

# Native Plant Landscaping Site Visit Report

October 29, 2018

Kathy Pavlick  
Cape Coral



Thank you, Kathy, for inviting the Cocoloba Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society to visit your property. Cocoloba members Barbara Forster, Paula Reiss, Sherry Sizemore, Ana Clavero, and Ben Johnson participated in the visit, and appreciate your enthusiasm for installing more native plants in your landscape. The purpose of the visit was to assess different areas around the property and offer suggestions for native replacements/additions. It was a pleasure to view the property, and share ideas towards a more natural setting.

-As we mentioned, we are happy to help you improve your landscaping. We are proponents of native plants and plant communities of Florida, and 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.

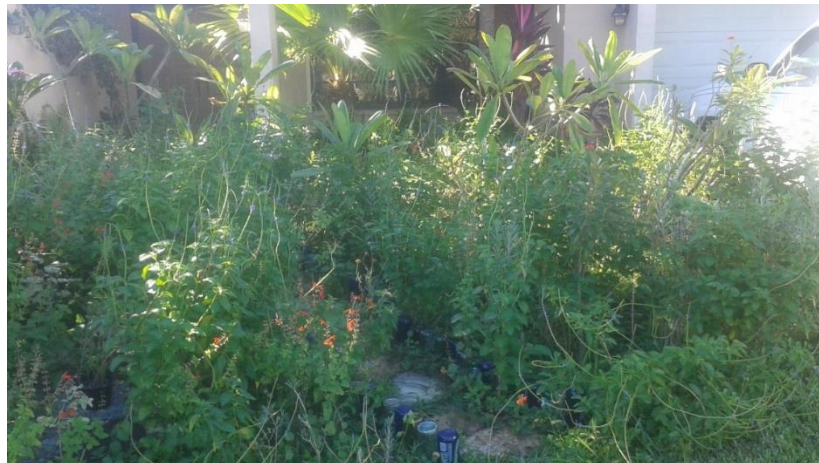
***Disclaimer:*** The FNPS mission is to promote the preservation, conservation and restoration of native plants and native plant communities of Florida. The Cocoloba Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society provides this site visit free of charge. The volunteers visiting your location are **not landscape 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.

## **Summary of Visit:**

We viewed all the areas around your property, and observed an abundance and variety of plants. There was a diverse mixture of non-native and native plants throughout your yard. We did not have many detailed comments, but our one main suggestion is to phase out the non-native species, especially the invasive exotic species, and replace them with suitable native alternatives over time.

## **Detailed Comments:**

1. The first area we looked at was the front yard which faced north with partial to full sun areas. There were numerous native plants already in existence. We had no issue with the trees (mostly palms), but you did express that you would like to remove the Canary Island date palm (*Phoenix canariensis*). Good native replacement trees include live oak (more shade) or slash pine (less shade). We could not identify the one palm with the three sides where the trunk meets the crown, but my research indicates it is a triangle palm (*Dypsis decaryi*). Some exotics we observed in this area (some also present in other areas of the yard): Non-native porterweed, green shrimp plant, oyster plant, asparagus fern, and carboard palm.



2. The side of the yard the we viewed next faced east and fairly sunny. We did not have many comments for this area, but did discuss the following:
- Walking iris – nonnative, but not considered a threat.
  - Plant with white, ball shaped flowers – we could not identify this plant, but my experience is that it is prevalent in most upland areas of lee county and difficult to pull out because of a long taproot. I am not entirely sure if this plant is native or not. I will continue researching this plant, and will follow-up at a later time.



3. We also looked at the back yard (behind the gates). This area ranged from full sun to full shade, and had some of the same plants observed in other areas of the yard. We discussed specific plants, mostly trying to determine identification. These included:
- Hibiscus with purple leaves – appears to be *Hibiscus acetosella*.
  - The yellow buttercup bush is a *Turnera ulmifolia* which is non-native, and also listed as a CAUTION on IFAS Non-Native Assessment (<https://assessment.ifas.ufl.edu/assessments/turnera-ulmifolia/>)



- The pencil cactus (milkbush) is *Euphorbia tirucalli* and a non-native, but does not appear to be invasive. The sap is considered toxic.



- The guava tree was not identified to any particular species although it strongly resembles *Psidium cattleianum* which is non-native and does appear on the FLEPPC list as a Category 1 invasive, and also on the IFAS Non-native Assessment as invasive.

- We determined the necklace pod to be the non-native variety. The native necklace pod has dark green, smooth, and shiny leaves (although newer leaves can have a velvety texture).



- The clover we observed was not flowering, but appears to be yellow woodsorrel (*Oxalis corniculata*) which is native.
  - Other exotic invasive observed in the backyard: Mexican petunia (*Ruellia simplex*), two-leaf nightshade (*Solanum diphyllum*), and bishopwood (*Bischofia javanica*).
4. Lastly, we looked at the west side of the property, and we had no comments for this area other, but did enjoy viewing the Dutchman pipe vine growing on the fence. Unfortunately, this is the non-native variety (*Aristolochia elegans*) and appears on the FLEPPC list as a Category II invasive. There are a couple of native *Aristolochia*, one of which is endangered.

Some invasive exotics that were observed (as listed on the 2017 FLEPPC list):

Category I - Species that are invading and disrupting native plant communities in Florida.

- carrotwood (*Cupaniopsis anacardioides*) – we only saw one, but there may be more hiding in the yard because of the large tree we noticed on your neighbor's property behind your home
- asparagus fern (*Asparagus aethiopicus*)
- bishopwood (*Bischofia javanica*)
- Mexican petunia (*Ruellia simplex*)

Category II - Species that have shown a potential to disrupt native plant communities.

- green shrimp plant (*Ruellia blechum*)
- oyster plant (*Tradescantia spathacea*)
- two-leaf nightshade (*Solanum diphyllum*)
- Dutchman's pipe vine (*Aristolochia elegans*)

Other species of concern

- cardboard palm (*Zamia furfuracea*) – toxic to dogs (similar to coontie (*Zamia integrifolia*))

We support your actions in restoring some of your areas to a more natural state. Choose your battles when it comes to removing exotics as some can be difficult and maybe not worth the effort at times. Prioritize your areas, and you may wish to do one or two areas at a time. Diversity in plants is always good for attracting wildlife, and although not entirely maintenance free, the right native plant in the right spot eliminates the need for fertilizers and reduces irrigation to supplemental in the drier months.

As always, we also continue our invitation to attend our monthly meetings 6:30 pm at the Universalist Unitarian Church located at 13411 Shire Ln, Fort Myers, FL 33912 on the third Thursday of the month (No May or December meetings). Finally, we also invite you to visit us at Koreshan State Park's Farmers Market and Native Plant Sale to learn more. Other local places to purchase plants are SCCF (Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation) Native Landscapes and Garden Center along with All Native Garden Center in Fort Myers. Feel free to invite your friends and neighbors also. Thank you again, Kathy, for inviting us to visit.

### **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 and walkways.
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.
4. Since some 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. Consider adding a rain barrel or two for supplemental irrigation of landscape and potted plants.
7. Share this information with your neighbors. As more people plant yards for nature, we will create an even healthier environment and bigger corridor 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.

### **Websites & books for reference:**

1. Florida Native Plant Society: [www.FNPS.org](http://www.FNPS.org)
2. Coccoloba Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society: [www.FNPSCoccoloba.org](http://www.FNPSCoccoloba.org)
3. Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council: the best resource for identifying and understanding invasive exotic plants [www.FLEPPC.org](http://www.FLEPPC.org)
4. [IFAS Non-Native Assessment](#) website is a newer tool for assessing invasive exotic plants.
5. Institute for Regional Conservation: great information & pictures about natives [www.regionalconservation.org](http://www.regionalconservation.org)
6. Atlas of Florida Vascular Plants: great pictures & information about natural range of native plants <http://www.plantatlas.usf.edu/default.asp>
7. Osorio, Rufino. *A Gardener's Guide to Florida's Native Plants*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001.
8. Haehle, Robert G. and Brookwell, Joan. *Native Florida Plants: Low-Maintenance Landscaping and Gardening*. Lanham: Taylor Trade, 2004.
9. Nelson, Gil. *Florida's Best Native Landscape Plants: 200 Readily Available Species for Homeowners and Professionals*. University Press of Florida, 2003.
10. Taylor, Walter Kingsley. *The Guide to Florida Wildflowers*. University Press of Florida, 2013.

Respectfully submitted by Ben Johnson on behalf of the Coccoloba Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society.