



Native Plant Landscaping Site Visit Report

October 19, 2019

Wheeler Residence
Naples, 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 Liz Smith, Gregg Victor, Danny Cox 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.

Summary of Visit:

We found your home was primarily exotic plants. Some are “bad players” and should be removed. There is a lot of potential for native plants as some of the exotics die out or are removed.

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:

You were very patient waiting for a site visit and we were delighted to share the opportunity with the Naples Chapter. The FNPS group was excited to tour your Naples home despite the turn of the weather.

It was very apparent to our group that the Sterling Oaks common areas are primarily exotic plants. Most of the yards in the community mimic the common grounds. You have a terrific green thumb and seem to be able to grow and nurture plants very well.

You stated your goal is for us to recommend native plants to fill in vacancies left by other plants and also for some groundcover.

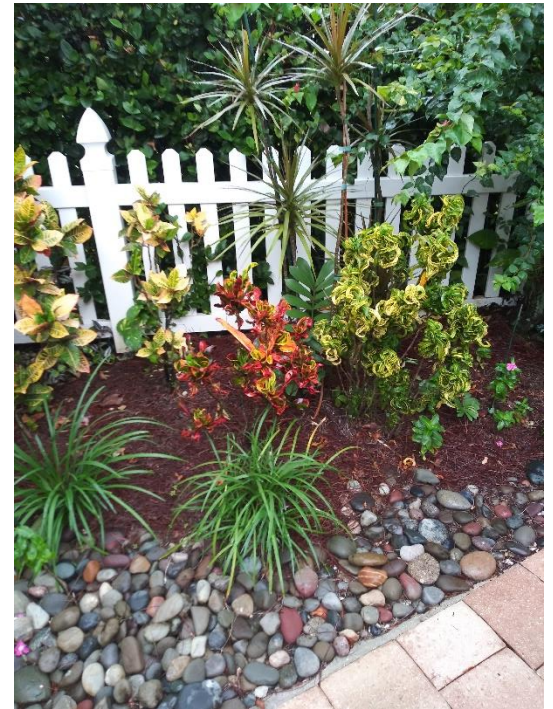
In the front yard and patio, you have a lot of exotic croton that seem to be performing better than most. You questioned the “safety” of a [spider plant \(*Chlorophytum comosum*\)](#) you are using for groundcover. In checking, it has not been assessed by IFAS yet. We noted some [Madagascar periwinkle \(*Catharanthus roseus*\)](#), which is listed as a CAUTION by IFAS. There is also quite a lot of [pothos \(*Epipremnum pinnatum cv Aureum*\)](#), which you said your husband is fond of. This is listed as an INVASIVE by both IFAS and FLEPPC. Other plants of concern were monstera (the *Monstera deliciosa* has recently been bumped to a HIGH INVASION RISK), [arrowhead vine \(*Syngonium podophyllum*\)](#) and [cardboard palm \(*Zamia furfuracea*\)](#). We should note that the monstera is not *M. deliciosa*, but a related species. It is great that you’re keeping some of these worrisome plants in pots, but seeds and fruits can still “escape captivity” and become a nuisance to others or your community preserves.

Some of the “good stuff” we found is [leatherfern \(*Acrostichum danaeifolium*\)](#), [coontie \(*Zamia integrifolia*\)](#), and [golden polypody fern \(*Phlebodium aureum*\)](#).

Some suggestions for replacing or filling holes were [beautyberry \(*Callicarpa Americana*\)](#), and [Simpson’s stopper \(*Myrcianthes fragrans*\)](#).

You might also keep in mind that darker stones, while they are beautiful, can heat up in our sun and create much warmer temperatures for your plants. Also, consider the plant requirements when grouping them together. Those wanting less water should be grouped together with the irrigation adjusted, if possible.

As we moved to the side and rear of your property, we enjoyed how you are minimizing sod by expanding your gardens. You incorporated three rain barrels and have PV solar panels providing power to your house. You also added a small garden in the middle of the sod where you were



interested in adding a groundcover. Some suggestions here are: [southern river sage \(*Salvia misella*\)](#), [Tampa verbena/vervain \(*Glandularia tampensis*\)](#), [Elliott's lovegrass \(*Eragrostis elliottii*\)](#) or [purple lovegrass \(*Eragrostis spectabilis*\)](#). [Porterweed \(blue\) \(*Stachytarpheta jamaicensis*\)](#) could also work there.

Speaking of blue porterweed, we found [nettle leaf porterweed \(*Stachytarpheta cayennensis*\)](#), which is on the FLEPPC list and a CAUTION on the IFAS list. We find this one particularly troubling because it cross-pollinates with our native porterweed causing wide variations in height. We are proud [porterweed snobs](#) and love our native supply that grows to less than a foot in height.

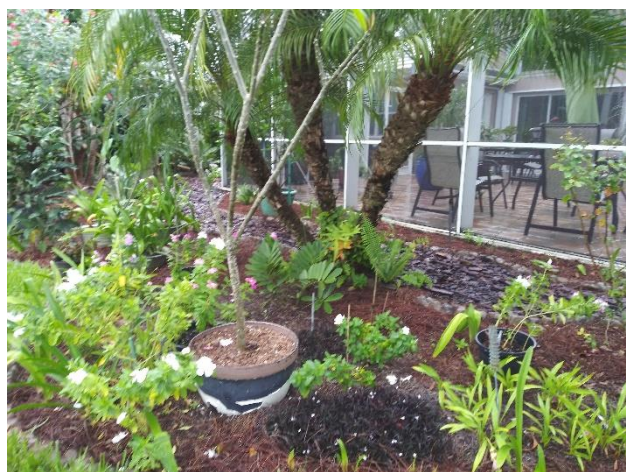


In your larger garden in your backyard, we discussed trying [peperomia \(*Peperomia obtusifolia*\)](#), [sea purslane \(*Sesuvium portulacastrum*\)](#), and, if you're feeling gutsy, [railroad vine \(*Ipomoea pes-caprae* subsp. *brasiliensis*\)](#) for groundcover. You might consider adding [porterweed \(blue\) \(*Stachytarpheta jamaicensis*\)](#), [tropical sage \(*Salvia coccinea*\)](#), [wild coffee \(shiny leaf\) *Psychotria nervosa*](#), and [white indigo berry \(*Randia aculeata*\)](#). You also mentioned removing some of the hibiscus. We thought that if you find room for [fiddlewood \(*Citharexylum spinosum*\)](#), it would be worthwhile.

Moving toward the back, behind the lanai cage you had a terrific looking pathway through the pine straw. We noted the Clerodendrum. Some of the species in this genus are causing concern ([Clerodendrum chinense](#)) ([Clerodendrum speciosissimum](#)).

We wrapped up our tour in your lanai where we were so proud of your mangrove in a pot.

In closing, you are like many of us were when we first moved here. In our lovely Florida environment can grow nearly anything. However, as we spent more time in natural areas and learned more about wildlife depending on our yards and corridors for food and habitat, we realized the importance of adding native plants and eliminating invasive ones.



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

Did you know?

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

“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, Cocoloba 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. Cocoloba Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society: www.FNPSCocoloba.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 Cocoloba Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society.