NATIVE PLANTS FOR CENTRAL FLORIDA LANDSCAPES

by Julie Gilbert

One of the best suggestions that can be made for landscaping central Florida homes and commercial properties is: "Use native plants whenever possible." Florida has an abundance of delightful native plants from which to choose for landscaping. These include nearly half of all the tree species found in North America north of Mexico.

Palms are one of the first choices. Florida gardeners wanting to add true Florida trademarks to their landscapes may select from a wide variety of palms. Our state tree, the cabbage palm (Sabal palmetto), is one of the most popular for commercial property. Others include Florida royal palm, Florida silver palm, needle palm, and saw palmetto.

Popular native trees that adapt well to urban landscape environment include American cherry laurel, chickasaw plum, flowering dogwood, fringe tree, laurel oak, live oak, southern wax myrtle, dahoon holly, redbud, southern red cedar, and yaupon holly.

Well-known native shrubs include coontie, golden dewdrop, Spanish bayonet, American beauty bush, and several small hollies.

These native plants have been tested by nature and proven to grow well in Florida. They are more resistant to pest problems and better suited to local weather and soil conditions.

Just because a plant grows well in the wilds, however, does not guarantee that it will readily adapt to your landscape. Some have very specific growth requirements, others thrive under a variety of climatic and soil conditions. So before you relocate a native plant, make certain you can provide it with an environment similar to its natural one.

Also, don't expect instant adaptation. It takes a reasonable amount of time and care for any plant to adjust to a new home.

Though you can legally take plants from the wild, you should know that Florida's native plants are protected under the Plant Protection Law. This law encourages preservation and propagation, but destroying, injuring, harvesting, collecting, or removing any plants covered by the law is prohibited without prior written permission from the owner of the land.

Many nurseries stock a good selection of native plants, so you probably can purchase your choice from an authorized dealer.

A copy of the Plant Protection Law and the plant list are available on request from the Florida Dept. of Agriculture, Div. of Plant Industry, P.O. Box 1269, Gainesville, FL 32601.