2012 Landscape Awards

Each year at the FNPS Annual Conference, the use of native plants in restorative and traditional landscapes is recognized through the Design With Natives program, which gives amateur and professional designers an opportunity to share their efforts and be honored for their achievements.

To qualify for consideration, landscapes must consist of a minimum of 75% Florida native plant species, and be free of any plants listed as Category I and II invasives by the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council (FLEPPC). Judges also consider many other criteria including the fulfillment of specific goals, creation or maintenance of species diversity, on-site preservation of existing native plants, relationships to local native plant communities, creative solutions to significant obstacles, and the existence of an educational component that benefits those visiting the landscape.

The projects featured here are the winners of the 2012 Design With Natives Awards. Each of these landscapes faced significant challenges, from lack of species diversity to misuse and invasive plant infestation. These challenges were met by designers, owners and installers, who worked to improve the landscapes for both visitors and wildlife.

We congratulate the 2012 winners and honor their dedication to the use of native plants to revive and restore Florida’s yards, communities and native habitats.

We encourage you to participate in the 2013 Design With Natives program. An application is available online at www.fnps.org. Click on ‘Participate/Grants and Awards’.

For more information, contact Karina Veaudry at kveaudry@nativefloridaconsulting.com. The application deadline for the 2013 awards program is March 1, 2013.

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Back Dune Restoration Project at White Sands Cabana Club

Before restoration, the beach dune at White Sands Cabana Club was seriously degraded by a large tree canopy of invasive exotic species including Australian pine (Casuarina equisetifolia), Brazilian pepper (Schinus terebinthifolius) and carrotwood (Cupaniopsis anacardioides). Native understory plants were smothered by a dense layer of Australian pine needles carpeting the ground. Only a few hardy native sabal palms and sea grapes persisted beneath the exotic canopy, accompanied by sparse patches of Florida privet (Forestiera segregata) and nickerbean (Caesalpinia bonduc) in the more open areas.

The restoration process began with removal of all exotic plants listed on Sarasota County’s invasive plant list. Heavy equipment could not be used on the back dune, so trees were cut and lifted off using a large crane and disposed of offsite. Next, a water-efficient irrigation system was installed to provide a temporary water source for hundreds of soon-to-be-planted native species.

During the restoration, 85 trees were planted, including sabal palms (Sabal palmetto), sea grapes (Coccoloba uvifera), and red cedars (Juniperus virginiana). A small front-end loader was used to transport the palms. All other plants were installed by hand to minimize disturbance to the dune, including 600 pots of muhly grass (Muhlenbergia capillaris), and 450 sea oats (Uniola paniculata). Additionally, 100 assorted dune wildflowers and vines were planted, including dune sunflower (Helianthus debilis), firewheel (Gaillardia pulchella) and railroad vine (Ipomoea pes-caprae).

This twelve-year cooperative effort of private and public entities resulted in the restoration of one of the last, large back dune ecosystems remaining on Siesta Key.

Haisley Lynch Park

A few years back, the City of Gainesville Community Redevelopment Agency identified Haisley Lynch Park as an area in need of revitalization. The 1.4 acre parcel was a dark, misused, highly visible downtown public space, covered with trash. Although the park had an existing canopy of oak, sweetgum, magnolia, elm, dogwood, redbud, pine and cherry laurel trees, understory plants and flowers had been disturbed or removed.

Revitalization began with the removal of diseased trees, and canopy trees were pruned to open and brighten the area. Steps were taken to create an ecosystem that mimics nature in the urban environment. Plants that appear together in nature were selected for the site, creating a direct relationship to local plant communities. The plant selection also took into consideration what plants would have been on the site historically, as well as the local climate, soil types, and orientation to the sun. The landscape plan incorporated 100% native plants, and species were chosen for their pleasing foliage color and texture, drought tolerance, and ease of maintenance.

One of the goals of the project was to enhance the park’s aesthetic qualities with a high-quality design that would attract patrons to enjoy social activities throughout the day. A dog park was created within the larger space to encourage visitors to use the park regularly, and within a short time, it attracted a large number of new patrons. A native plant garden and plaza were also added, creating a social gather-
ing place with welcoming seating. The plaza was connected to the dog park, an adjacent neighborhood, and Gainesville’s South Main Street area, forming an inviting open space that beckons visitors to enter and enjoy the outdoors.

End of the Road Ranch

This 10-acre property located near Fort Myers was once a slash pine and saw palmetto flatwood. By the 1990’s, the site was heavily populated by a mosaic of invasive plants including Brazilian pepper, casuarina, melaleuca, dwarf papyrus, Caesar weed, cogon and torpedo grasses and exotic aquatic weeds.

Esteemed native plant expert and author Dick Workman visited the ranch and coached the owner about the need to remove exotic vegetation and restore Florida native plants to the overgrown property. Inspired by his visit, she began the restoration process with eradication of invasive species on the entire ranch – a huge and costly undertaking.

Replanting focused on a rustic, Japanese-inspired landscape concept surrounding the developed areas, some 2.5 acres where the owner’s home and three man-made ponds are located. This area features Florida native landscaping with mulched beds and mown firebreaks. Plants were chosen to increase the variety of natural habitat for wildlife as well as to enhance the property’s visual appeal.

The remaining 7.5 acres of the property contains slash pines, saw palmettos, native understory plants, grasses and numerous wildflowers. Approximately 95% of the vegetation on the ranch is a mixture of pre-existing or recently planted Florida natives.

Each year, the owner hosts numerous landscape tours, hayrides, parties and lawn concerts. Over the years, she has used the ranch to educate visitors about Florida native plants, their benefits to wildlife, and landscape planning with natives.

Waldo Road Greenway

The Waldo Road Greenway is a multi-use 2.5 mile paved path that features landscape plants native to Florida, including 850 trees, 1,500 shrubs, and 7,750 wildflowers.

The project site was an abandoned railway which contained no trees or desirable plants. The soil was highly compacted and needed to be amended before planting could take place.

A multi-use path was built, followed by the installation of large trees, understory trees, shrubs, and wildflowers. The project transformed an unsightly and abandoned rail corridor into an attractive feature that enhances the east side of Gainesville and provides local residents with a greater sense of pride in their community. The Greenway is also used as an educational resource for Master Gardener programs, and to demonstrate proper use of pruning techniques and landscaping with native plants.

To see additional photographs of the award-winning designs, visit www.fnps.org and click on ‘What We Do > Landscaping’.
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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