

THE QUERY CORNER

Are there any books on Wild Edible Plants of the South East?

Marvyne Betsch

Sure are! Try Julia Morton's *Wild Plants for Survival in South Florida*, 76 pages, published by Fairchild Tropical Gardens; *Living Off the Land in Florida*, a four-page flyer by Tony Jensen, available from your County Agricultural Agent; *Survival Safari*, by Ross Allen, out of print, but available from your public library; *Wild Plants of Eastern North America*, by Fernald, Merritt, and Kinsey, published by Harper; and *Handbook of Florida Edible Wild Plants*, by Michalowski, out of print, but available from your public library. That should keep you busy for a few days!

Is there a native grass suitable for a yard?

Lora Ruth Leverence

Our native Florida grasses do not make a heavy turf as the imported grasses do, and many of the ones that might be useable have not been subjected to mowing or foot

traffic to see how they hold up. Carol Lotspeich of Winter Park suggests these two: Bermuda grass (*Cynodon dactylon*), called wiregrass in Georgia, and similar in appearance to zoysia. It grows to a maximum 6" tall; mowing some would stimulate growth. Or Little Carpet grass (*Axonopus affinis*), which tends to grow flat and needs little mowing. It does not take foot travel well, however, and turns brown at first frost.

Lew Yarlett, our range grass expert, says that both bermuda grass and carpet grass were actually introduced, but it was more than two hundred years ago and the history is obscure. Many experts think that's long enough to be a native.

Both of these grasses need mostly sun to do well. If it's very shady, try a ground cover. Those of us who don't care to establish a picture-perfect lawn just mow whatever comes up. If it's green, it's okay!

Check with your local seed dealer for starting either of these lawns. Ask for it by its Latin name so you don't get a cultivar (cultivated variety) that won't have the resistance to problems of this variety.

Anybody else have any suggestions?

Can anybody find A CHAMPION TREE?

by Harold J. Nett

As you may have read in the newspapers, the Florida Division of Forestry has started a champion tree program to identify the largest known specimens of the estimated 600 kinds of trees in Florida. This state program is modeled after the national contest which the American Forestry Association has sponsored for many years. In the national contest, which covers native and naturalized trees only, Florida has had as many as 117 national champions, but because of changes in the rules and a more critical view of what's native or naturalized, the number is now about 100. Many trees formerly considered naturalized in the opinion of one authority or another, such as royal poinciana or African trumpet tree, have been excluded. About 300 species, half the total, are native trees, including many hybrid oaks and varieties of species.

A good botanical key for use in this area of the country is **IDENTIFICATION OF SOUTHEASTERN TREES IN WINTER**, by R.J. Preston Jr. and V.G. Wright, published by North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service. \$2.00.

In the mid 1960s, Florida had only a handful of these native trees listed as champions by AFA. By April, 1973, the number had increased to 69, due in large part to the efforts of Malcolm B. Johnson, Charles E. Salter, and James A. Stevenson, all of Tallahassee; Eldridge T. Carnes of Sarasota; Elbert A. Schory Sr. and M.W. Kenton of Fort Myers; and Robert W. Simons of Gainesville. (Editor's note: Mr. Nett submitted the nomination for the champion cabbage palm in Highlands Hammock St. Pk., which is 3'9" in circumference, 90 feet tall and has a crown of 14 feet.)

According to a recent newspaper story, the largest live oak in Florida, the mighty Timuquan Oak located in

the Jacksonville area, has a trunk circumference of 330 inches measured 4.5 feet above ground (that's nearly nine feet in diameter), a height of 90 feet, and a limb spread of 151 feet. It is probably more than 200 hundred years old and less than 300, which means that it was a mere sapling when the English were cutting the New World's oaks for ship keels.

A few other live oaks might be mentioned: one in the Halifax Plantation near the Volusia-Flagler County line which is 27 feet in circumference or just a few inches less than the Jacksonville tree in diameter; a tree in an Orlando park which is between seven and eight feet in diameter; and the Fairchild oak also in the Halifax Plantation which is about the same size as the Orlando tree. The live oak in Highlands Hammock State Park may be the biggest of all, but I have lost the measurements I had for it!

The bald cypress at Longwood, the "Senator", seems to be the largest native tree in the state, with a circumference of 34' 6" or a diameter of 10' 8", a height of 138 feet, and a crown of 77 feet, and a camphor tree in Hardee County is the largest naturalized tree with a circumference of 30' 8" and an approximate diameter of 9' 9".

As for the saw palmetto, the emblem of the Florida Native Plant Society, the current American Forestry Association champion comes in at 2' 3" in circumference and 25 feet in height. There are some other palmettos, also in the Ormond Beach area, which are a couple of inches more around but do not have a good height in comparison.

Trees are measured as follows: girth or circumference at 4½ feet above ground, measured in inches (minimum 9½"), plus the height expressed in feet (minimum 12 feet), plus the average crown spread measured in feet. One point is given for each inch of circumference, each foot of height, and each four feet of the crown spread. For example, a devil's walking stick tree in San Felasco Hammock with dimensions of 1' 11" in girth, 51 feet in height, and 16 feet of crown winds up with 78 points.

Anyone wanting to nominate a possible champion should give the pertinent facts to the forester of the Florida Division of Forestry in your county for official identification and measuring. Or notify Larry Amison, Division of Forestry, Collins Bldg., Tallahassee 32304. And notify **The Palmetto**.