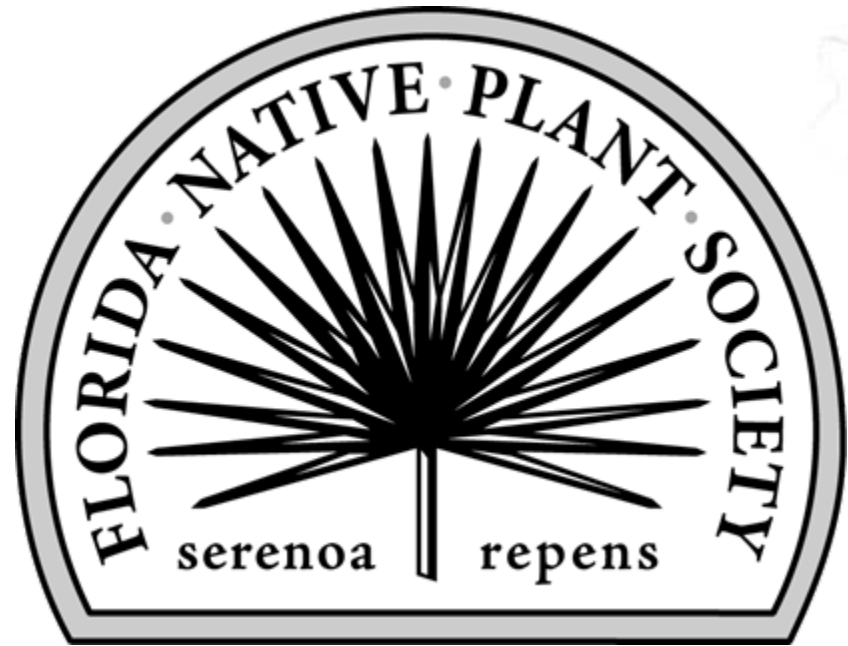


Florida Native Plant Society



Native Plant Owners Manual

Serenoa repens – Saw Palmetto

Mark Hutchinson

Putting things in perspective

All seasonal references are applicable to the eastern panhandle of Hernando County where the plants portrayed in this presentation grow. This area happens to be a cold spot in central Florida due to the Brooksville Ridge and approximates a Hardiness Zone of 8a or 8b, average annual low temperatures ranging between 10 and 20 °F.

Any reference to medicinal or culinary use of plants or plant parts should in no way be considered an endorsement by the Florida Native Plant Society of any sort of experimentation or consumptive use.

Please do not attempt to rescue any native plants without first reviewing the [FNPS Policy on Transplanting Native Plants](#)

Special thanks to Lucille Lane and Shirley Denton.

Saw Palmetto

Palm family





*Serenoa
repens*



Navigation Links

(for use in open discussion)

[What's in a Name?](#)

[Biological Classification – Tree of Life](#)

Where does this plant grow?

- [In North America](#)
- [In Florida](#)

What this plant needs to -

- [Thrive](#)
- [Pollinate](#)
- [Propagate](#)

[Life Cycle](#)

[References](#)

‘View/Full Screen Mode’
recommended

Throughout this
presentation, clicking
this symbol will return
you to this page.



Saw Palmetto, scrub palmetto, scrub palm,
silver saw palmetto palm

Serenoa (se - REN - oh - uh)

Named after Sereno Watson 1826 – 1892, Yale graduate of 1847. He joined the Clarence King expedition in California. Later returning to Harvard he was appointed by Asa Gray as assistant at the Gray Herbarium in 1873. While there, he worked on The Botany of California, eventually becoming curator and holding that post until his death.

repens (REE - penz)

Latin, meaning spreading or creeping



Biological and Genetic Relationships

Serenoa repens - (Bartram) Small - saw palmetto

└─ *Serona* Hook f. - serenoa

└─ Livistoninae

Thrinacinae1

Borasseae

Coryphinae

Phoeniceae

Sabalinae

Thrinacinae2

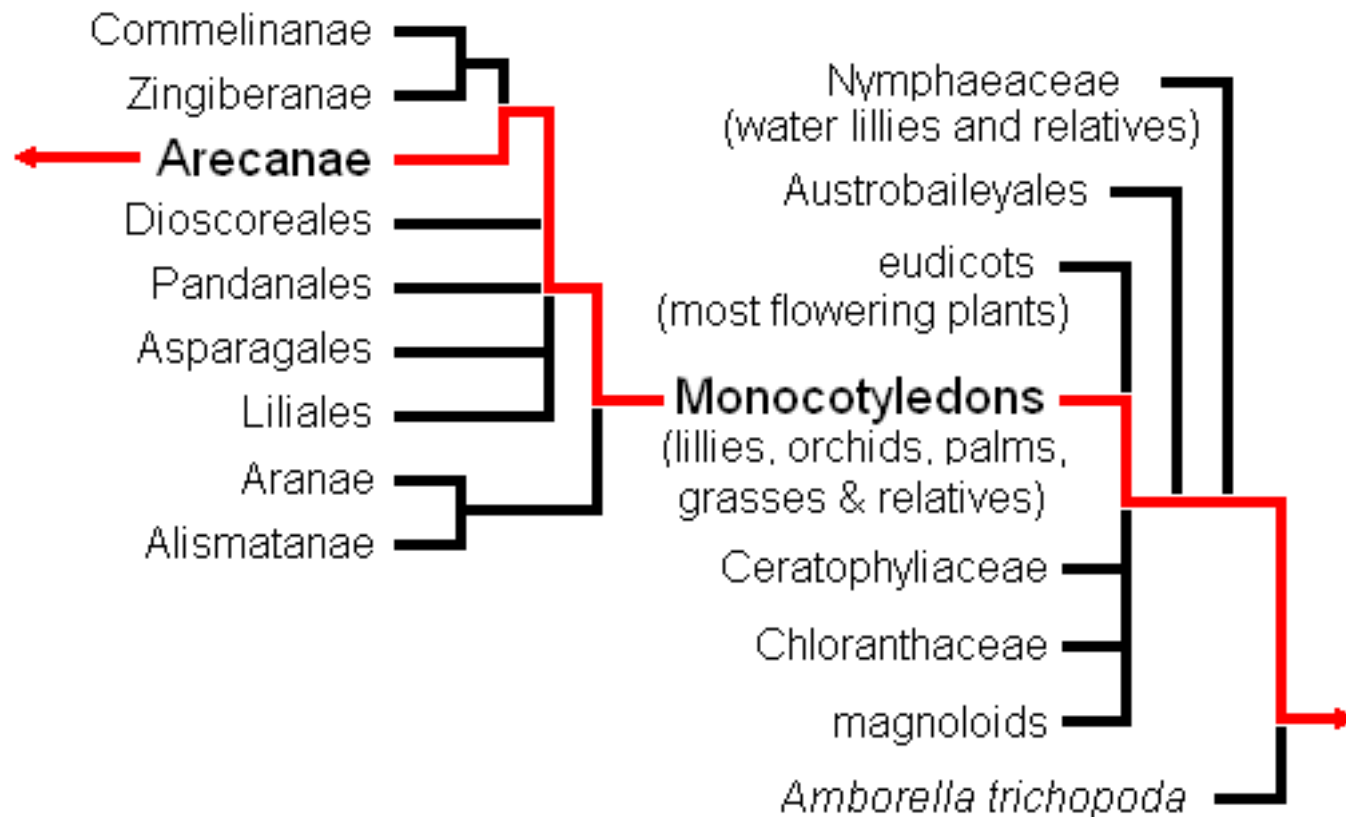
(more of the palm family) ←

Calamoideae

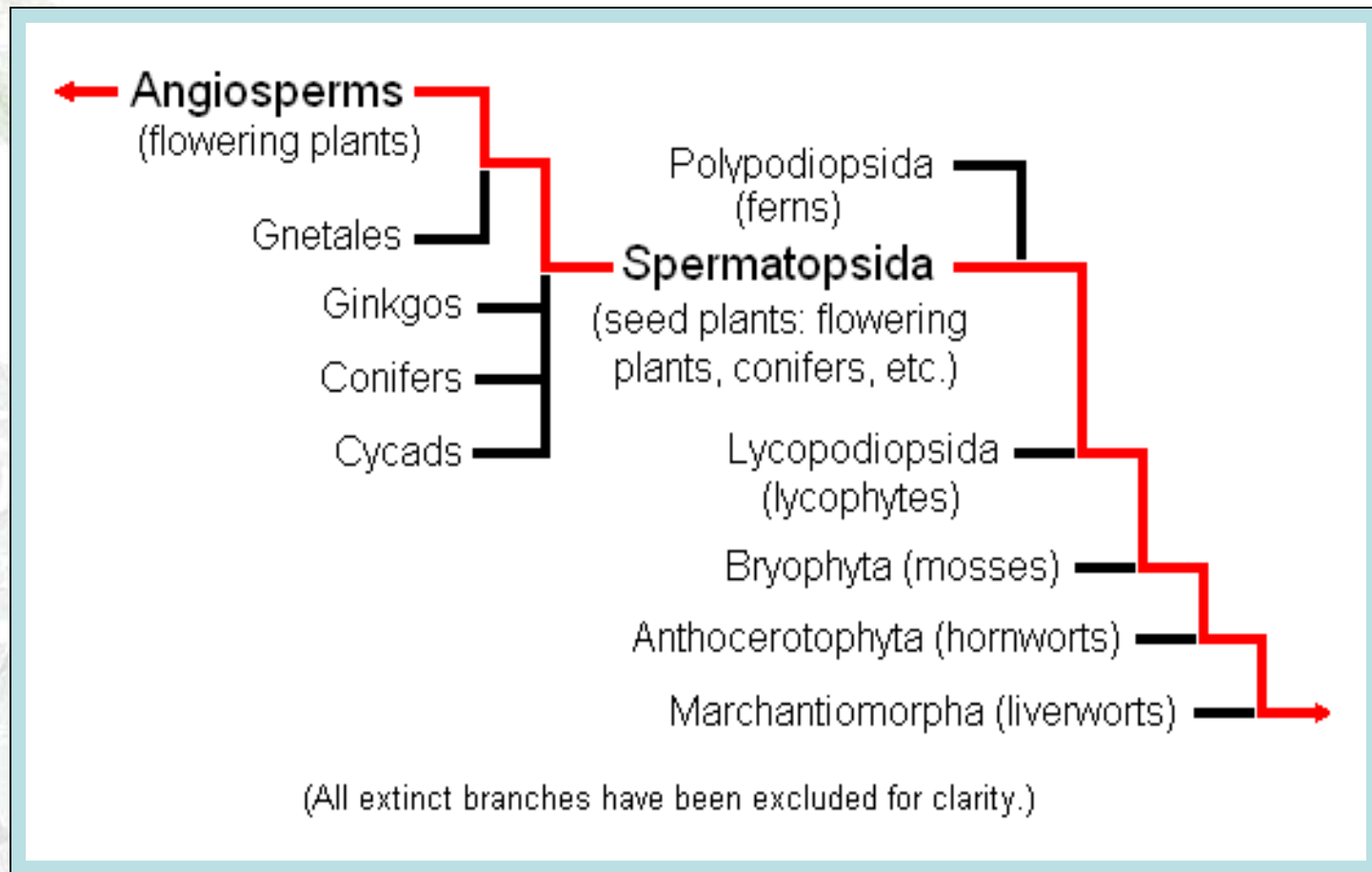
Nypoideae

Each species is a leaf on the Tree of Life. Its genetic connections can be explored by following the branches (red line), towards the roots of life.





(Individual species and genus denoted by italics)

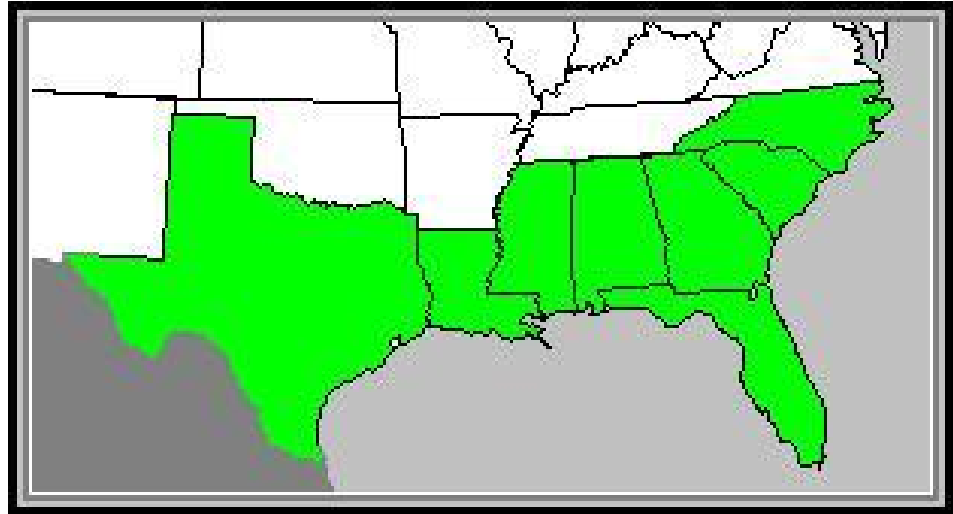


Link to the University of Arizona's [Tree of Life](#).



Species Distribution in the United States

Saw Palmetto, native to North America, is endemic to the southern United States. Its range extends primarily in coastal areas from Texas to South Carolina. It is found throughout the state of Florida.



(For specific distribution within any of the shaded areas go to the USDA link provided on the reference page, and click the shaded area of interest.)



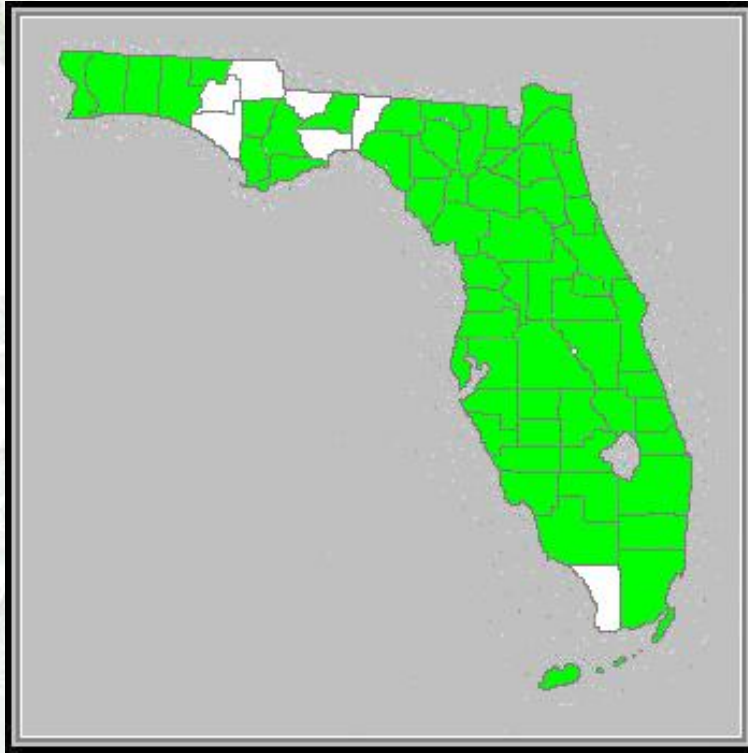


- Both the United States Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Florida Atlas of Vascular Plants list only a single native species of the genus *Serenoa* Hook. f. in the United States.

**R.K.Godfrey Herbarium
(FSU) #2070 Franklin Co.,
4/15/85**



Species Distribution within Florida



(*vouchered – indicates that a fully documented dried specimen has been deposited in an approved herbarium)

- Saw Palmetto, a perennial shrub, is *vouchered in approximately sixty-one counties in Florida.
- *Serenoa repens* grows in a variety of habitats, including sandy coastal lands, pine flatwoods, and understory areas in hardwood hammocks.



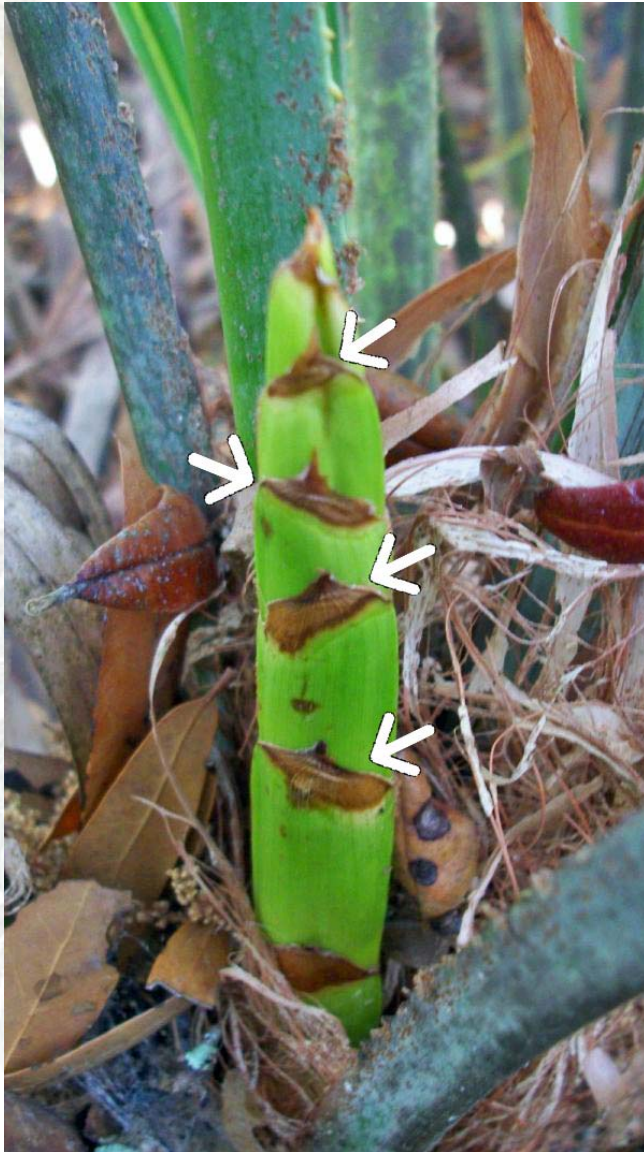
Plant Structure and Life Cycle

Serenoa repens is a member of the Palm Family and is slow growing and long lived. The plant rarely has erect stems, usually growing prostrate, on or just beneath the ground. This species tends to grow in clumps and will colonize the floor of a woods area unless deterred by wildfire. The color of the leaves varies from yellow-green, to green or silvery green near coastal areas.



The rounded, palmate leaves of Saw Palmetto each have about twenty leaflets. Each leaf is supported by the petiole, lined with sharp teeth or spines, hence the name saw. The petiole, in turn, is supported by the trunk. The longer the trunk, the older the plant. Some grow to be as old as 500 - 700 years!





When spring arrives *Serenoa repens* begins the flowering process. First a flower spike emerges from the trunk. Panicles grow from each of the diagonal fissures on the spike (noted by arrows), forming a compound panicle. The spike can grow as long as 60 cm (about 2 feet).





The unopened flower buds of *Serenoa repens* can stay in place for some time before they flower, if they do at all. It appears that they are more likely to flower in areas that have been burned recently.



The musty- to sugary-sweet scent of its flowers attract many pollinators including love-bugs, native bees, wasps, and ants.



Fruit begins to appear in earnest by early summer, ripening by early fall. From the initial appearance of the flower spike until the ripening of the fruit takes about six months.



Growing Conditions



to



- Saw Palmetto favors full sun to near full shade

- It favors sandy soil and is moderately salt tolerant
- Strongly acidic to slightly alkaline soil - 4.5 to 7.5 pH
- Good drought tolerance
- Hardiness: USDA Zone 8b: to -9.4 °C (15 °F)
to USDA Zone 11: above 4.5 °C (40 °F)
- Flowering and seed production occur from late spring to early fall
- Height: 4 - 8 feet (1.2 – 2.4 meters)



Pollinators and Wildlife

When *Serenoa repens* flowers in the spring it attracts numerous pollinators. Saw palmetto also serves as host plant to the monk skipper and palm skipper.

The dense growth and sharp spines of the petiole make the clumps of this plant ideal cover for many small animals and birds, including the endangered grasshopper sparrow, and its fruit provides a tasty treat for black bears.



Seed Collection and Propagation

Serenoa repens does not propagate vegetatively, meaning it will not root from cuttings or spread by runner. The only way practical way to grow another plant is by seed, which should be planted soon after harvesting.

Transplanting saw palmetto is extremely difficult due to its large root system.



Presentation References

- North America distribution

[USDA](#) - Natural Resource Conservation Service

- Florida distribution

[Atlas of Florida Vascular Plants](#)

- Herbarium specimen

[FSU Robert K Godfrey Herbarium](#)

- Larval Food Source – Host Plants

[Biospherenursery.com](#)

- University of Michigan

[Native American Ethnobotany](#)



Presentation References (cont.)

- Growing conditions & general information

- [Wikipedia](#)
- University of Florida [IFAS](#) Extension
- [Dave's Garden](#)

- FNPS – Natives for Landscaping

[FNPS.org](#) This Link will take you to the profile for this plant on the FNPS website

- [Florida Plants](#) by zone and habitat, use your county name or zip-code to see native habitat classifications and appropriate plants.



- For more in-depth study:

Native Florida Plants: Low Maintenance Landscaping and Gardening. Robert G. Haehle and Joan Brookwell. 2004 (revised edition). Taylor Trade Publishing. ISBN 1589790510.

A Gardener's Guide to Florida's Native Plants. Rufino Osorio. 2001. Gainesville: University Press of Florida. ISBN 0813018528.

Grafting, Budding, Cutting, Layering & Other Ways of Propagating Fruit Plants in Florida. 1995. Gainesville: Institute of Food & Agricultural Science. ISBN 0916287092.

