



Native Plant Landscaping Site Visit Report

February 6, 2020

Atherton Residence
Estero, FL

Thank you for inviting the Coccoloba Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society to visit your property. We appreciate your enthusiasm for installing more native plants in your landscape. FNPS members Pat and Tony Mauriello, Dennis Kessenich and Marlene Rodak participated in the visit and met with you. Neighbors Gary Kerl and Jane Pelke joined us for at least a portion of the visit. The purpose of the visit was to recommend suitable native plants to add to your home for many different reasons. It was a pleasure to view the property and share ideas toward a more natural setting.

As we mentioned, we are happy to help you improve your landscaping. We are proponents of native plants and natural plant communities of Florida. We believe in creating functional ecosystems that support life. Dr. Doug Tallamy, professor of entomology and wildlife ecology at the University of Delaware, says it well:

“Plants are as close to biological miracles as a scientist could dare admit. After all, they allow us, and nearly every other species, to eat sunlight, by creating the nourishment that drives food webs on this planet. As if that weren’t enough, plants also produce oxygen, build topsoil and hold it in place, prevent floods, sequester carbon dioxide, buffer extreme weather and clean our water. Considering all this, you might think we gardeners would value plants for what they do. Instead, we value them for what they look like.

“When we design our home landscapes, too many of us choose beautiful plants from all over the world, without considering their ability to support life within our local ecosystems.”

Furthermore, we should be good stewards of the Earth and protect the native and natural environment so our wildlife will have healthy food sources and shelter.

Summary of Visit:

- We looked at your home

We found your home was primarily exotic plants and sod with some “weeds.” Some of your plants are “bad players” and should be removed. There is a lot of room for native plants.

Disclaimer: The FNPS mission is to promote the preservation, conservation and restoration of native plants and native plant communities of Florida. The Coccoloba Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society provides this site visit free of charge. The volunteers visiting your location are **not landscape architects**. They are passionate native plant enthusiasts. They donate their time and service to further the mission of the Society and to help you add native plants to your piece of earth.

Detailed Comments:

The FNPS group was excited to tour your Marsh Landing home. You explained that you are having extensive renovations done inside, but wanted to take a look at the outside. You explained that you had a small termite issue and have termite bait stations now located around the perimeter of your home. You also added river rock type gravel to nearly all your planting beds.

We started with the driveway area. You mentioned that you were looking for a plant to add between the garage and front door. You want something well-behaved that won't get out of control when you are away in the summer months. You also expressed concern that the plants not stain your driveway.



Since this is the north side of your home, we suggest [wild coffee \(shiny leaf\) *Psychotria nervosa*](#). Alternatively, you could use [wild coffee \(Bahama\) \(*Psychotria ligustrifolia*\)](#) or [peperomia \(*Peperomia obtusifolia*\)](#).

On the other side, you pointed out the nutsedge in your turf. Whether you should “embrace” that or remove it is a personal preference that you should be comfortable with. Some people want a complete monoculture of “perfect” turf. Others only want it to be green from the street. However, we suggest that you expand your planting bed areas to minimize the turf. Turfgrass needs herbicides and pesticides to encourage St. Augustine grass that doesn't want to grow well here. Then, you can begin mixing [sunshine mimosa \(*Mimosa strigillosa*\)](#) and/or [frogfruit/matchweed \(*Phyla nodiflora*\)](#) in with your lawn to gradually overtake the turf.



You were surprised to learn [Mexican petunia \(*Ruellia simplex*\)](#), which is still sold at big box stores, is an invasive exotic plant that we recommend you remove. Sadly, this is our reality.

We also discussed the importance of slowing rainwater down and holding it on your property for as long as possible to clean it. This is something every homeowner in Florida should know about and practice to improve our water quality. Therefore, we recommend removing the downspout extensions and expanding the planting beds to prevent erosion and slow the water. Replacing the blue plumbago with [Simpson's stopper \(*Myrcianthes fragrans*\)](#) or [Spanish stopper \(*Eugenia foetida*\)](#), and swapping the hibiscus with a small tree such as [sweet acacia \(*Vachellia farnesiana*\)](#) or [pigeon plum \(*Coccoloba diversifolia*\)](#) would be an attractive alternative to your current planting. You could also add additional shrubs, grasses and wildflowers to make a butterfly garden. Suggestions here are: a native hedge of [golden creeper \(*Ernodea littoralis*\)](#) with some beautiful wildflowers such as [blanket flower \(*Gaillardia pulchella*\)](#), [tropical sage \(*Salvia coccinea*\)](#), [starry rosinweed \(*Silphium asteriscus*\)](#), or [porterweed \(blue\) \(*Stachytarpheta jamaicensis*\)](#), plus [senna \(Bahama\) \(*Senna mexicana var. chapmanii*\)](#) or [senna \(privet\) \(*Senna ligustrina*\)](#) and perhaps [muhly grass \(*Muhlenbergia capillaris*\)](#).

As we moved further up the east side yard we explained, generally, all your plants were installed too close to your house. After your scary termite incident, you expressed concern about removing the hibiscus around the house because the termites can use the roots to work their way back into your living space. So, that decision is up to you, but we also suggested adding shade trees on both this side and the back of your home. This would make great progress shading your home and improving the efficiency of your air conditioning. We also discussed the potential of deciduous trees or trees that lose their leaves in the dry months. They would shade in the summer and allow the warmth of the sun to pass through in the winter. We suggest that you consider planting a [satinleaf \(*Chrysophyllum oliviforme*\)](#) or [paradise tree \(*Simarouba glauca*\)](#), which are beautiful trees and would eventually provide wonderful shade for livable outdoor space. Otherwise, your air conditioner unit seems sufficiently shaded from the sun and the landscapers are maintaining it to keep it clear of the unit.



The backyard has huge potential to be a wildlife destination. Along the back of the house, we suggest expanding the beds and adding [firebush \(*Hamelia patens*\)](#), [necklacepod \(*Sophora tomentosa* var. *truncata*\)](#) and/or [senna \(Bahama\) \(*Senna mexicana* var. *chapmanii*\)](#) or [senna \(privet\) \(*Senna ligustrina*\)](#). We didn't

discuss it at the time, but adding a [fiddlewood \(*Citharexylum spinosum*\)](#) or two would be great additions with their beauty and aroma. We also discussed using [Jamaica caper \(*Quadrella jamaicensis*\)](#) although they are slower-growing. Adding [dahoon holly \(*Ilex cassine*\)](#) and/or [wild tamarind \(*Lysiloma latisiliquum*\)](#) would help draw the wading birds up from the pond.



On the west side of your home, there is limited space between your place and the neighbor's. Therefore, we believe it will be rather shaded. Based on your input, we recommend a mixed hedge. Suitable plants here are: [wild coffee \(Bahama\) \(*Psychotria ligustrifolia*\)](#), [wild coffee \(shiny leaf\) \(*Psychotria nervosa*\)](#), [wild coffee \(velvet leaf\) \(*Psychotria tenuifolia*\)](#), with groundcovers of [southern river sage \(*Salvia misella*\)](#), [corkystem \(*Passiflora suberosa*\)](#) or [peperomia \(*Peperomia obtusifolia*\)](#). This is also a great place for ferns. We suggest [cinnamon fern \(*Osmunda cinnamomea*\)](#), [swamp fern \(*telmatoblechnum serrulatum*\)](#) or [bracken fern \(*Pteridium aquilinum*\)](#). It might be aesthetically pleasing to mix the various leaf types of ferns for textural aesthetics. The soil and irrigation in the area should be suitable for ferns.

Finally, we worked our way back to the northwest corner. This is a mix between your neighbor's plants and yours. We recommended cutting back the neighbor's non-native firebush that is growing on your side and adding [white indigo berry \(*Randia aculeata*\)](#) and [firebush \(*Hamelia patens*\)](#).



We also recommend that you move the stones to within about a foot of your foundation and use high-quality mulch such as Forestry Resources' FloriMulch around your plants. That will provide natural fertilization for your plants and help create healthy soil.

Summary:

Overall, your yard is typical of most in the area. It is predominantly non-native plants without much wildlife. This is a wonderful opportunity for you to take small steps that will make a big difference. Your yard is like a blank canvas. We can offer suggestions, but it's up to you to paint the picture you want to see. You will ultimately make the decisions about how you want to use your yard so we suggest visiting other yards and gardens to see what you like. Then we can help you replicate that.

Please feel free to visit us at the Koreshan Farmers Market to discuss your thoughts. Bring pictures for discussion. We have a lot of members who love to help. Use Facebook -- *Coccoloba Chapter*, *Florida Native Plant Society* and *Native Plants of Florida*. They are great resources.

Some guidelines to remember:

1. Make sure you leave enough space between your new native plants for mature height and width. Add native wildflowers to take up the space between them as they grow in. The wildflowers will reseed reappearing where they are happy.
2. Be very careful about planting too close to structures.
3. Use a wide variety of native plants to invite nature to the area. While this generally contradicts landscape architects' recommendations to mass plants,

Did you know?

There are over 2800 species of plants native to the state of Florida?

mimicking nature provides the much-needed assortment of food for wildlife. Dr. Doug Tallamy states this best in [articles like this](#) and in his book, [Bringing Nature Home](#). Adding a diverse assortment of native plants will increase the “carrying capacity” of your parcel of Earth. Plants efficiently convert the sun’s energy into plant material. Different plants have different chemical makeups and tastes. Our native creatures have evolved to eat different native plants. Therefore, plant communities rich in diverse native species are important for a wide variety of birds, insects and mammals.

4. Since some people value neat and orderly landscapes, Coccoloba Chapter recommends adding “[cues to care](#)” indicating the area is maintained. This includes small fences or hedges around diverse planting areas.
5. As your native plants get established in the ground, turn off the sprinkler system to those areas and use it only as needed.
6. Share this information with your neighborhood. As more people plant yards for nature, we will create an even healthier environment and bigger corridors for songbirds and migrating birds and other wildlife.
7. Finally, nurture your soil. A single teaspoon of productive soil generally contains between 100 million and 1 billion bacteria. Inorganic fertilizer can deactivate or kill these and other important microbes that are helping your plants take up nutrients. Use mulch and compost.

For additional pictures and information on any of these plants, the websites & books below are great references.

Websites & books for reference:

1. Florida Native Plant Society: www.FNPS.org
2. Coccoloba Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society: www.FNPSCoccoloba.org
3. Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council: the best resource for identifying and understanding invasive exotic plants www.FLEPPC.org
4. Institute for Regional Conservation: great information & pictures about natives www.regionalconservation.org
5. Atlas of Florida Vascular Plants: great pictures & information about natural range of native plants <http://www.plantatlas.usf.edu/default.asp>
6. Osorio, Rufino. *A Gardener’s Guide to Florida’s Native Plants*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001.
7. Haehle, Robert G. and Brookwell, Joan. *Native Florida Plants: Low-Maintenance Landscaping and Gardening*. Lanham: Taylor Trade, 2004.
8. Nelson, Gil. *Florida’s Best Native Landscape Plants: 200 Readily Available Species for Homeowners and Professionals*. University Press of Florida, 2003.
9. Taylor, Walter Kingsley. *The Guide to Florida Wildflowers*. Taylor Publishing Company, 1992.

We invite you to attend our monthly meetings 6:30 pm at the Universalist Unitarian Church/Holton Eco-Preserve located at 13411 Shire Ln, Fort Myers, FL 33912 on the third Thursday of the month (No May or December meetings). Feel free to invite your friends and neighbors also.

Thank you again for allowing us to visit.

Respectfully submitted by Marlene Rodak on behalf of The Coccoloba Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society.