



Native plants are cool!

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Native Plant Landscaping Site Visit

April 11, 2015

Unity Church of Bonita Springs
28285 Imperial Pkwy
Bonita Springs, FL 34135

Thank you for inviting The Coccoloba Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society to visit your property. It was truly a pleasure for Charlie Strader, Dick Workman and Marlene Rodak to visit on Wednesday, March 25th at 10 am.

As we mentioned, we are happy to help you improve your landscaping. However, we are proponents of native plants and 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:

1. Unity church of Bonita Springs is conveniently located on Imperial Parkway just south of Bonita Beach Road. It is about 5-acres of what some call “scrubby” pine flatwood. Without regular fire to thin the vegetation in the area, the palmetto has become dense and oak is taking root.
2. The church itself has windows overlooking the property in three directions (west, south and east). Members have commented how much they enjoy being able to look out the windows. However, the east-facing windows look out over the parking lot and Imperial Parkway. Therefore, it *could* be desirable to screen that view to prevent distractions during services.
3. The church has a beautifully screened-in area on the west-facing side that overlooks the very natural preserve area. This is a great place to hold classes and less formal meetings. Frankly, Coccoloba Chapter would love to hold meetings there to help others understand the importance of native plants and native plant communities.
4. Although there are some invasive exotics in the preserve area, it is in remarkably good shape. Some exotics noted were rosary pea (*Abrus precatorius*), fountain grass (*Pennisetum setaceum*) and Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*). Although it does not appear on the FLEPPC list, cardboard palm (*Zamia furfuracea*) appears on other invasive exotics lists and therefore recommended for removal. For more information on invasive exotic plants, please visit: http://www.fleppc.org/list/2013PlantList-WithLinksToUFL-update_05_28_14.pdf



Figure 1 Unity Church of Bonita Springs property

Details of Site Visit:

Some of the native plants found on your property, in no particular order:

- Cabbage palm (*Sabal palmetto*)
- Cardinal airplant (*Tillandsia Fasciculata*)
- Cherokee/coral bean (*Erythrina herbacea*)
- Coontie (*Zamia pumila*)
- Dog fennel (*Eupatorium capillifolium*)
- Firebush (*Hamelia patens*) 6-8' tall, red/orange tubular flowers
- Golden polypody fern (*Phlebodium aureum*)
- Greenbriar (*Smilax havanensis*)
- Hog-plum (*Ximenia americana*)
- Mahogany (*Swietenia mahagoni*)
- Muhley grass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*)
- Muscadine grape (*Vitis rotundifolia*)
- Myrsine (*Myrsine cubana*)
- Oaks (*Quercus virginiana*, *Quercus laurifolia*, etc)
- Paradise tree (*Simarouba glauca*)
- Paw paw (*Asimina triloba*)—double check this one.
- Pennyroyal (*Piloblephis rigida*)
- Persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*)
- Saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*)
- Slash Pine (*Pinus elliotii*)
- Spanish Needles (*Bidens alba*) native weed, but great for many butterflies
- Wax myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*)
- And many other great native plants

Recommendations:

You indicated that the entrance to the church was a high **priority** (red circle). Your goals were to make it more inviting. You also suggested that the entrance to the parking lot be spruced up (blue circle). We suggest focus on the medians in the parking lot (olive circles). Some suggestions are:

1. Use a wide diversity of plants to invite nature to the area. While this generally contradicts landscape architect recommendation to mass plants, mimicking nature more provides much-needed food for wildlife. Dr. Doug Tallamy states this best in [articles like this](#) and in his book, [Bringing Nature Home](#).
2. Since some value neat and orderly landscapes, Coccoloba Chapter recommends adding a line of low hedge along the sidewalk and into the entry of the church. Beach creeper/golden creeper (*Ernodea littoralis*) would fit this purpose nicely. It would require low maintenance and can be shaped easily. This would provide "[cues to care](#)" indicating the area is maintained.
3. Put the desert rose (*Adenium obesum*) in a pot. It is clearly not happy in the ground. It would like to be in a pot and would look nice at the entryway. On that note, that is where most of your exotics should be.

4. There are several jatropha shrubs (*Jatropha integerrima*) in the entryway area. While these are not native plants, they function reasonably well enough to be left in place. They are a low-priority for replacement.
5. Prune judiciously. The cabbage palms were severely pruned. This is a very common practice, but it is unsightly and damages the health of the tree. Furthermore, it is illegal. There is plenty of information on this subject, but here is one: <http://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/care/pruning/pruning-palms.html>. These trees do not pose a fire hazard because there is nothing around them to burn. If you believe these palms must be pruned like this, then they are not planted in the right place. Leaving these trees to grow naturally provides rooting spaces for plants such as the [golden polypody fern](#) that was trying desperately to live in the “boots” of your tree.
- 6. Perhaps you might use the entrance as Phase I of a CHNEP grant.**
7. The hedge on the north side of the parking lot is also severely pruned. We recommend that this hedge be allowed to grow up to the bottom of the handicap parking sign.
8. There is an abundance of invasive exotic fountain grass in the parking lot. We recommend that these be removed and replaced with muhley grass and other grasses. Additionally, the cardboard palms should be removed and replaced with coontie. Our native, endangered coontie is the sole host plant for larvae of the rare atala butterfly (*Eumaeus atala*), once thought to be extinct in Florida. **Perhaps this should be Phase II of your grant application requesting \$250 for the replacement of exotic plants with native plants.**
9. The south side of the building would be a lovely place for a variety of butterfly plants. These should include Bahama cassia and wildflowers.
10. Trellises can be built by volunteers. This [is a nice plan for one](#).
11. Members with green thumbs can learn to propagate plants to enhance the property even further, particularly the entrance along Imperial Parkway.
12. Classes can be held there to help demonstrate and encourage native plant propagation.

Some recommendations for plants on your property include shell midden and other plants such as:

Wildflowers/Groundcover:

- Coontie (*Zamia pumila*) 2-3' tall-tolerates sun or shade
- Beach (golden) creeper (*Ernodea littoralis*) 2-3' long-lived perennial
- Blue porterweed (*Stachytarpheta jamaicensis*) 1' tall, blue flowers-can tolerate shade (make sure it is the native variety!)
- Gaillardia (*Gaillardia pulchella*) 2' tall, red/yellow flowers-put in sunnier spots
- Dune sunflowers (*Helianthus debilis*) 2-3' tall, yellow flowers-put in sunnier spots
- Red salvia (*Salvia coccinea*) 2' tall, red flowers-can tolerate partial shade
- 3-4' tall, pinkish-purple bloom
- Golden creeper (*Ernodea littoralis*) 3-4' tall, small white flowers, yellow berry-can tolerate shade

- Tickseed (*Coreopsis leavenworthii*) 1-2' tall, yellow flowers

Shrubs:

- Wild olive (*Osmanthus americanus* and *Osmanthus megacarpus*)
- Spiny hackberry (*Celtis laevigata*)
- Beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) 4-6' tall, pink flowers, purple berries-butterflies like
- Bahama cassia (*Senna mexicana*) 3-5' tall, yellow flowers-butterfly host plant
- Locust berry (*Byrsonima lucida*) 4-6' tall, white and pink flowers
- Wild sage (*Lantana involucrata*) 3-5' tall, white flowers, purple berries-butterflies like
- Privet cassia (*Senna ligustrina*) 4-6' tall, yellow flowers
- Cocoplum (*Chrysobalanus icaco*) 12-15' tall, fruit that wildlife eats
- Marlberry (*Ardisia escallonioides*) 15' tall, white flowers, dark berries that birds love-put in shadier spots
- Simpson's stopper (*Myrcianthes fragrans*) 15-20' tall, white fragrant flower, orange berry that birds love
- Jamaica caper (*Capparis cynophallophora*) 15-20' tall, whitish-pink flowers
- Florida boxwood (*Schaefferia frutescens*) 10-15' tall, red berries
- Little strongbark (*Bourreria cassinifolia*) 4-6' tall, white flowers, orange berry

Trees:

- Seagrape (*Coccoloba uvifera*) It's our namesake!
- Gumbo limbo (*Bursera simaruba*)

The electronic version of this report links the scientific names to links for more information. 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.FNPCCoccoloba.org
3. Institute for Regional Conservation: great information & pictures about natives: www.regionalconservation.org
4. Atlas of Florida Vascular Plants: great pictures & information about natural range of native plants: <http://www.plantatlas.usf.edu/default.asp>
5. Osorio, Rufino. *A Gardener's Guide to Florida's Native Plants*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001.
6. Haehle, Robert G. and Brookwell, Joan. *Native Florida Plants: Low-Maintenance Landscaping and Gardening*. Lanham: Taylor Trade, 2004.
7. Nelson, Gil. *Florida's Best Native Landscape Plants: 200 Readily Available Species for Homeowners and Professionals*. University Press of Florida, 2003.

8. Taylor, Walter Kingsley. *The Guide to Florida Wildflowers*. Taylor Publishing Company, 1992.