

EDUCATION IS FIRST

by Joseph A. Cascio

(This article has been extrapolated from two long letters to *The Palmetto* in response to Terry Mock's article in the last issue: "Which Comes First: Supply or Demand?")

Demand comes first, anywhere in the world except South Florida. Here, in Plant Hardiness Zone Ten-B, Demand comes second — not to Supply, but to Education.

To create a demand, the designer must desire to use the material, either for his/her own home, or for a client's space. The choice is made on a knowledge of the plant characteristics, and an ability to visualize the plant in its position within the design.

All who design successfully know the process of plant selection: knowing the conditions — such as wind, water, temperature, and light — that determine the habitat in which certain plants will thrive naturally; then carefully selecting a palette of plant materials that best thrive in this habitat. The designer begins with a knowledge or a reference source to all plants available or potentially available; eliminates all plants not suitable to the project habitats; and creates a design by refining the palette with characteristics of texture, form, color, and habit of growth.

How many designers for projects in Zone 10b know — or know where to find — the characteristics of the available endemic plants?

I've been designing with native plants for twenty years, and I know them well; unfortunately, none that I know are native to South Florida, with the exception of the red maple and many of the ferns. (And because I know its characteristics, I never choose to use the red maple.)

So what does one do who knows nothing? They can join the clubs, attend the meetings and workshops, walk the woods with naturalists and taxonomists, study the arboretums and nurseries, read the books, drive the neighborhoods in search of the natives "in use" to see where they grow and how they look in composition with others. This is fine for those of us who can spend our weekends in this pursuit, but most design offices would not support such unstructured educational efforts essential to first-hand knowledge of natives.

We dig and probe and question and

experiment, because it is important to those of us who want to do top quality, long lasting designs of muted taste; plus, it is fun, and the people involved in native plants are the best.

Many of us, however, have neither the time nor inclination to spend with the "native nuts", but would use native plants if we could learn them from pictures and text. Too few texts are available. We have too many "Guides" and "Introductions", and not enough monographs. Too little material is presented in the curriculum of the design schools.

The most useful educational products emerge from individual effort, built upon the knowledge of others perhaps, and amended by careful review of experts, but the finished product satisfies the need and goal of one individual, rather than trying to satisfy the needs and goals of many.

I aim to have my milkings churned into either butter or sour milk by the time of the American Society of Landscape Architects meeting on Captiva in April, and I hope others will use this as a deadline as well. If a whole bale of written material, slides, bibliographies, etc., from all zones of Florida could be delivered to those who teach the designers, they might develop a

syllabus this summer, and start introducing far more native Florida plants into the curriculum this fall, and begin a continuing education course for licensed landscape architects and designers, soon after.

Yes, education comes first, then demand is created, and supply follows at an economically sound pace.

Even with the education and the demand, however, we face some difficulties in convincing developers and designers to use plants indigenous to their site for the final landscape planting. They complain that materials are either too small or in too limited quantities. This is true, but it need not be.

Here is one way to influence the supply:

Ask native nurserymen for their inventory price lists of native materials in any size; for a method by which designers might arrange a contract to grow native plants, two years in advance of delivery; and a list of native plants they would like to grow if there was a sustained demand for them.

From this information, landscape designers can structure the contract for their client's needs and develop a format for involvement between designer, client, and plant broker.

These ideas are as yet untested, but we are confident that this approach is a means of solving current supply problems when there is adequate lead time before supplies are needed.

Second Annual Florida Native Plant Society CONFERENCE AND WORKSHOP UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA, GAINESVILLE

May 14, 15, 16, 1982

Co-sponsored by Florida State Museum and the Florida Conservation Foundation
Registration will begin at noon on Friday, with the first sessions at 1 P.M. The workshops will include: Designing your home landscaping with native plants; Propagation for beginners; Propagation at more advanced levels; Endangered Florida plant communities, such as the rosemary scrub, the cactus scrub, the Miami oolitic pinewoods, the Apalachicola ravines (steepheads).

Field trips will include the Devil's Millhopper, San Felasco Hammock, Payne's Prairie, Morningside Nature Center.

The Conference Committee includes Bill Partington, Winter Park, 305/644-5377; F. Wayne King, Gainesville, 904/372-1721; Dorie Karl, Naples, 813/261-6060; Lew Yarlett, Gainesville, 904/377-5830; Peggy Lantz, Orlando, 305/299-1472; Frances Alsobrook, Melrose, 904/475-2299; David Drylie, Orlando, 305/841-7898; Norma Jeanne Byrd, Sanibel, 813/472-2866; Lee Barnes, Gainesville, 904/392-1831; and David Case. If you have any suggestions — and we welcome them — please contact one of these committee members immediately.

Plans are in the making to have a Florida native plant sale at the Conference.

The next *Palmetto* will have more information, but be sure to put the date on your calendar now. The registration fee will be a bargain for all, but will be less for FNPS members than for non-members. So join before it's time to register!