



Gardening Uncovered: Florida Native Species

By Jason Aguilar

What is a Native Plant?

Native plants have naturally adapted to local climates and soil conditions. They connect us to where we live; help us understand our environment. Their nectar, pollen and seeds are great food sources for native butterflies, insects, birds, and other animals.

Native plants do so much for our local environment and are an overall great investment because:

- They don't require fertilizer.
- Require fewer pesticides.
- Require less water.
- Help prevent erosion.
- Help reduce air pollution.
- Provide food and shelter for insects and other wildlife.
- Promote biodiversity and stewardship for natural heritage.
- Hardy and tolerant blooming longer increasing scenic beauty and curb appeal.

Why are Native Plants Important?

The most important reason to use native plants is because they sustain the environment. Native plants harvest the sun's energy to create plant material that is food for a plethora of insects making them healthy and nutritious food for wildlife who depend on insects. In fact, native plants produce approximately four times more herbivore material than non-native plants. Native plants support approximately three times as many species. Interestingly, native plants also supported more than thirty-five times the caterpillar biomass than non-native plants.



We chose our homes due to their curb appeal, neighborhood aesthetic, and the natural beauty of Central Florida. Native plants enhance that beauty, native flowers bloom longer, stay greener, and can withstand all of the crazy weather we have.

Much like the evasive reptiles we hear about in South Florida; non-native plants can become invasive too. They are not natural to the area and as a result it takes longer for pests to develop a taste for them. This allows for the plant to grow and take over choking out the native plants. Insects travel on plants too; non-native plants bring with them insects and other pests or disease that aren't native causing damage to existing plants. Examples of non-native plants are: Brazilian Pepper, Mexican Petunia, some varieties of Lantana, Weevil, and a ton more.

Non-native plants require help. They need added fertilizer, herbicide, and irrigation. This help leaches into the soil and becomes runoff ending up in waterways and contributes to costly environmental issues.

How do I choose the right native plants for my landscape?

Choosing the right plants for your landscape should start with a trip to your local nursery or university extension office. You will want to choose plants based on the look you want to achieve, do you want blooms, birds and butterflies, or a green, woodsy look. The level of work you want to contribute to the garden must be considered too.

Look at your existing landscape and neighborhood, try to find plants that you love. If you are a bird feeder, choose plants that attract native insects.

Anson Nursery is Citrus Counties' premiere garden center specializing in Florida Friendly native and non-native species that have been tested to grow well in our area. They carry supplies and accessories that are sure to make your gardening or landscaping project run smoothly.

To help keep customers and staff safe and healthy Anson Nursery have hand washing stations, curb side pickup, and delivery and installation services. Open Monday – Friday from 9am – 5pm and on Saturday's from 9am – 4pm, make plans to visit Anson Nursery today. Conveniently located at 5296 West Homosassa Trail, Lecanto, FL 34461. For more information you can call 352-628-4554, visit www.ansonnursery.net, or find us on Facebook. Be sure to watch for next month's Gardening Uncovered article.

Sources: Accessed 02-04-21. www.ansonnursery.com

Native Plants - University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (ufl.edu) Native Gardening (fs.fed.us) Why Natives? - THE COCCOLOBA CHAPTER OF THE FLORIDA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY (fnpscoccoloba.org)

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