

Dick Workman

Past President of FNPS

Author of *Growing Native: Native Plants for Landscape Use in Coastal South Florida*

Interview by JoAnne Trebatoski



Dick Workman

Dick Workman is considered “Mr. Native Plant Society” to folks in Lee county. He is a founding member of the Florida Native Plant Society and the author of *Growing Native: Native plants for Landscape Use in Coastal South Florida*. He grew up on a farm in Waynesville, Ohio, where he developed an interest in natural systems. After studying zoology at Miami University in Ohio, the Air Force led him to the Mojave Desert and an interest in plants. He began an active role in environmental protection in 1969, and organized an event for the first Earth Day in 1970 on the campus of Victor Valley College in Victorville, California.

In 1973, Dick moved to Florida to assume the job of administrative director of the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation. While there, he initiated the use of prescribed fire to manage interior marshes, the active control of exotic pest plants, and started the SCCF’s Native Plant Nursery. He was active in the formation of the City of Sanibel and served as the chairman of the first vegetation committee that wrote Sanibel’s first vegetation ordinance. He is a vocal proponent of the protection of native plant communities and has advised individuals and governments on the subject throughout Florida and the West Indies. He is currently president of

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Coastplan, Inc., an environmental consulting firm located in Fort Myers, and continues to write articles for regional and local newsletters and magazines on many different aspects of native plants and native plant communities.

Dick has served for several years as the President of the Coccoloba Chapter and also has served as President of FNPS. He continues to be an active member of the Coccoloba Chapter and to serve as a Director at Large for the state organization.

Dick's most memorable and noteworthy memory of the Florida Native Plant Society was the meeting that took place at the Sanibel-Captiva Foundation in 1979 with Bill Partington and his late wife [see interview in Spring Issue, Vol. 20, No. 1]. Dick, in conversation, said to them that he thought that the time was right to formally organize the people who were interested in Florida native plants. The Sanibel-Captiva Native Nursery had already been started. Joyce Gann had started the first nursery doing research on native plants and was making information available to the public. The University of Florida was involved. Bill Partington agreed, so Dick contacted the Arizona and Utah Native Plant societies for information on their organizations, and an organizational meeting was held at Bill's office with people who were interested in forming a Florida native plant group. Thus the Florida Native Plant Society was born. Dick describes that historic meeting as a most memorable one with diverse characters and opinions.

Another memorable happening Dick remembers was when George Allen, owner of Allen's Nursery in Homestead, Florida, introduced Fakahatchee Grass (*Tripsacum* sp.) at an annual meeting of the Florida Native Plant Society. Dick says it was especially exciting to see how quickly hoticulturists began propagating Fakahatchee Grass after George's introduction.

When Dick was asked what he saw for the future of the Florida Native Plant Society, he had lots of important words – I hope that I have gotten them down on paper with integrity and accuracy. Here are Dick's words as best I could record them:

“The Florida Native Plant Society is always going to be a small group of people who have a deep, concerted cerebral development in the area of native plants as it applies to fixing the ills of the planet. Only a small percentage of the populace can meet that criteria. However, we want to continue to encourage more people to use and appreciate native plants. Inroads will be made.”

“If the Florida Native Plant society wants to have major impact, we need first to involve and influence lawmakers and regulators at

all levels of government. Secondly, the FNPS needs to help educate and establish an aware populace to support the ordinances and laws that come out of these governing bodies. And the members of the FNPS need to support conservation organizations like The Nature Conservancy.”

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Recently Dick was doing some work in rural Highlands county and he was surprised at how rapidly the “neat little natural places” were disappearing in rural Florida.” He said: “If we depend on government and regulators to save natural Florida it won't happen. The inefficiencies embedded in government will prevent it from happening. Natural Florida has to be saved by private individuals and groups like the Florida Native Plant Society.”

Dick Workman is indeed the embodiment of these ideas and ideals. He is recognized in Lee County and throughout Florida, and well respected as he walks the walk as well as talking the talk. May his words and his example give us all inspiration and energy, and long-range commitment to FNPS ideals. Thank you, Dick, for your leadership.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Once again, we thank all of the very special folks featured here for their concern and work on behalf of Florida's native flora and the Florida Native Plant Society. We are indebted to these and other early members for wise guidance and much toil, providing a strong foundation on which FNPS can continue to grow. Interviewers, we are indebted to you also for capturing for us these gems of FNPS history.

**Member Profiles Wanted for Future Issues of
The Palmetto**

1000-1500 words plus photo

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