



Good Citizen Guide to Natural Florida

West Central Region

Learn about where you live

Florida's West Central Region has a variety of natural areas to discover. Visit these areas to see the "real" Florida and to appreciate their diversity. Seeing native plants in their natural communities can help you learn about what to plant in your own landscape to make your yard more sustainable.



Discover some of the Region's native plant communities



Mangrove Swamp

Coastal wetlands where freshwater runoff mixes with saltwater. Buttonwood and red, white, and black mangrove trees are found here. Their tangled roots help protect the shoreline from storm surges, prevent erosion, and provide habitat for marine animals.

Where to visit Mangrove Swamp

- Caladesi Island (Pinellas County)
- Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge (Citrus County)
- E.G. Simmons Regional Park (Hillsborough County)
- Weedon Island Preserve (Pinellas County)
- Werner-Boyce Salt Springs State Park (Pasco County)



Salt Marsh

Salt marsh is found where bays and estuaries are inundated with saltwater between low and high tides. Dominant plants like black needlerush, saltmeadow cordgrass, and sawgrass tolerate the challenging conditions. They also provide nursery areas for small fish, shellfish, and crustaceans.

Where to visit Salt Marsh

- Crystal River Preserve State Park, including St. Martins Marsh Aquatic Preserve (Citrus County)
- Jenkins Creek Park (Hernando County)
- Werner-Boyce Salt Springs State Park (Pasco County)



Cypress Swamp (Dome)

Isolated, forested wetlands in a shallow depression, providing vital freshwater for many wildlife species. Pond cypress trees are dominant, with smaller plants growing along the edges and larger trees growing in the deeper water.

Where to visit Cypress Swamp (Dome)

- Blackwater Creek Nature Preserve (Hillsborough County)
- Brooker Creek Preserve (Pinellas County)
- Cypress Lakes Preserve (Hernando County)
- Hillsborough River State Park (Hillsborough County)
- Lettuce Lake Regional Park (Hillsborough County)
- Withlacoochee River Park (Pasco County)



Floodplain Forest

A dense, closed-canopy forest located near a river or stream that seasonally overflows its banks. Plants found here must be tolerant of prolonged flooding, and such species include swamp tupelo, red maple, and Dahoon holly.

Where to visit Floodplain Forest

- Alderman's Ford Nature Preserve (Hillsborough County)
- Hillsborough River State Park (Hillsborough County)
- Withlacoochee River (Citrus County)
- Withlacoochee State Forest, Silver Lake Recreation Center (Hernando County)



Mesic Flatwoods

A familiar Florida habitat, a mesic flatwood is a large, flat area with a longleaf or slash pine overstory, scrubby shrubs, and wiregrass groundcover. Fire is a dominant ecosystem factor, scorching the trees and burning the lower plants.

Where to visit Mesic Flatwoods

- Blackwater Creek Nature Preserve (Hillsborough County)
- Caladesi Island (Pinellas County)
- Flatwoods Conservation Park (Hillsborough County)
- Hillsborough River State Park (Hillsborough County)
- Jay B. Starkey Wilderness Park (Pasco County)
- Withlacoochee State Forest, Two Mile Prairie Tract (Citrus County) and Richloam Tract (Hernando County)



Scrub

Scrub areas are very dry with deep, sandy soils and patches of scrubby plants and lichens. This ancient, fire-dependent ecosystem formed on old dunes. It is home to endangered plants and animals that can tolerate harsh conditions, including the Florida goldenaster and gopher tortoise.

Where to visit Scrub

- Balm Boyette Nature Preserve (Hillsborough County)
- Chassahowitzka Wildlife Management Area (Hernando County)
- Golden Aster Scrub Nature Preserve (Hillsborough County)
- Jay B. Starkey Wilderness Park (Pasco County)
- Seranova Tract (Pasco County)
- Weedon Island Preserve (Pinellas County)



Sandhill

The deep, sandy soils of sandhill are host to widely spaced longleaf pine and sparse turkey oak, with moderately dense low-growing plants, such as wiregrass. This ecosystem is home to endangered animals, including the Sherman's fox squirrel and red-cockaded woodpecker.

Where to visit Sandhill

- Aripeka Sandhills Preserve (Pasco County)
- Withlacoochee State Forest, Croom Tract (Hernando County)
- Withlacoochee State Forest, Citrus Tract (Citrus County)

Easy to grow native plants for home landscapes in the West Central Region



Bring the beauty of native plants home

Florida's West Central Region has many beautiful native plant communities. In addition to visiting them, you can bring a bit of natural Florida to your landscape by planting natives. Fortunately there are many options to choose from and many plants are adaptable to a wide range of conditions. Plant selection and planting advice is available from Florida Native Plant Society chapters as well as local extension agents and nurseries. Here are just a few suggestions for plants to consider for home gardens and landscapes.

Shady hammock garden



Canopy trees:

(1) *Quercus virginiana* (live oak); (2) *Sabal palmetto* (cabbage palm); (3) *Magnolia virginiana* (sweetbay magnolia). Not pictured: *Quercus laevis* (turkey oak)

Shrubs:

(4) *Callicarpa americana* (American beautyberry). Not pictured: *Myrcianthes fragrans* (Simpson's stopper)

Low growing plants:

(5) *Heliotropium angiospermum* (scorpion's tail)
(6) *Dyschoriste oblongifolia* (oblongleaf twinflower).
Not pictured: *Zamia integrifolia* (coontie)

Flatwoods garden

Canopy and smaller trees:

(1) *Pinus elliotii* (slash pine); (2) *Prunus angustifolia* (Chickasaw plum). Not pictured: *Sabal palmetto* (cabbage palm); *Pinus palustris* (longleaf pine)

Shrubs:

(3) *Serenoa repens* (saw palmetto); (4) *Morella cerifera* (wax myrtle). Not pictured: *Callicarpa americana* (American beautyberry)

Low growing plants:

(5) *Mimosa strigillosa* (sunshine mimosa);
(6) *Liatris gracilis* (slender gayfeather). Not pictured: *Eragrostis spectabilis* (purple lovegrass)



Sunny pollinator garden

Shrubs:

- (1) *Hamelia patens* (firebush)
- (2) *Lyonia ferruginea* (rusty lyonia)
- (3) *Myrcianthes fragrans* (Simpson's stopper)

Low growing plants:

- (4) *Salvia coccinea* (tropical sage)
- (5) *Monarda punctata* (dotted horsemint)
- (6) *Rudbeckia hirta* (black-eyed Susan)



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

Florida Native Plant Society

PO Box 278, Melbourne, FL 32902-0278
(321) 271-6702 • Email: info@fnps.org

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