



Native Plant Landscaping Site Visit Report

February 6, 2020

Kessenech 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 and Marlene Rodak participated in the mini-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.

Summary of Visit:

- Since you have so many similarities with the Atherton property, we focused on the north-facing area between your lanai and the preserve.

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:

We found it very exciting that you had added an area of rock or gravel immediately around your house and added mulched beds beyond that. The gravel will keep the moisture from the mulch away from your home, but the mulch will help your planting areas and the associated soil.

We first worked on understanding where your property ends and the preserve starts. This is very important as you cannot disturb the preserve area. Furthermore, your plant selections can have a direct effect on the amount of money the HOA spends maintaining the preserve. It is critical that you are careful with your plant selections in such close proximity to the preserve. That doesn't mean that invasive exotics from your front yard or neighboring yards won't travel into and take up residence in the preserve, but the risk is magnified when you're planting at the immediate borders.

We found the Marsh Landing-rampant [Mexican petunia \(*Ruellia simplex*\)](#) invading the area as we expected. We also saw [asparagus fern \(*Asparagus aethiopicus*\)](#), which we cautioned you to wear protective gloves when removing. An unidentified plant in this buffer area is now identified as a CAUTIONARY plant called [candlestick plant \(*Senna alata*\)](#). Although this plant is listed as a CAUTION, we believe it working its way to the invasive exotic list and should be removed right away. (Sometimes these things take DECADES before we understand their environmental impact!) You seem to be aware of the risks there, so we'll focus on the native plants.

We suggest a tidy border along the lanai edge to soften it and add beauty. This could be an assortment of [wild coffee \(Bahama\) \(*Psychotria ligustrifolia*\)](#), [peperomia \(*Peperomia obtusifolia*\)](#) and, if desired, ferns such as [cinnamon fern \(*Osmunda cinnamomea*\)](#). Between the tidy border and the preserve, you can fill in with butterfly nectar and host plants. Some specific suggestions are [blanket flower \(*Gaillardia pulchella*\)](#), [tropical sage \(*Salvia coccinea*\)](#), [starry rosinweed \(*Silphium asteriscus*\)](#), [porterweed \(blue\) \(*Stachytarpheta jamaicensis*\)](#), [dune sunflower \(*Helianthis debilis*\)](#), [corkstem \(*Passiflora suberosa*\)](#), plus [dwarf Fakahatchee grass \(*Tripsacum floridanum*\)](#) and [firebush \(*Hamelia patens*\)](#), which will add consistency and structure to your butterfly garden.

We also suggested spreading cardboard over the areas you want to plant. Then, generously spreading mulch. Punch holes in the cardboard with a pitchfork, if desired. Then, when you want to plant, simply spread the mulch away, cut a hole, plant the plant and move the mulch back to cover the cardboard.



CAUTION: *Senna alata* or candlestick plant

As the grass and weeds below the cardboard break down, they will release the nitrogen and phosphorus from their leaves back into the soil as fertilizer for your plants. This provides natural fertilization for your plants and will 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.

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, 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.

Did you know?

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

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.