I wonder what spring would mean to one who was encountering it, if such a thing were conceivable, for the first time. My notion is that it would mean nothing. Spring is beautiful because it is familiar. Its implications are stirring because we understand them. We know the cold that precedes it and the hot sun that will follow it. It is generally believed that the northern spring is more portentous than the tropical or sub-tropical spring, because the contrast between cold and warmth, between frozen sterility and hot fertility is more apparent. This is not true when, as in the sub-tropics at Cross Creek, spring is so well known that its coming is as important as a smile across a beloved face. A very clever poet, Wallace Stevens, ended a poem with saying, "But there is no spring in Florida." He came as a stranger, a traveller, to Florida, and the lushest of spring was to him only lushest. He could not differentiate among the shades of green, which at Cross Creek tell us when to plant and when to fertilize and when to cultivate. He did not know when the red-bird begins to sing again and when the cypress bursts from gray bareness into a dress of soft needles and the swamp maple puts out young passionate red leaves.

At the Creek, spring is as definite and as exciting as in Greenland. We have not had snow behind us, but we have had an ungrowning period, as have they, and life now stirs and sap rises and the creatures mate and the snakes come out of their winter's lethargy. Because it is familiar and beloved, we watch every gradation. It is dear to us because knowledge of it is necessary to recognize its variations. There is no one sign of spring, but several spontaneous burstings. At the moment of the cypress' needled sprouting and the swamp maples' glory of color, there bloom the yellow jessamine and the red-bud. The jessamine is at its height, spilling waterfalls of gold from high in the tallest trees, when the major miracle occurs. One evening there is the jessamine in the sunset, alone in a world of arrested color. The next morning there is a tinge of green across the gray Spanish moss, and infinitesimal rosy blossoms may be discovered along its strands, the distant hammock is emerald, and on the soft air floats a fragrance for which we have hungered the whole year through. The first orange blossoms have opened. For, the seasons at the Creek are marked, not by the calendar, but by fruits and flowers and birds.

After a warm winter, the jessamine blooms in late January and the orange trees in early February. After an average winter, the jessamine blooms in early February and the oranges in the middle of the month. After a long winter with protracted cold, as this year, the jessamine waits wisely until the frost is over....

from Cross Creek

---

**SPRING AT THE CREEK**

by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings

---

**SWEET PRINCESS OF FAR FLORIDA**

The Yellow Jessamine

by Melanie Darst

Whether you call it "jessamine" or "jasmine," "Carolina" or "yellow," "evening trumpet-flower" or "poor man's rope," it still must be described with the same adjective - beautiful.

Wild Flowers of Florida (Fleming, Genelle, and Long) says it belongs to the logania family, is a woody, evergreen perennial vine up to 20 feet long. [I have seen it climbing up to 50 feet to bloom in the tree tops. -Ed.]

Yellow jessamine is described by R.K. Godfrey as a "lemon yellow"; J.K. Small says "deep-yellow." The Latin name is Gelsemium sempervirens (L.) Taume St. Hil. Gelsemium is a latinization of "gelosmeno," the Italian name of jasmine. The common names are Carolina jessamine and yellow jessamine. J.K. Small in his Manual of the Southeastern Flora also lists Evening trumpet-flower. R.K. Godfrey and W.J. Wooten (Aquatic and Wetland Plants of Southeastern United States) have Poor-man's rope for another common name. Gelsemium is a genus with three species: one Asiatic, the other two found in the Southeast. G. sempervirens is more widespread. It is found from Florida to Virginia and Texas. G. rankii is commonly found growing in waterlogged soils. In Florida its range is from Escambia to Leon and Wakulla counties. In bloom the two are easily distinguished by fragrance, G. rankii having none. G. sempervirens is described as delicately fragrant by Godfrey. Not having any at hand to smell, I can't give you my opinion.

Along the fencerows, through the hammocks, slim dry vines are suddenly a mass of golden bloom, so fragrant that the initiate all but swoons. Like many tropical flowers, the jessamine is most potent in the afternoon. It is often said jessamine come so strongly from the ground that the perfume is visible. Afternoon jessamine over the stars.
FLORIDA ELM

by Steve Farnsworth

An Overlooked Native

Florida elm reaches a maximum height of 50 feet with a broad crown of nearly equal spread. When grown in the open, it produces the typical elm outline — vase-like with a crown shaped like an inverted cone. A fast grower when young (20 feet in four years!), the growth rate slows considerably when the tree begins to produce seeds in about its tenth year. This elm forms a trunk one foot in diameter that is covered with grayish bark in vertical ridges and fissures, and buttressed at the base in soft, shallow soils.

Like its frequent and flashier associate, the red maple, Florida elm prefers moist, fertile soil, but will grow in any soil of reasonable moisture and fertility. It tolerates partial shade and temporary flooding, but seems to grow on slightly higher ground than the maples. In general, this elm can be grown anywhere that red maple succeeds. This is especially true in South Florida where the elm doesn’t naturally occur; trees in Palm Beach and Dade counties are doing beautifully. Other frequent associates are laurel oak, sugarberry, sweetgum, black tupelo, loblolly bay, green and pop ashes, hornbeam, and sweetbay.

In my travels in the state, it seems that Florida elm is most common in south-central Florida slough areas. It flowers there in late January in inconspicuous clusters of small green blooms hanging from drooping stalks on bare branches. Fruit development is rapid and the seeds fall in mid-February as the leaves fall. This elm is especially beautiful after leafing out in spring, forming a mass of bright, clear, clean greenery setting off the mixed green and red of the maples. The flowering and leafing sequence is the same in North Florida but is delayed by a month.

The seeds are rather curious, greenish-brown ovals, a half inch long, containing a central seed surrounded by a papery wing. They have a fringe of short ciliate hairs and a notched tip and can be found in large numbers under the trees at the right time of year. Dispersed by wind and flowing water, the seeds germinate in about ten days. Planted shallowly in seed flats, 90% of the seed will come up, but they are cutworm favorites so take any necessary precautions. Seed retains its viability for over a year if stored under conditions of low humidity and temperature. Elms can also be propagated by leafy cuttings under mist, but seeds remain the easiest way.

Florida elms aren’t hard to identify in the field provided you know what to look for. The ovate leaves, 2 to 5 inches long, are coarsely toothed and have the typical elm asymmetry: one side of the leaf is bigger than the other with the midvein being the dividing line. Leaf coloring in the fall is unimpressive, with the leaves turning a dull yellow before dropping to reveal the smooth, slender twigs. The lateral twigs are very thin, about 1 to 2 millimeters in diameter, and form delicate patterns that only become apparent after the leaves take their brief vacation.

Dutch elm disease, the great bane of northern cities, is not a problem in Florida, although the Florida elm is susceptible to it. The disease’s southern progress has halted in northern Georgia and has never reached this state. Elm bark beetles spread this fungal malady, but they can travel only short distances and may not be present in this state. In any case, the disease seems to rage only where elms form a large portion of the tree population, a condition we’ll probably never see here. Otherwise, the tree has no major pest problems.

If you’ve read this far, you might be considering planting a Florida elm. If so, you’ll have to act fast as the short seeding season is nearly upon us and if you miss it, it’s “wait until next year”, or try to buy one from one of the few nurseries that carry them.