

The Quarterly Journal of the Florida Native Plant Society

Palmetto



Native Plant Landscaping for Florida Wildlife

Native Plant Landscaping for Florida Wildlife. By Craig N. Huegel
Paperback, 320 pages. University Press of Florida, Gainesville
\$24.95. ISBN-10: 0813034949

Craig Huegel's new book will be a handy reference for seasoned gardeners and those who are just beginning to plant their landscapes with natives and wildlife in mind. Craig's experience in the field and his keen observational skills are combined in an easy-to-use reference book that will be a good addition to any native plant library. The author shares his personal know-how and draws on the resources of many experts in the state's agencies and academia as well. What is not superficially apparent in a reading of the new book is that it is an extensive revision of a previous effort supported by our organization.

In 1995 FNPS published Craig's 118 page paperback, *Florida Plants for Wildlife*, listing about 280 wildlife-friendly trees and shrubs from 50 Florida native plant families. Each species entry was accompanied by a range map and icons which clued the reader in to its habit, ornamental value, growth needs and specific wildlife attractiveness. Some species were illustrated with line drawings. The 98 pages of species entries were preceded by a 10 page discussion of habitat and a briefing on how to plant for food and cover. The accounts were followed by a one page pep-talk on helping wildlife, 3 pages of region-specific recommended planting lists and an index. The book is out of print, but is available through Amazon, and other sources.

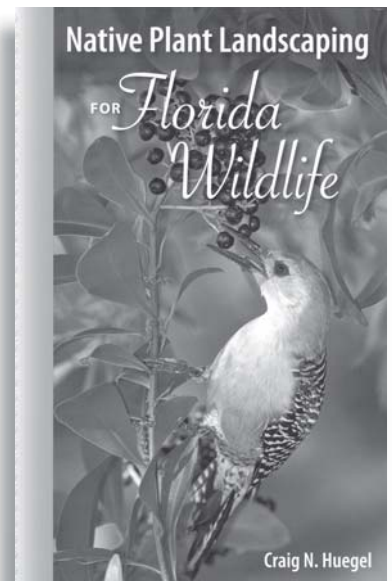
It's important to review a little something about *Florida Plants for Wildlife*, because the author tells us frankly that his new book is a direct descendant of that earlier effort. The earlier book contains so many more species, readers who don't have one may want to track down a copy to supplement the more streamlined species presentation in the new, improved version. The new book has been a long time coming and has, as Huegel notes, changed considerably in the process. These changes will perhaps appeal to a wider audience. Chances are, they will also appeal to the same folks who enjoyed and used the earlier volume.

Native Plant Landscaping for Florida Wildlife is constructed with a core of native species accounts wrapped in advice on how to use the plants to create wildlife-friendly Florida yards. The number of species presented has shrunk to fewer than half those in the '95 book, but comprise a section with 40% more pages. This streamlined core is the result of both winnowing and expansion. The winnowing may simply reflect the practical matter of availability. Sure, you'd love to use *Trema micrantha* in that mixed species hedge, but where do you get it? By contrast, most species in the new volume seem to be commercially available. Each account in the new book is longer, and includes Huegel's personal notes and other biological tidbits helpful to suburban wildlife managers. There is also at least one color photo, most by the author, illustrating each of the 53 families.

Readers may be disappointed to learn that, as in the original, only trees and shrubs are included. The vast world of native Florida herbaceous plants still awaits a similar treatment. Tantalizingly, Huegel suggests he may be considering one – he already has authored a volume on butterfly landscaping. More frustrating is the lack of concrete case studies of successful wildlife plantings. The archives of FNPS's annual competitions must contain dozens of good plans from all over Florida. Including few of those, complete with photos, would go far to inspire imitation.

Craig Huegel's expertise in wildlife-interactive native planting really shines in the sections leading up to and following the species accounts. Instead of producing a terse set of directions, the author has written a personal essay on wildlife landscaping. On most pages, there are thoughtful insights such as this commonsensical first sentence: "Florida wildlife species are not declining because of development, but because of the way we develop." That becomes the starting point for his personal appeal to interested homeowners: build a landscape which will attract wildlife by using your eyes and head and by doing what they tell you. Through sections like "Plants and Food" Huegel weaves in the necessary ecological principles without making a big deal of it. For example, he introduces the concept of Limiting Factor by simply suggesting that gardeners figure out for themselves which of the "big three" – food, water and cover, are in shortest supply and work on providing it. The author's stated goal for the book is for it to be the resource which supports that process. Similarly, Huegel trusts us to consider which wildlife species we may want to plan for. He provides a short database of native vertebrates to aid in this.

Florida's latitudinal reach and its resultant biodiversity make writing a book with this one's goals a daunting, almost audacious undertaking. Craig Huegel pulls it off with a combination of evident expertise and a personal approach which is both charming and informative. Readers will find much to savor, and to reflect on in his thoughtful deliberation on landscaping for Florida wildlife.





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Editorial Content

We welcome articles on native plant species and related conservation topics, as well as high-quality botanical illustrations and photographs. Contact the editor for guidelines, deadlines and other information.

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The purpose of the Florida Native Plant Society is to conserve, preserve, and restore the native plants and native plant communities of Florida.

Official definition of native plant:

For most purposes, the phrase Florida native plant refers to those species occurring within the state boundaries prior to European contact, according to the best available scientific and historical documentation. More specifically, it includes those species understood as indigenous, occurring in natural associations in habitats that existed prior to significant human impacts and alterations of the landscape.

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