At the nursery workshop sessions on April 25, a number of experts in production of native plants in Florida provided information on plant identification, propagation, and marketing of plants from various natural plant communities throughout the state. The workshop leaders included the majority of native plant producers for the entire state. They and a few others involved in native plant production are the pioneers of the native plant movement. Many of these growers have to spend considerable time in educating their market before they can sell any plants. They function not only as growers but as educators too. A communications channel through the Florida Native Plant Society that would provide an educational facility for these growers would allow more time for production to meet the increased demand for native plants. This communications channel would also create a distribution system for native plants throughout the state — so that a grower on the West coast, for example, knows that a grower on the East coast has plants available for some particular project.

The production of native plants in Florida is greatly limited to small scale nurseries scattered throughout the state. The few nurseries that do specialize in native plants generally carry a wide diversity of native plant material. But in most cases they do not yet provide the quantity of native plants that are required for large landscaping contracts at prices which are competitive with large scale growers. All too often, the job goes to the exotic grower. State agencies such as the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Recreation and Parks require the use of native plants for landscaping and revegetation in all parks. Coastal and freshwater wetlands revegetation projects require an abundant supply of native grasses and herbaceous plants. City and county ordinances affecting some residential and commercial developments are beginning to stipulate that native plants be used in landscaping. Yet even with increasing demand for native plants, some native plant nurseries still have trouble unloading valuable stock.

Those visiting the Tosohatchee Preserve during the Conference found trees, ferns, grasses, and flowers.
SAW PALMETTO: Emblem of the FNPS

SAW PALMETTO
Serenoa repens
A. flowers
B. fruit

by Dave Wilson

Serenoa repens is a beautiful miniature accent tree which has not been appreciated much, probably due to its abundance. Saw palmetto has fan-shaped green leaves on a fine-toothed stem which shoots forth from a dark brown fibrous trunk. The fronds are smaller and more circular than the Sabal palm and lack the central midrib. Normally the trunks creep along the ground, so that the height of the plant is the length of the leaf. Rarely specimens are found with erect trunks.

Both Sabal palm and saw palmetto are depicted on the Florida State seal.

During this time of the year (spring), delicately fragrant, flowing showers of dainty light yellow or white flowers appear on plume-like multi-branched stalks that sprout from the trunk. The bees which pollinate palmetto make delicious rich palmetto honey.

Miniature plum-like black fruits then form, providing food for wildlife. The Indians ate them and used them for medicinal purposes. Saw palmetto also yields a “cabbage” heart, smaller than the Sabal palm, but taking it kills the tree.

Unfortunately the saw palmetto is difficult to transplant and takes up to six weeks to germinate from seed, so this is one species that really should be preserved near the pines it grows under whenever a new building is constructed. Once established, it is resistant to fire, drought, and cold.

Saw palmetto, preserved on site, or grown from seed, will provide a haven for native wildlife in your yard. They feel at home there...and you will, too.