"Why should I pay $5.00 when I can go get one out of the woods?" These people usually come back to buy after an unsuccessful attempt at uprooting a plant the wrong way during the wrong season.

We’ve approached the education of the customer by creating an image for our nursery and developing advertising, workshops, courses, lectures and landscaping around this image/theme. Our theme is that of creating productive, low energy, low maintenance landscapes by using native plants, edible plants and plants having wildlife food value whenever possible.

Some of our educational techniques in conveying this image have been:
- appearing on television talk shows on rare and endangered native plants, backyard birding, hummingbirds, etc.
- lecturing and presenting slide shows to garden clubs and other community groups.
- offering free workshops and special programs at the nursery. These have proven most profitable. For example, this spring we held a program on hummingbirds every hour during a weekend. We sold hundreds of hummingbird feeders and many red buckeye and coral honeysuckle plants. In addition to the increased sales for the weekend, the programs brought in many people who previously had not known that we stocked a full line of native plants.
- offering field courses on trees and wildflowers for a fee. The people attending these classes have become long-term customers and several have had us do their landscaping.
- keeping a photo album of flowering native plants at the front desk.

We have found it necessary, as a retail store, to diversify while remaining consistent with our image. We are not only North Florida’s native plant specialist but also the local backyard bird supply center. Organic and natural mineral fertilizers, herbs, wildflowers, field guides, and locally made crafts relating to trees and birds are stocked at Native Nurseries. We are not just a store, but an educational center as well. We also do landscaping on a small scale but plan to expand in this area in the future.

An educational program is necessary to convince people of the value of native plants. Without it, plan to continue seeing destruction of native habitat followed by replacement with ligustrum and viburnum hedges covered with white flies.

Serenoa repens is a beautiful miniature accent tree which has not been appreciated much, probably due to its abundance. Saw palmetto has fan-shaped green leaves on a fine-toothed stem which shoots forth from a dark brown fibrous trunk. The fronds are smaller and more circular than the Sabal palm and lack the central midrib. Normally the trunks creep along the ground, so that the height of the plant is the length of the leaf. Rarely specimens are found with erect trunks.

Both Sabal palm and saw palmetto are depicted on the Florida State seal. During this time of the year (spring), delicately fragrant, flowing showers of dainty light yellow or white flowers appear on plume-like multi-branched stalks that sprout from the trunk. The bees which pollinate palmetto make delicious rich palmetto honey.

Saw palmetto, preserved on site, or grown from seed, will provide a haven for native wildlife in your yard. They feel at home there...and you will, too.

by Dave Wilson