

# National Champions Awaiting Discovery

by Daniel B. Ward and Robert T. Ing

Florida currently has 168 trees of 148 species that have been designated as “National Champions” or “Co-Champions.” This honor is awarded to the trees that are the largest of their species in the United States. Because of Florida’s unique subtropical flora, many of its trees occur nowhere else in the nation and thus are without competition from other states. In consequence, as recently reported by *American Forests*, Florida can boast of more National Champions than any other state (California has 88; Texas has 65.).

The Division of Forestry, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, has the responsibility of recording Florida trees of exceptional size. In turn, the Division has delegated to the Department of Botany, University of Florida, the tedious but enjoyable task of seeking out and documenting these remarkable trees. Our discoveries thus far have been set forth in *Big Trees: the Florida Register*, a 223-page book published in 1997 by the Florida Native Plant Society (see FNPS book order form, page 19). But additional large trees continue to be discovered, often larger than those previously on record, a demonstration that Florida’s tree flora still contains many delightful surprises.

One would assume that this search for big trees has long since encountered specimens of all the native species and that the measurements on record, if not of the very largest possible, at least give some indication of the size the species can attain. It is a safe venture that no bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) in the state (probably in the nation, but that is another story) exceeds in size the gigantic “Senator” in Longwood, Seminole County. The state’s three largest live oaks (*Quercus virginiana*) – near LaCrosse, Alachua County; near Otter Creek, Levy County; and at the Jacksonville Naval Air Station, Duval County – surely are unsurpassed. And – perhaps most stunning of all, because of its enormous size when compared with what we usually think of as large for the species – behold the

mighty southern red oak (*Quercus falcata*) near Live Oak, Suwannee County, with a trunk 24 feet in circumference (nearly 100 inches larger than the next-largest known tree of that species).

But when we turn to the smaller trees of our state, especially the subtropical species, the picture changes. Even when we have an official champion in our record books, we are never surprised to come upon a larger individual of these smaller species. No doubt this uneven coverage is caused by the

inherent emotional impact of a gigantic tree, something we don’t experience when observing a smaller species. And a surprising number of modestly sized species have no champion whatsoever.

We have compiled a listing of twenty-six Florida tree species that have no National Champion. Most of these trees are subtropical, and most of them are small. But their most striking characteristic is that, within the limits of the United States, most are confined to Florida. This guarantees that a champion found in Florida is not going to be surpassed by a larger individual in some other state.

Some of these species are quite rare, and restricted to limited areas (sometimes a single hammock) of south Florida. But others are not uncommon. And nearly all are familiar to astute FNPS members.

We ask that you help us by finding and nominating a large specimen of each of each

## NATIVE TREES THAT HAVE NO DESIGNATED CHAMPIONS

Location may not be limited to the areas cited in parentheses. For additional information on the range of these plants, consult *Guide to the Vascular Flora of Florida*, Richard P. Wunderlin, University Press of Florida, 1998, or [www.plantatlas.usf.edu](http://www.plantatlas.usf.edu).

*Acacia macracantha*, long-spine acacia  
Southeast Florida (Miami-Dade County)  
and the Florida Keys (Ramrod Key)  
*Amphitecna latifolia*, black calabash  
Southeast Florida (Miami-Dade County)  
*Amyris balsamifera*, balsam torchwood  
South Florida (Miami-Dade County)  
*Ardisia escallonioides*, marlberry  
Central and South Florida  
*Asimina obovata*, flag pawpaw  
Central Florida  
*Capparis flexuosa*, limber caper  
Coastal Central and South Florida  
*Casasia clusiifolia*, seven-year apple  
Coastal South Florida  
*Chrysobalanus icaco*, cocoplum  
Coastal Central and South Florida  
*Colubrina arborescens*, coffee colubrina  
South Florida and the Florida Keys  
*Colubrina cubensis*, Cuban Nakedwood  
South Florida (Miami-Dade County)  
and Florida Keys  
*Exothea paniculata*, butterbough/inkwood  
South Florida and the Florida Keys  
*Ilex krugiana*, Krug’s Holly  
South Florida (Miami-Dade County)  
*Laguncularia racemosa*, white mangrove  
Coastal Central and South Florida  
*Licaria triandra*, Florida Licaria  
South Florida (Miami-Dade County)

*Magnolia tripetala*, umbrella magnolia  
West Florida (Okaloosa County)  
*Myrcianthes fragrans*, twinberry  
Coastal Central and South Florida  
*Nectandra coriacea*, lancewood  
Coastal Central and South Florida  
*Picramnia pentandra*, bitterbush  
South Florida (Miami-Dade County)  
*Pithecellobium unguis-cati*, catclaw black-bead  
Coastal South Florida  
*Quercus myrtifolia*, myrtle oak  
North and Central Florida  
*Savia bahamensis*, maidenbush  
Florida Keys  
*Solanum elaeagnifolium*, potato-tree  
South Florida and the Florida Keys  
*Tetrazygia bicolor*, Florida Tetrazygia  
South Florida (Miami-Dade County)  
and the Florida Keys  
*Yucca aloifolia*, Spanish dagger (see note)  
North and Central Florida, mostly  
coastal  
*Zanthoxylum coriaceum*, Biscayne prickly  
ash  
Coastal South Florida

**NOTE:** *Yucca aloifolia*, Spanish dagger, is one of those controversial “is it native or is it not?” plants. Listed as an exotic in Wunderlin’s *Guide to the Vascular Flora of Florida*.

of these Florida trees. The bigger the better, of course. But the marvel of this present opportunity is that, since there is currently no champion for these species, any nomination, no matter how small (barring some complication) is certain to become the National Champion, with you as its sponsor.



**ABOUT THE AUTHORS:** FNPS members are indebted to the authors for their tireless campaign on behalf of Florida's big trees. Dan started measuring big trees at the age of 15 and hasn't stopped since. He and friend, Bobby Ing, spent five years traveling all over Florida to find and document our champion trees. Their work resulted in the book, *Big Trees: The Florida Register* (see inside back cover to order!). Dan and Bobby continue to maintain the Champion Tree Program at the University of Florida in Gainesville. With friends like these, our trees can breathe a little easier.

## Be a Champ! Nominate a Champion.

The procedure for nominating a champion tree is straightforward and uncomplicated. A thorough explanation is published in Dan Ward and Bobby Ing's book *Big Trees: the Florida Register* (see order form inside back cover), which also provides the application form to record the information needed for the nomination. The nomination form is also available from your regional Division of Forestry office, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, listed in your phone book.

INFORMATION REQUIRED INCLUDES THE NAME OF THE owner of the tree, the tree's location and its measurements—height, branch spread, and trunk size. If requested, most state foresters will assist with the measuring.

Champions are determined by their ranking in point size. Points are calculated by applying a simple formula to three measurements:

- Trunk circumference, in inches, at 4.5 feet, or at a lower point if smaller than 4.5 feet high.
- Tree height, in feet.
- 1/4 of crown spread diameter—average of largest and smallest diameters—in feet.

Upon receipt of the nomination, the Champion Tree Program in Gainesville reviews previous records and notifies the nominator of the championship status of the tree. The nomination is then forwarded to *American Forests*, with the recommendation that the tree be declared the National Champion. And in due course, if there is no other competing nominee, *American Forests* publishes its official listing of the largest trees of the United States, with the new tree and its nominator duly recorded.