a native landscape. And don't expect instant gratification or forget patience! Many native plants grow slowly, especially during the first few years.

Even if you live in an HOA, you can still plant natives. To find out more and see examples of landscape designs, visit the **Florida Native Plant Society Villages Chapter**.

"Learn More" Favorite: Read Ginny Stibolt's "A Step-by-Step Guide to a Florida Native Yard" (see [Books](#)).

"Learn More" Favorites: Watch the FNPS Lunch & Learn Landscape Design series (see [Videos](#)).

Plant Care and Maintenance

Even native plants require care and maintenance, although the timing and mix of maintenance tasks is different for native plants. Weeding, transplanting and replanting, pruning, edging, mowing, refreshing mulch, and watering are all necessary to keep native plants healthy and your landscape looking cared for.

The difference is frequency. "Traditional" landscapes rely on routine monthly tasks like mowing, edging, and pruning. Native plant maintenance can be concentrated in seasonal tasks about four times a year. Native plants respond better when maintenance is timed to seasons and plants' lifecycles. Pruning after the risk of a freeze is past or when fire would occur takes advantage of their natural cycle of regeneration.

Weeding is a necessary ongoing task. Weeding removes invasives and exotics that find their way into our yards or spring from the seedbank and plants that spread where they are not wanted or out-compete wanted plants. The good news is that weeding can be a meditative activity and provides the opportunity to observe up close what goes on in nature from season to season.

The amount of maintenance required depends on the types of plant species and on whether you want your landscape more manicured or naturalistic. Some yards may have a more manicured front yard to conform to community restrictions and a more naturalistic back yard to support wildlife. Spreading groundcovers and wildflowers require more frequent maintenance. Trees and shrubs don't necessarily require maintenance every year.

The maintenance of individual native plant species is not well documented. Such information would be a useful addition to plant databases.

"Learn More" Favorites: Watch "how to" maintenance videos (see [Videos](#)).

"Learn More" Favorites: Read Ginny Stibolt's "The Art of Maintaining a Florida Native Landscape" (see [Books](#)) and watch the FNPS Conference presentation [Growing, Planting and Maintaining Native Plants](#)

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Resources

FNPS Web Sites

<https://www.fnps.org/> contains news and information about the organization and useful resources in addition to the plant database.

Chapter websites are great resources for local information. You can search for Chapters by zip code.

Books

The FNPS website has an extensive list of books about native plants, native plant communities, and the creatures that depend on them at <https://www.fnps.org/resources/books>. You can see information about the listed books and click on the cover to go to Amazon for purchasing.

Some Chapters maintain libraries their members can borrow from, sell book lists on their websites, and/or sell books at events and plant sales.

Many books are also available to borrow through local libraries.

Plant Databases

Florida Native Plant Society - <https://www.fnps.org>

Search a native plant database by county, name, light, water, and soil to find plants appropriate for your yard by clicking the “Native Plants” tab. Find your local FNPS Chapter and membership information and join. <https://www.fnps.org/plants/> is a valuable resource for horticultural information on native plants. A common saying in this field is “Right plant, right place”; FNPS.org’s plant finder tool tells you what the right place is for the plant you have your eye on, or you can provide your site conditions for a list of plants that should do well for you.

Atlas of Florida Plants - <https://florida.plantatlas.usf.edu>

The Atlas provides a useful record of the plant species that grow in Florida, their natural ranges, and their native status. Search the database by common or scientific names. Use this site to compare a specimen to a known species (several photos are provided for a good majority of species) and to get specific habitat information and a distribution map. You can view the herbarium specimens (a library of book-pressed plant specimens, identified by professionals) and relevant data from USF.

The Atlas is a joint effort by the Institute for Systematic Botany, the University of South Florida, and the USF Water Institute. Although the aim is for the database to be comprehensive, it includes only vouchered plant specimens and the Atlas compilers acknowledge that some counties and areas of Florida are still poorly documented.

Florida Association of Native Nurseries - <https://www.plantrealflorida.org>

Find sources for specific native plants or local retail native nurseries and native landscapers. Also native plant communities

FANN.org is the Florida Association of Native Nurseries. It’s often difficult to source native plants, and when gardening for wildlife you can’t trust big box stores to carry unpoisoned plants or plants that come from Floridian genetics. Native nurseries are the way to go, and FANN can save you a lot of trouble and wasted gas by telling you which nurseries stock what.

Institute for Regional Conservation - <https://regionalconservation.org>

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“Natives for Your Neighborhood” provides reliable species and habitat information and soil types for South Florida.

Wild South Florida - <https://wildsouthflorida.com/plant.index.html>

A guide to Flowering Plants of South Florida.

Audubon - <https://www.audubon.org/native-plants>

Audubon provides a searchable database of plants for birds. Search by zip code for the best plants for birds in your area and get an emailed list of your search results. The site also has tips on creating bird-friendly habitats.

Internet Resources

Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas (CISMA) - <https://www.floridainvasives.org/cismas/>

The CISMA site contains Invasive Plant lists (some by County), identification guides, and other links and information.

Early Detection and Distribution Mapping System (EDDMapS) - <https://www.eddmaps.org/about/>

This is a web-based mapping system for documenting invasive species and pest distribution. Site provides tracking, interactive maps, reporting, and management information.

Florida Wildflower Foundation (FWF) - <https://flawildflowers.org>

The Resources section of the website contains excellent Plant Profiles, downloadable Brochures and Guides, Classroom Resources, and tips on how to grow native wildflowers.

Florida Invasive Species Council (FISC) - <https://floridainvasivespecies.org/>

Site contains information and current lists of non-native plants that are invasive in Florida's natural areas. Formerly known as the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council (FLEPPC), this site contains scientific, educational, and technical information.

Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services (FDACS) - <https://www.fdacs.gov/>

Site contains information and lists of Florida's Endangered Plants (Threatened, Endangered, and Commercially Exploited) and Noxious Weeds. FDACS also provides information about poisonous plants, pests, and plants for bees, educational materials, a coloring book, and provides plant identification services.

Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) - <https://www.fnai.org/>

This site includes natural community information, a database of current information on Florida's rarest species, an inventory of the state's conservation land holdings, and information about invasive species and their impact on Florida's rare species and ecosystems.

Florida Invasive Species Council - <https://floridainvasivespecies.org/>

View the FISC invasive species plant list, learn about definitions and proper terminology, and find links to databases and other useful resources (including the Florida Invasive Plant species mobile field guide).

Soil Web Survey - <https://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/>

Provides guides to soil information and soil data. Use the website or the mobile phone app to identify a location's soil type (and habitat).

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University of Florida (UF/IFAS) - <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/>

Site contains all manner of information on horticulture, invasive species management, and a wealth of other information. One can even use their digital collections to view historic aerials of a site to get an idea of what a place was like prior to human development as explained in the Historical Ecology Lunch & Learns on the FNPS YouTube channel. Note that plant lists includes non-native Florida Friendly plants.

The site can be unwieldy for those that are new to this. A useful trick is to Google what you are after followed by “site:<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/>”. Doing this tells google to only search that domain.

Find your local UF IFAS Extension Office (<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/find-your-local-office/>)

There Were No Fences - <https://werenofences.blogspot.com/>

Craig Huegel’s blog has articles and advice based on decades of experience about many topics, myths, and trends relevant to people growing and landscaping with native plants.

Native Florida Wildflowers - <https://hawthornhillwildflowers.blogspot.com/>

This blog by Craig Huegel focuses on growing Florida’s wildflowers in a home landscape and contains useful firsthand information about many plant species based on his experience in this central Florida landscape.

Green Gardening Matters - <https://greengardeningmatters.blogspot.com/p/green-resources.html>

A collection of articles and posts by Ginny Stibolt.

National Wildlife Federation - <https://www.nwf.org/garden>

You can certify your habitat as a haven for local birds, butterflies, and other wildlife.

Homegrown National Park – <https://homegrownnationalpark.org/>

Website of a grassroots call-to-action movement to regenerate biodiversity and ecosystem function founded by Doug Tallamy. Get on the Map by registering your habitat.

Apps

iNaturalist – a free app that is useful for identifying plants.

Use the app to record, share and discuss observations of plants and animals with other naturalists and experts. Recorded observations can contribute to biodiversity science by helping scientists and resource managers understand when and where organisms occur. In addition, you can contribute to (or start) projects and/or use the app for a Bioblitz event

Social Media

Facebook groups to join

- **Florida Native Gardening**, a group dedicated solely to gardening using Florida native plants
- **Native Plants of Florida**, a group dedicated to discussion of Florida’s native plants not limited to garden settings.
- **Florida Flora and Ecosystematics**, a group that is about more than individual plants, it’s where you learn about our ecosystems as a whole.
- **Florida Native Plant Propagation**, the group to search for questions on how to grow native plants from seed or cuttings. Some species and genera sometimes have finicky requirements.
- **Florida Native Wildflowers**, a group created to provide a place for discussions about and identification of Florida’s native wildflowers.

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- **UF Native Plants Nursery**, a group with information about native plant seed, restoration projects, and Florida's native plant industry.

Facebook Pages to follow

- Florida Native Plant Society and Florida Native Plant Society Members Only
- Most chapters of FNPS have a Facebook page. It's interesting to follow more pages than your own chapter because online presentations are often open to everyone.
- Your local state park's Facebook page is a good page to follow for information on both plants and animals. The Parks also serve as living examples of what an area once was and perhaps has potential to be again, and they're well worth exploring whenever you have the time.
- The same goes for state forests as state parks.
- My FWC Florida Fish and Wildlife, while largely focused on hunting and fishing is known to post on conservation issues and about native wildlife.

Instagram accounts to follow

- Floridanativeplantsociety
- lilliumbyrd (by the FNPS Director of North Florida programs)
- Search "chapter fnps" on Instagram to get a list of chapters with Instagram accounts.

Brochures

FNPS Brochures

Obtain from your chapter

Brochure	English	Spanish	Digital*
Good Citizen Guide to Natural Florida gatefold	√		
Good Citizen Guide to Natural Florida regional inserts*	√	√	√
Homeowner's Guide to Practicing sustainability in the Landscape (Mow Less)	√	√	√
Native Landscaping Brochure (6 regions)	√		
FNPS Membership Brochure	√	√	

* Digital versions are downloadable at <https://www.fnps.org/resources/pubs>.

FNPS Downloadable Documents

Ginny Stibolt's "Why Native Plants are Important" PDF – plus other resources can be downloaded from the FNPS website - <https://www.fnps.org/resources/pubs>

Brochures from other organizations

Florida Wildflower Foundation Brochures and Handouts <https://www.flawildflowers.org/brochures/>

Florida Wildflower Foundation Plant Profiles <https://www.flawildflowers.org/plant-profiles/>

Videos

FNPS Videos

FNPS Lunch & Learn Playlist

Watch the FNPS Lunch & Learn Landscape Design series [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), and [Part 3](#).

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FNPS **After Hours Playlist**

Many Chapters also have YouTube Channels with links to recorded educational programs on their websites.

Videos from other organizations

Outside Collaborative – instructive "how to" videos on plant maintenance

<https://www.youtube.com/@outsidcollab2198/playlists>

Florida Wildflower Foundation – webinar on plant maintenance/pruning

<https://www.flawildflowers.org/231115-webinar-prune-your-native-plants/>

Ginny Stibolt – Taking Care of Your Florida Yard” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQZr_KZ45b4