The Right Plants for Dry Places
Native Plant Landscaping in Central Florida

A great new book written by the Publications Committee, Suncoast Native Plant Society published by Great Outdoors Publishing Company

Congratulations all around to FNPS Suncoast Chapter members, most notably Sheryl Bowman, Debbie Butts, Betsy Davis, John Marsh, Ann Nord, and Carl Strohmenger, for this very fine, timely, and very needed addition to books on native plants. The perfect starter book for the Central Florida new resident (or the Central Floridian just awakening to the natural surroundings), this book is the right size (6” x 9” and 112 pages, not too overwhelming) and the right price ($12.95 retail for non-members). And best of all, there are lots of color photos! No more wondering what the plant looks like. In addition to excellent general information on native plant landscaping concerns, the book provides handy quick reference guides, descriptions of dry inland plant communities, a detailed bibliography, an index, and additional resources for the reader. Nearly 40 plants are described with common, botanical, and family name; plant community, mature size, growth habit, general description, landscaping use, maintenance notes; water, light, soil, and salt tolerance conditions, propagation methods, and human and wildlife uses. Chapters, you can buy from the publisher at discount and resell; call (813) 522-3453 and ask for Jan Allyn. Members, you can buy this book direct from FNPS Subtropical Trader at discount (send check with name & address to Betsy Bicknell, see pg. 3 for contact info.)

Fronts can be seen in totality from all directions. “Topped” trees will never provide much shade, so the code now stipulates that trees planted to meet the shading requirement (50% within 20 years) can only be pruned from the bottom, and then only for the safety of pedestrians or motorists. All “surgery” on required or regulated trees must be done according to the ANSI Z-133 pruning guidelines. Of course, decorative trees planted in excess of code requirements can be pruned into the shape of lollipops, dinosaurs, or whatever.

Tree removals by permit. In Gainesville, permits are required before removal of “regulated” trees. Hardwoods are regulated at 8” in diameter at breast height (dbh) in multifamily, commercial, religious, or government zoning. Loblolly and slash pines only require a permit if they’re larger than 12” dbh. Since citizens’ private lives should be as free as possible from regulation, permits in single family zoning are required only for “Heritage” trees in the legal setbacks of the property. Heritage trees are 30” dbh or larger, although some prized species are regulated at 20.” The “legal setbacks” are the part of the property that must be yard. Thus a 32” live oak next to a home, if it’s in a place where an addition could be built, would not require a removal permit. A similar tree growing near either the back fence or sidewalk would.

Valid reasons for approving a tree removal permit are hazardous condition or if it is causing extensive property damage. Not wanting to rake leaves or fear of branches hanging over the yard are not justification for removing a large, strong, and beautiful tree that has lived longer on the site than the current resident.

Remedial planting. When a permit is approved, two trees must be replanted for each tree removed. Replacements must grow at least as tall at maturity as the tree removed. Thus, a white ash and a southern magnolia may be planted to mitigate the removal of a laurel oak, but a crape myrtle and a redbud may not.

All government entities in Florida must file a comprehensive plan with the Florida Department of Community Affairs. The purpose is to assure that infrastructure and environmental quality will not be sacrificed as communities grow. Tree canopy coverage is an excellent objective to determine whether the urban forest is being effectively protected. In 1984, a tree canopy analysis using aerial photographs from the Alachua County property appraiser showed that 42% of the land area of Gainesville was shaded by trees. In 1993, the figure was 60%. Much of the difference is due to new trees planted to comply with changed land development regulations. The Gainesville comprehensive plan stipulates that the city maintain a tree canopy coverage of at least 57%.

What about enforcement? Penalties do exist. Regulated trees removed without permits must be replanted on a diameter inch-for-inch basis. Thus, mitigation for a 15” diameter live oak illegally removed from in front of a business would be 10 young trees, each 1.5” in trunk caliper; these would have to be planted on the same site if room permits.

On new developments, if the landscaping does not meet the approved landscape plan, the “Certificate of Occupancy” is withheld until the quantity and quality of the trees, or the correctness with which they were planted, are corrected. Subsequent problems (trees dying and replacements needed) are treated as code violations.

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings wrote in Cross Creek (1942):

“The consciousness of land and water must lie deeper in the core of us than any knowledge of our fellow beings. We were bred of earth... We cannot live without the earth or apart from it, and something is shriveled in a man’s heart when he turns away from it and concerns himself only with the affairs of men.”

Developing community ordinances to preserve and replant trees is of tremendous importance — it’s a blending of environmental protection and the affairs of men in a way that makes the heart expand!