MEMBERSHIP
Make a difference with FNPS
Your membership supports the preservation and restoration of wildlife habitats and biological diversity through the conservation of native plants. It also funds awards for leaders in native plant education, preservation and research.

Memberships are available in these categories: Individual; Multi-person household; Sustaining; Lifetime; Full-time student; Library (Palmetto subscription only); Business or Non-profit recognition.

To provide funds that will enable us to protect Florida's native plant heritage, please join or renew at the highest level you can afford.

To become a member:
Contact your local chapter, call, write, or e-mail FNPS, or join online at www.fnps.org/join

The purpose of the Florida Native Plant Society is to conserve, preserve, and restore the native plants and native plant communities of Florida.

Official definition of 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.

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The Florida Native Plant Society is a valuable partner in preserving natural state park landscapes, and last year, FNPS volunteers served on 100 percent of state land management review panels. Article by Eric Draper.

Books of Note: The Nature of Plants
Craig Huegel’s new book brings to light the complex ways plants live and interact with their environment. Not only does the book discuss topics like growth and reproduction, it includes real-life examples from Craig’s own gardening experiences to increase understanding of what plants need to thrive. Review by Ginny Stibolt.

The False Rosemaries of Florida
In the southeastern United States, the genus Conradina is comprised of 7 species, each occupying a distinct geographic range, and 5 of these species are endemic to Florida. Conradina species are photogenic, attractive to pollinators and sun-loving, however, all but one species are listed as endangered. Article by Todd Angel, Hanna Rosner Katz and Michael Jenkins.

Building Chapter Success
Challenged to survive a change of venue and answer the call to increase membership, the Martin County Chapter grew by 65% through enhanced communications, vigorous outreach, strong mission-focused programs, and the friendliest meetings in town. Article by Linda Eastman.

ON THE COVER: Conradina brevifolia (short-leaved false rosemary) is endemic to the white sand scrub habitat of the mid- to lower Lake Wales Ridge in Polk, Highlands, and Osceola Counties. Photo by Mike Jenkins, Florida Forest Service.
Building Chapter Success

*Martin County Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society*

By Linda Eastman

At the August 2018 Council of Chapters meeting, then membership chair Anne Cox issued a challenge to all FNPS chapters: raise membership by 5%. Martin County complied. From June 2018 to date chapter membership increased from 86 to 141, or 65%! Our motivation for growth was more significant than compliance, though. That summer we were concerned with survival.

In the fall of 2017, just before the start of the program season, we were forced to move our meeting venue from the quaint 1930s era school building where the chapter was founded in the 1980s. Fortunately, we were offered a temporary meeting location at the modern offices of a local service organization. This new site was centrally located, included convenient, lighted parking, reliable AV equipment, upholstered seating and quiet central air conditioning that didn’t compete with our featured speakers. Such modernity seemed to attract people to meetings in greater numbers and we recognized that the upgraded venue elevated our chapter’s identity as a serious organization, thereby attracting even larger audiences. With high hopes for finding a permanent home, we contracted with Indian River State College’s Wolf High-Technology Center in Stuart for 2018-19 and immediately began planning how to pay the rent. Since our two main sources of revenue are proceeds from our annual native plant sale and the chapter support from FNPS based on membership numbers, our energies focused on growth in those two areas.

For years our plant sale had been held in conjunction with the school district’s Earth Day celebration and mainly served a small local community of students and parents. Profits were minimal and shared with the school council. Since our closest native nurseries are in Palm Beach or Indian River Counties, we reasoned that our plant sale had potential to fill a niche locally for an increasing number of gardeners looking for native plants. In our new expansion mode we sought a partnership with local Master Gardeners and our first joint sale, although somewhat challenging, was successful beyond all expectations. This past year we moved our sale from Earth Day to Arbor Day in conjunction with the Martin County Master Gardeners’ annual Native Tree Give-away. With the Master Gardeners’ extensive marketing and our own publicity efforts on social media and radio spots, our entire inventory was sold out in the first two hours. Our profits tripled over those from the old days. Based on the demand this year we plan further increases for January 2020.

The plant sale success gave us confidence in our ability to fund our new meeting venue. However, we also needed growth in membership to increase our revenue from FNPS Chapter support and to fill the seats in the huge new conference room we were paying for. Our board resolved to attract and recruit new people to our chapter through enhanced communications, vigorous outreach, strong, mission-focused programs, and the friendliest meetings in town.

**Improved Communication**

The chapter’s monthly newsletter went through a complete redesign. Our eNews is well written, beautiful to look at, easy to navigate and content-rich, inspiring readers to action. For example, a feature on the orchid *Sacoila lanceolata* (leafless beaked ladies’ tresses), revealing that this plant is vouchered in every South Florida county except Martin, prompted one of our members to locate several populations on roadsides and alert county employees to avoid mowing them. This quick action enabled our members to voucher the species here and preserve the beautiful flowers to be enjoyed by travelers.

Additionally, our chapter website was revamped and we began sharing information about chapter events and invitations to join on social media pages, with friends, and with other organizations.
Board members who are active in other groups became liaisons, recruiting from like-minded organizations. We brought friends to meetings and carried membership brochures in our handbags, backpacks and consoles, always prepared to hand one to a prospective new member. One by one, they joined.

**Increasing Outreach Efforts**

Instead of waiting for people to come to us, we went in search of them at state parks, conservation events and in community organizations. We organized a series of wildflower walks in three seasons at Jonathan Dickinson State Park. The group Friends of Jonathan Dickinson State Park advertised the walks in their social media channels and strategically posted flyers. Over 125 participants who had not previously interacted with our chapter attended the walks. Many who attended the first walk came back for more and shared photos and positive feedback through their own social networks.

We were becoming recognized in the community, and Audubon of Martin County invited us to teach a class of young birders about native plants. We were asked to share information about living shorelines at Florida Oceanographic Society’s Rally for the River and to survey the plants in a local historic cemetery. We gave talks at garden clubs and collaborated with the Martin County Orchid Society to place over 100 Encyclia tampensis (Florida butterfly orchid) seedlings in a county park.

Maximizing our outreach efforts markedly increased our visibility, sparking increased collaborative opportunities. Though exhausting at times, we accommodated every single request – and added more members.

**Improving Speaker Programs**

For the past several years we have built our speaker program around substantive themes intended to make our audience’s experience memorable. Some recent themes included natural connections, landscaping with natives, and Martin County’s native plant communities. Knowledgeable presenters and exciting field trip destinations have resulted in meaningful programs that keep participants interested and coming back for more.

Replacing our traditional sparsely attended holiday potluck with a fun “members only” workshop and picnic in a park doubled our attendance in the first year and tripled it the next, increasing memberships in the process.

**Friendly Meetings**

We strove to make the best first impression ever. Two smiling board members greeted every attendee, offering information and, of course, membership brochures. There were multiple sign-in sheets (no waiting) for members and non-members. We collected email addresses from first-time attendees. Between our expanded outreach events and meeting sign-ins, our email list has grown five-fold in the past year. A half-hour social time is built into our meeting schedule, providing all board members opportunities to chat with people, learn their names, explain our program, and introduce them to the inner workings of our plant exchange.

We staffed a resource table near the plant exchange table with plant books and an expert to answer questions. A volunteer sign-up table provided information on volunteer opportunities, clip boards with sign-up sheets and, when appropriate, information about current legislative issues. Our plant exchange took on a carnival-like atmosphere at times; board members hawked tickets, remarked on the quality and diversity of plants, and encouraged everyone to “take a chance.” During this half hour we ran a PowerPoint loop with announcements, field trip information, photos of chapter activities, and upcoming events. This gave our audience something to enjoy while waiting for the meeting to start, time to note dates and places, and stimulated interest. With all these conscious efforts, our membership numbers continued to rise.

These achievements were possible with strong support in many small ways from FNPS and because an exceptional Martin County Chapter board committed themselves to our chapter’s success. We look forward to continued growth in 2020.

**About the Author**

Linda Eastman is a retired elementary school art teacher who joined the Martin Chapter of FNPS after moving to Florida from Detroit, Michigan in 2011. Eager to embrace her new home, she completed certification in the Florida Master Naturalist and Audubon Field Academy’s Birding Naturalist programs. She has been program chair for the Martin Chapter since 2015 and chapter president since June 2018. Linda and her husband Chuck cultivate a native plant garden in Hobe Sound.