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Shakespeare knew something about landscaping

by Marcy Bartlett

When Shakespeare said “Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds,” he was describing the mess we had all over Brevard after the last two winters. If only we had all planted the “weeds” that grow wild, we’d still have trees and other good green things. A short walk in a wild place will show you that Florida’s native plant communities have not suffered from our current drought or last winter’s freezes. Trees, shrubs, flowering herbs, vines, and inconspicuous little ground covers thrive as if they like it here. No one fertilizes or tends them and the stubborn things grow anyway.

And in the process of surviving, these plants help us survive. The root systems of these plants are the primary pathways for water to percolate into our underground supplies. Even though South Brevard drinks surface water, those underground supplies are still critical. Every time we clear, fill, or pave an acre, and every time we plant imported trees or lawn grass, we are destroying native root systems that replenish our water.

Conserving water is one good reason to preserve natives and replant natives. The fact that they require very little attention is another. The South Brevard Chapter of FNPS provides a plant identification course every second Thursday at Erna Nixon Park to enable interested people to learn to identify them. We list here just six that are commonly found on uncleared lots, with a few suggestions on their use in landscaping.

*Ceratiola ericoides*, scrub rosemary. Shrub; very attractive dense form needs no pruning; evergreen with deep green color, inconspicuous flowers, fragrant foliage. Thrives in dry sandy soil. Would be excellent for road medians, but don’t install sprinkler systems. Mature plants are hard to transplant.

*Yucca filimentosa*, “beargrass.” Resembles Spanish bayonet, but the spines are softer and not dangerous. Light-colored evergreen rosette to 18” tall, attractive flower stem to 8’ tall, creamy white flowers resemble giant lily-of-the-valley. Grows from large tuber; hard to transplant, but good survival rate. Yucca propagates itself by underground roots, putting up new plants in a straight running line from the parent. Happily shares space with:


*Myrica cerifera*, wax myrtle. The queen of Florida landscape plants. Fragrant, olive-colored evergreen foliage, can grow to 20’ and has nice form. It is highly salt tolerant, flood resistant, drought resistant, cold hardy. Grows rapidly when well-tended, but grows anyway when ignored. Easy to transplant even at 8-10 feet tall; can be pruned to formal shape by gardeners who enjoy work; fruit can also be harvested by zealots who make bayberry candles.

*Serenoa repens*, saw palmetto. The signature plant of the Florida Native Plant Society for good reason. Seldom more than 5 to 6 feet tall, salt tolerant, cold hardy. This unsung hero provides bees with its plumes of flowers, its berries are a major food source for birds and little bears, and in its spare time the palmetto does yeoman duty in water transpiration. Preserving palmettos along with your trees will do a lot toward keeping your building cool. Larger plants can be salvaged using heavy equipment, the same techniques to protect the growing bud that you would use for large palms, plenty of water, and the patience of Job. Young plants can be salvaged by hand (or shovel!); they need plenty of time to re-establish themselves.

*S. repens* var. *glauc*a, blue wax palmetto. All of the above about palmetto applies to this variety, a dreamy blue color produced by the waxy coating on the leaves. This plant, in company with scrub rosemary, would give strong color to a landscape planting.

*Befaria racemosa*, tarflower. Shrub, to 6 feet, evergreen, but sparse foliage. Spectacular bloom; massed plantings rival anything you can do with azaleas and with a lot less maintenance. Hard to transplant, but can be left in place or propagated.

The Joy of Weeds

MIMOSA VINE

by David Hall

Mimosa vine, *Mimosa strigillosa* Torr. & Gray, is a woody creeping vine in the Bean Family with attractive pink flowers in the spring and occasionally again in the fall. The genus name, *Mimosa* is from the Greek and refers to the sensitive leaves of some species. The specific name, *strigillosa*, is from the Latin word *striga*, meaning short, stiff, appressed, bristle-like hairs.

This native plant ranges from the Everglades northwards into southeast Georgia across to southern Arkansas, Texas, and into the tropics. It grows along roadsides and in other disturbed areas, hammocks, pinelands, and bottomlands. It’s rather inconspicuous, except when blooming, and is not at all frequent.

Mimosa vine can be used along margins, drives, or borders where a low plant is desired. It needs bright to broken sunlight. Frequently the vine is allowed to grow in lawns where it stands traffic rather well, but it does not make an effective ground cover. Since the plant is prostrate, only the leaves stick up, usually no more than 15cm (6”), so most of the year very little of it is seen or noticed. However, when the flower heads appear, the effect is most striking. A second
Florida’s Wildflowers

Butterflies and Native Plants

Malachite, Atala, White Peacock

by Eve Ilannahs

Because of geographic location and proximity to the Atlantic Ocean and especially the warm Gulf of Mexico, Florida has unique plant communities and insect populations. Some lepidoptera of Florida are found rarely or never in other states of the continental United States, with the exception of southernmost Texas.

The tropical butterfly, Malachite, Siproeta stelens, is one of these—a large, 2½ to 3 inch tailed butterfly of unusual beauty. Above, it is black with marbled green; underneath the marbled green it is marked with white and light brown. As the insect ages, the green soon fades to almost white.

It has been suggested that these butterflies are strays, but there is evidence that they breed in Hidden Woods Park, in the Ft. Lauderdale area. The distinct caterpillar, to 2" in length; is velvety black with red bristles and recurved horns. It feeds on Blechum brownei and other related species. Blechum is common to most of Florida.

The once common Atala, Eumaeus atala, of southernmost Florida was thought at one time to be extinct in the U.S. because of destruction or alteration of habitat. The small, 1½" butterfly is velvety black above with a blue iridescent sheen. Below, it is black with three rows of metallic blue dots on the hind wing. The coral-red abdomen has a matching spot on the hind wing.

The showy dark red caterpillars have two rows of yellow spots. Their host plants are members of the Cycadaceae. They are reported to be partial to zamias, especially Z. integrifolia, but are also reported to be found on rare cycads in Fairchild Gardens! Their range is extreme south Florida and the Bahamas.

The white peacock, Anartia jatrophae, one of the brush footed butterflies, is related to the Buckeye. Klots states that in the tropics it forms many sub-species and local forms. The handsome 2 to 2½" butterfly has rounded wing tips and a stubby tail. Above coloring has silver-white dots on the hind wing. Below coloring has silver-white ground with white outlines on both sets of wings; bordering colors are orange and brown. Above and underneath surfaces have intricate patterns of orange and brown. The hind wing has two eye spots underneath.

This butterfly is reported to be widespread in the tropics, and can be found in Florida and the southern regions of Texas. They have been sighted as far north as Kansas and Massachusetts, but the sighting is a rarity. Although white peacocks are considered common in Florida, they seem to be restricted to disturbed fresh water shorelines. During early November of 1985, large colonies were observed on the shores of a pond at Woodruff Wildlife Preserve west of Deland. They were feeding on water hyssop, Bacopa, and creeping charlie or capeweed, Lippia nodiflora. No caterpillars were observed.