



## Coccoloba CHAPTER

### Florida Native Plant Landscaping Site Visit Report August 26, 2023

Carse Residence  
Grandezza Community  
Estero, FL

Thank you for inviting The Coccoloba Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society (FNPS) to visit your property. We appreciate your enthusiasm for installing more native plants in your landscape. FNPS members Randa Veach, Chuck Schad, Tony Mauriello, Joann and Tim Larkee, and Marlene Rodak participated in the visit and met with you. 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.

Most of our waterways in Florida are impaired with excess nutrients. By planting native plants, you can eliminate the need for fertilizer, which can leach and runoff, adding excess nutrients to our water bodies. Once the fertilizer enters water, it can cause algae to “green up” or bloom. These algae blooms can absorb the oxygen in the water resulting in fish kills and other issues. Some blooms can contribute to toxic blooms such as red tide and other serious issues. Please visit [wetplan.org](http://wetplan.org) and [Lee County's Water Initiative](#) for more information on improving our water quality.

### **Summary of Visit:**

Your yard was typical of the southwest Florida golf course community. Nearly all the plants were exotic in a highly manicured yard with a lot of turfgrass. We discovered some native plants, but for the most part, they were from other places in the world.

The HOA uses Pinnacle Landscaping to maintain the homeowners' yards. They manage the plants and irrigation. You can change plants in accordance with your architectural review board. The landscaper will only guarantee plants they provide and install.

***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 at low or no 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:**

**Your goal:** You stated that your goal was to create a place where people can walk by and be curious. You also wanted to encourage bees, among other things.

To appease others, you might achieve a more manicured look with palms such as with [Florida thatch palm \(\*Thrinax radiata\*\)](#), or [paurotis palm, Everglades Palm \(\*Acoelorrhaphe wrightii\*\)](#). If adding new beds of natives, consider balancing diversity of new plants with some massing of one or two species as an edging or groundcover and to tie the design together.

### **Areas:**

#### **Front yard – west facing**

**Native plants present:**



[live oak \(\*Quercus virginiana\*\)](#)

[golden polypody fern \(\*Phlebodium aureum\*\)](#)

**Invasive plants present and recommended for removal:**

[Chamber bitter \(\*Phyllanthus urinaria\*\)](#)—Caution

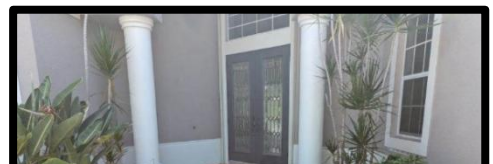
**Recommendations for changes and/or additions:**

We discussed minimizing the turf grass because of the excessive chemicals applied to keep it looking green. There are so many options for native plants to add. Here are some of our comments.

- Replace the bougainvillea at the street with a grouping of [coontie \(\*Zamia integrifolia\*\)](#). This will improve the visibility exiting the driveway, too. You could run the coontie along the driveway as well.
- You may get great pops of color using [dune sunflower \(\*Helianthis debilis\*\)](#) or [beach tea \(\*Croton punctatus\*\)](#) in the mounded areas beside the driveway. We also recommended a row of [Jamaica caper \(\*Quadrella jamaicensis\*\)](#) or [tea bush \(\*Melochia tomentosa\*\)](#) beside the driveway.
- You can minimize turf by expanding the beds toward the road. There would be a lot of space to add some of our favorites such as [sweet acacia \(\*Vachellia farnesiana\*\)](#), [gumbo limbo \(\*Bursera simaruba\*\)](#), [firebush \(\*Hamelia patens\* var. \*patens\*\)](#), [paradise tree \(\*Simarouba glauca\*\)](#), [coco plum \(\*Chrysobalanus icaco\*\)](#), [tea bush \(\*Melochia tomentosa\*\)](#), [porterweed \(blue\) \(\*Stachytarpheta jamaicensis\*\)](#), [dwarf Fakahatchee grass \(\*Tripsacum floridanum\*\)](#), [Florida privet \(\*Forestiera segregata\*\)](#), [fiddlewood \(\*Citharexylum spinosum\*\)](#), [little strongbark \(\*Bourreria cassinifolia\*\)](#), [senna \(Bahama\) \(\*Senna mexicana\* var. \*chapmanii\*\)](#), [senna \(privet\) \(\*Senna ligustrina\*\)](#), and [golden creeper \(\*Ernodea littoralis\*\)](#).



At the front door, we thought that keeping things lower would be advisable to preserve your view out of the windows. We suggested adding [senna \(Bahama\) \(\*Senna mexicana\* var. \*chapmanii\*\)](#), [firebush \(\*Hamelia patens\* var. \*patens\*\)](#), [wild coffee \(Bahama\) \(\*Psychotria ligustrifolia\*\)](#), [wild coffee \(Bahama\) \(\*Psychotria ligustrifolia\*\)](#), [lantana \(gold\) \(\*Lantana depressa\* var. \*depressa\*\)](#), [rouge plant \(\*Rivina humilis\*\)](#) or the horizontal version of [coco plum \(\*Chrysobalanus icaco\*\)](#) with [Keys blackbead \(\*Pithecellobium keyense\*\)](#) to the left (north) of the front door. On the right (south), a nice row of [wild coffee \(shiny leaf\) \*Psychotria nervosa\*](#) would work well. Other options discussed there were [tropical sage \(\*Salvia coccinea\*\)](#), [peperomia \(\*Peperomia obtusifolia\*\)](#), or [porterweed \(blue\) \(\*Stachytarpheta jamaicensis\*\)](#). We also added [necklacepod \(\*Sophora tomentosa\* var. \*truncata\*\)](#), [strongbark \(\*Bourreria succulenta\*\)](#),



[scorpion-tail \(\*Heliotropium angiospermum\*\)](#) and [painted leaf \(\*Euphorbia cyathophora\*\)](#) to the plant palette.

We talked about our concerns with uplighting on the plants and pollinators. It might warrant additional research on your part. Also, if you replant where there is rock as “mulch,” please consider eliminating the rock before replanting.

### **Side yard – north facing**

This is a very narrow area and likely your lowest priority area. We suggested potentially adding trellises in front of the windows for privacy and color. We also suggested [wild coffee \(shiny leaf\) \*Psychotria nervosa\*](#) to replace the viburnum.

### **Invasive plants present and recommended for removal:**

None noted. However, the two large white bird of paradise plants may damage your foundation if left there in a confining space.

### **Rear yard – east facing**

#### **Native plants present:**

[mahogany \(\*Swietenia mahogoni\*\)](#)

[cabbage palm \(\*Sabal palmetto\*\)](#)

[buttonwood \(\*Conocarpus erectus\*\)](#)

[saw palmetto \(\*Serenoa repens\*\)](#)

[Virginia creeper \(\*Parthenocissus quinquefolia\*\)](#)

#### **Invasive plants present and recommended for removal:**

[carrotwood \(\*Cupaniopsis anacardioides\*\)](#)

[balsam apple \(\*Momordica balsamina\*\)](#)

[cypress vine \(\*Ipomoea quamoclit\*\)](#)

[nettle leaf porterweed \(\*Stachytarpheta cayennensis\*\)](#)



#### **Recommendations for change and/or additions:**

This is a narrow space with a row of [buttonwood \(\*Conocarpus erectus\*\)](#) suffering from excessive pruning. Leaving this hedge untrimmed and allowed to grow tall would revitalize it. Alternatively, although it might be too small of an area, the buttonwood could be replaced with the horizontal version of [coco plum \(\*Chrysobalanus icaco\*\)](#).

You could replace the hibiscus with something low growing because the existing privacy hedge provides the needed screening. Suggestions for replacements would be [porterweed \(blue\) \(\*Stachytarpheta jamaicensis\*\)](#) or [dune sunflower \(\*Helianthis debilis\*\)](#).

We also recommend potentially adding [frogfruit/matchweed \(\*Phyla nodiflora\*\)](#), [dune sunflower \(\*Helianthis debilis\*\)](#) and/or [peperomia \(\*Peperomia obtusifolia\*\)](#) to the new, open area from your lanai



extension. An option is to crowd in more of these ground covering species than believed necessary to see which ones do best and which ones you like.

Finally, you could add something tall like a trellised [coral honeysuckle \(\*Lonicera sempervirens\*\)](#) on the corner to hide the pipe.

### **Side yard – south facing**

Again, this is a narrow area and a lower priority except for the view from the kitchen or dining area. The group thought that an addition of [firebush \(\*Hamelia patens\* var. \*patens\*\)](#) and [corkystem \(\*Passiflora suberosa\*\)](#) would add a beautiful, butterfly-attracting view to your life. Alternatively, you could use [tea bush \(\*Melochia tomentosa\*\)](#) with [porterweed \(blue\) \(\*Stachytarpheta jamaicensis\*\)](#).

Although you have plans for a hard walkway here, you could also use pine bark.

### **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. Do not plant under the eaves or overhangs. Plants should be outside the dripline.
3. Use a wide variety of native plants to invite nature to the area. While this generally contradicts landscape architects' recommendations to mass plants, 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. Dr. Craig Huegel and others recommend a balance by planting groupings of three of each species.
4. Since some people value neat and orderly landscapes, The Coccoloba Chapter recommends adding "cues to care" indicating the area is maintained. This includes small fences or hedges around diverse planting areas. Research "cues to care" or "Messy Ecosystems, Orderly Frames" by Joan Nassauer for more information.
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. Lee County's fertilizer ordinance forbids your use of fertilizer between June 1 and September 30, except for organic fertilizer such as compost. You are NEVER allowed to fertilize within 10 feet of any water body.



7. 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.
8. 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 and books below are great references.*

**Websites & books for reference:**

1. Florida Native Plant Society: [www.FNPS.org](http://www.FNPS.org)
2. Cocoloba Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society: [www.FNPSCocoloba.org](http://www.FNPSCocoloba.org)
3. [Lee County Water Initiative](#)
4. Florida Invasive Species Council (FISC): the best resource for identifying and understanding invasive exotic plants <https://floridainvasivespecies.org/index.cfm>
5. Institute for Regional Conservation: great information and pictures about natives [www.regionalconservation.org](http://www.regionalconservation.org)
6. Atlas of Florida Vascular Plants: great pictures and information about natural range of native plants <https://florida.plantatlas.usf.edu/>
7. [WetPlan](#)
8. Osorio, Rufino. *A Gardener's Guide to Florida's Native Plants*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001.
9. Haehle, Robert G. and Brookwell, Joan. *Native Florida Plants: Low-Maintenance Landscaping and Gardening*. Lanham: Taylor Trade, 2004.
10. Nelson, Gil. *Florida's Best Native Landscape Plants: 200 Readily Available Species for Homeowners and Professionals*. University Press of Florida, 2003.
11. Taylor, Walter Kingsley. *The Guide to Florida Wildflowers*. Taylor Publishing Company, 1992.

Thank you again for allowing us to visit.

*Respectfully submitted by on behalf of The Cocoloba Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society.*