Carrotwood Lookout

Chris Lockhart

Carrotwood (Cupaniopsis anacardioides) is a popular landscape tree that has been planted in Florida since the early 1980s. By 1990, reports began to surface that carrotwood had escaped cultivation and could pose a serious threat to natural areas — yes folks, it looks like we have another invasive exotic plant. So far, carrotwood has been reported in the following habitats: mangrove, coastal hammock, coastal strand, scrub, and pine flatwoods.

What does carrotwood look like? Leaves are pinnately compound, with two to four leaflets as seedlings, and usually six to eight leaflets in saplings and mature trees. Leaflets are elliptic or obovate, 4.5 to 19 cm long, have entire margins but tend to be wavy in mature leaflets, and often have an indented apex. The petiolo is often swollen where it attaches to the midrib of the leaf.

What can you do? Keep an eye out for wild carrotwood seedlings and saplings in natural areas. Report them to me at the address below, indicating the location (including county), habitat, population (few or many), and any nearby plants you recognize. If you find any wild carrotwood trees five feet tall or taller, break off a small branch for a voucher specimen, put it in a manilla envelope, and mail it (please don’t use plastic bags).

This information is part of a collaborative study on carrotwood with Dr. Dan Austin, FAU, Ed Freeman, Sarasota County, and Bill Jones, Collier County. Thanks from all of us for any scout reports you send in.

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Maintaining Native Grasses

Perennial bunchgrasses grow out from a central core and gradually expand over the years. These warm-season grasses grow actively March through September, with the growth time varying depending on locale. To continue to have full tufts of green grass, prune in February or March.

Here are some additional tips on grass care:
- Select a grass that grows to the desired size. Grasses grow fast to a predictable size and cannot be pruned to fit a smaller space.
- Plant grasses in a sunny location.
- Match the grass to existing water conditions.
- To renew a worn-out grass clump, cut it back close to the ground prior to the spring growth. Bunchgrasses over two years old are more vigorous looking with a “haircut” that allows new leaf blades space to grow.
- For more plants, divide old clumps early in the growing season, collect seeds, or look for seedlings to dig and transplant. Native plant nurseries and plant swaps at local FNPS chapter meetings are other potential sources.

inflorescence and in winter, the whole plant turns golden brown. Perennial mulfygrass will grow on dry sandy beach fronts or moist inland sites. Its native habitats include coastal dunes, pine flatwoods, and sandhills. Use this grass in a sunny, mixed wildflower border, in mass plantings landward of the dunes mixed with beach sunflower, in mass plantings in parking lots and along the interstate, or scattered in an open meadow.

Dwarf Fakahatchee grass, or Florida gamagrass, is a fine-textured perennial bunchgrass with a fifteen-inch tall by twenty-inch wide drooping habit and no special inflorescence. This dwarf grass is widely adaptable, from full sun to light shade and moist to dry soils. Plant it twenty to twenty-four inches apart so that the cascading leaf blades can be seen. Dwarf Fakahatchee grass has performed well and is uniformly evergreen in the landscape. Use it as a low border to a bed, as a mass-planted groundcover, or in informal plant groupings in naturalized areas.

Purple-lovegrass is the lowest bunchgrass (eight inches high x twelve inches wide) in this group. It is a flat-bladed, medium-textured grass that forms a soft drooping clump. Late in the summer, this lovegrass is covered with a very attractive purple inflorescence that makes a puffball effect. Purple-lovegrass is widely distributed in Florida in longleaf pine, turkey oak hills, and upland hardwood hammocks. It has grown in our area on very dry, hot sites and occasionally in wet pine flatwoods type of soil. It can be used as a groundcover and planted in small groups in informal areas.