

Mark your calendars

March 31st - Little Bayou Park, St Pete. Volunteer/Work Day. Contact Ray Wunderlich III @ 577-4344 or rayrunner@yahoo.com

Apr 4th - Monthly Members Meeting. Moccasin Lake Nature Park 7:00 pm. Topic: "The REAL Dining Out Guide to Florida" Speaker: Dr. Anna Dixon

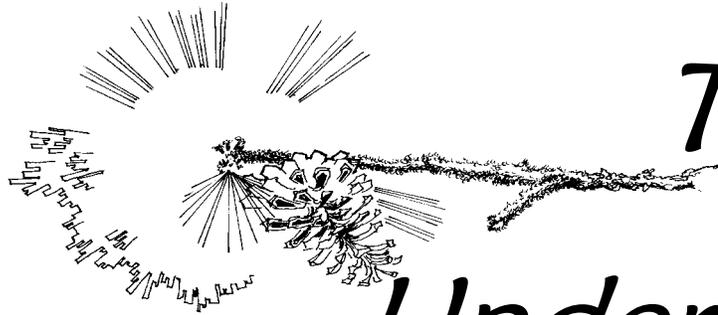
Apr 7th - Field Trip to Weedon Island Preserve Contact Erica Powell at fieldtrip.pinellas.fnps@gmail.com

Apr 21st - Spring Native Plant Sale. Florida Botanical Gardens at Pinewood Cultural Park 10 am—4 pm

May 2nd - Monthly Members Meeting. Moccasin Lake Nature Park 7:00 pm. Topic: "Landscapes: Beyond the Puritan Mandate" Speaker: Dr. Martin Quigley

May 12th - Field Trip to Stetson University Campus in DeLand. Contact Erica Powell at fieldtrip.pinellas.fnps@gmail.com

Apr 25th and May 23rd - Board Meeting. Clearwater Library 6:30 pm - 9:00 pm



The Understory

Memorial to Donna Heinrich and the History of Boyd Hill's Migratory Bird Trail

Ranger Donna Heinrich had a long time dream of developing an area that would provide natural food and sanctuary for birds, especially endangered migratory song birds. Part of this dream was accomplished through a grant that was received in 2003 from United States Fish and Wildlife Service. Park staff cleared exotic vegetation from a site located between the new Education Center and the Birds of Prey Aviary. The original acre to be planted with primarily berry producing natives actually ended up being nearly three, thanks to community volunteers.

There are additional phases to Donna's plan that remain incomplete. Phase II was to be the installation of educational signage that included the importance of green space, statistics on migratory birds, and an outdoor brochure display. Phase III was to add bird feeders and a secondary water source. The area has not been easy to maintain without a steady group of volunteers. Watering is difficult, old growth takes over quickly and some of the original plants have been lost.

Today, the trail has become known as the "Birdscape" and it is the hope of Donna's family that her dream continues. Memorial donations can be made to your local chapter in Donna's name. There is an ongoing campaign to find a group that would take the Birdscape over as a project. Until that time, the park staff has committed to assist volunteers when work days are organized. If you would like more information please contact Barb Meyer at 727/866-8836 or sunlover@aol.com.

Deadline for the June/July

Newsletter is May 1st

Contact Lisa Curry

lkcurry1@tampabay.rr.com or 727/595-2073

President's Message

HOW MUCH DO YOU CARE?

Honest self examination is always a prerequisite to growing in wisdom and maturity. As members of our native plant society, it is helpful to periodically examine our commitment and participation in the organization that we have decided to espouse and support. It might be most appropriate to start on a very basic and broad level. How much do I appreciate our ecological life support systems, the earth and the other traditional elements of water, air, fire (heat and light), and space that form the foundation of our biological existence? How does my level of appreciation translate into action to help rectify a close to calamitous current situation brought about by modern man's disastrous disconnect with nature? Do I care enough to be an active and vital participant in an environmental organization concerned with restoring the balance of nature and our species' original harmony with it?

Through membership in two local environmental groups, I have observed that there are several general levels of participation by members. On the first level there is attendance at members' meetings and field trips, both of which have educational value about environmental and related issues. Without following up with action, however, there is a danger of relegating our involvement to entertainment and recreation. On another level the member, in addition to members' meetings and field trips, may occasionally contribute some action like participating in a park cleanup or planting. This is certainly a welcome contribution to the

organization. These folks, however, rarely extend themselves beyond their comfort zone and thus limit the possibility of substantial personal growth through giving provided by the next level of participation.

On that next level there are members who show a strong and continual commitment to using their knowledge and skills in actions that pave the way to the vision of a higher quality of life for everyone. Often the driving force is a deep connection with the natural world and the possibilities that are afforded by living that connection. They see our chapter's mission as an opportunity to defend the planet and restore its natural integrity. These members rarely count the cost in terms of time or effort. They give freely and enjoy the benefits of a vital commitment and participation. They have learned the wisdom that a quality life is not about what you get but what you give.

So how much do you care? Does your caring translate into serious and regular action? We are an active chapter with many opportunities for members to contribute. These opportunities are accessed on our website www.pinellasnativeplants.org, the chapter newsletter, our email list-serve, and members' meetings. The activities could vary from direct restoration projects, advocacy, administrative support, to public outreach and education. These chapter endeavors need your energy and creativity. The opportunities are there; the need is there. Will you be there? How much do you care?

- Bill Bilodeau

Kayak Free and Help Clean Up Clam Bayou

Kurt Zuelsdorf, an 18-year resident of Gulfport, is the proprietor of Kayak Nature Adventures. Sponsored by a small grant from the Southwest Florida Water Management District, he is offering one hour of free kayaking in return for filling a black garbage bag with litter from the water or mangroves at Clam Bayou. His inspiration for the program is the birds that live and nest in the mangroves. He isn't concerned with any political issues surrounding the bayou; he just wants it cleaned up. "It's all for the birds," he said. Anyone who is not able to paddle can help by donating cash or supplies. Needs include bottled water, children's life jackets, garbage bags and even services such as advertising. All donations will be used to clean up the bayou.

Kayak Nature Adventures is just south of Miriam Street and 29th Avenue in Gulfport. The "Bring Back the Bayou" program will run from 4 to 6 p.m. Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, weather permitting. The program is scheduled to run for three months.

Contact Kurt Zuelsdorf at kurtz@kayaknature.com or phone 727/418-9728

Lake Chautaugua Field Trip

It was a beautiful day to be investigating one of Clearwater's most undisturbed parks. Lake Chautaugua came into being under the same government grant that created Moccasin Lake Nature Park. That was back in the 1970's when people wore their hair long and alternate energy sources were an important topic. Moccasin Lake Nature Park was built to show what could be done to generate electricity, compost waste, and ventilate spaces using new technologies. Sadly, nothing much is left of that technology at Moccasin Lake, but according to Cliff Norris, manager of Moccasin Lake Nature Park, the land for the Lake Chautaugua Park came at the same time. Pretty soon a new park appeared to little or no applause. It is quiet out there and not too many people know this park exists.

The land in this park has not been messed with except to remove invasives. There is no playground, no dog park, no picnic pavilions. The only picnic tables are scattered into the park among the trees and are not easily found. You can picnic in private in this park. There is a road in, some nice paved skating/walking paths, some good dirt paths, a pier out into the lake and that's it. Even on a Saturday morning the birds were plentiful and the people were unobtrusive.



The park is mostly upland, xeric oak hammock rolling down towards Lake Chautaugua which is shared to the south with the Camp Soule Boy Scout camp. My son attended camp there and I'll bet yours did too. The lake is a joy to behold with aquatic plants comfortable in their spaces (not newly

planted) with ducks, coots, and moorhens cruising the water. If the conditions are right the birds will come, and the sight of happy birds on the lake means that the lake is healthy.

Native plant people do not travel at a very fast rate. The main party was a good hour getting out of the wetlands surrounding the lake and moving down the path where the edges between wetland and xeric upland meet. The birders were long gone by this time having looped the park a couple of times and come back to report what they had found (a lot of different species, again a good sign of the health of an ecosystem).



Bruce Turley led the tour. He has worried that there was not enough habitat to talk about. Foolish man. He talked for two hours without even leaving the wetlands.

Higher up we found lovely xeric oak spaces with the plants one would expect....turkey oak (beautifully colored at this time of year), sand pine, sand live oak and more. The lesson here was that there are many oak species suitable for our yards besides laurel oak (yuck!) and live oak. Clumps of hog plum were the first I had ever seen. There were no blooms, but the leaves were out and the plants were plentiful in small thickets.

Your own visit to this park should be a pleasant experience. The park is located behind a residential neighborhood accessible from Enterprise Boulevard just west of McMullen-Booth Road. There is also a smaller area accessible from Union Street on the opposite side of the lake and a third that I have never been able to find. The Clearwater city maps are not helpful. See you out there if you can find it.

-Jane Williams

Photos courtesy of Jan Allyn

Conservation Corner

The following is an update on the Restoration of Little Bayou Park on 55th Ave South and 4th Street.

For the past few months volunteer coordinator and GPPCA member Ray Wunderlich III and Bill Bilodeau, President of The Pinellas Chapter of The Florida Native Plant Society, have been leading an upland restoration effort at the city owned Little Bayou Park located at approximately 55th Ave. South and 4th street in St. Petersburg.

This park, which extends from 4th Street East to the bay, including a small lake with a stream flowing into the bay, has had partial restoration to its wetland areas within the past eight years. These earlier, positive changes to Little Bayou were all part of a mitigation/restoration plan. These plans included a seawall removal, a consequent replacement of sea grasses created a small lagoon area, the removal of Brazilian pepper and Australian pine trees and the creation of the aforementioned small lake.

However, the upland part of this park, approximately 15 acres, has received little restorative work and has been neglected over the years. This land was also the site of many truckloads of illegal dumping through-out its history. It is the site where Ray and his wife found a very harmful exotic, invasive species of plant called "Shoebuttan Ardesia", never before seen on this coast of Florida. This find was chronicled on Bay News 9 two years ago. This find, along with the basic need to help this unique and beautifully special park achieve its restoration, are the things that led to the City of St. Petersburg and The Pinellas Chapter of The Florida Native Plant Society, GPPCA, and Progress Energy to meet this need.

Firstly, the City of St. Petersburg sprayed and cut down 90% of the Ardesia two years ago. Next, in early December, The Florida Native Plant Society (FNPS) devised a proposal for the City in which to restore Little Bayou Park. When the city graciously agreed to do the work, the FNPS and the GPPCA organized an advance surgical team in late January of this year that took down and/or cut most of the invasive vines (potato, grape vine, smilax, syngonium, pothos, etc) that were killing the trees. This team also piled up many truckloads of garbage that had been dumped on the site throughout the years, trimmed and picked up over 30 gallons of air potatoes. They erected several "No Dumping" signs and identified, with red tape, every exotic invasive tree and shrub that needed to be removed from the park.

Next, in late January, half of the park was sprayed to kill the exotic ground-cover-gone-wild, syngonium and wedelia. At the same time they began taking down the smaller shrubs and trees with a massive "tree cutter", a 250 pound blade on a tractor that chops up a small tree in seconds. Then in early February, the city's park's department, under the direction of Clarence Scott, Cliff Footlick, Phil Whitehouse and foreman Steve Ellis, began to enlist other heavy equipment to mow down the invasive habitat smothering trees. The city's first wave in their forestry department, under the 71 year young Bill Cunningham's direction, was begun. They worked well together

and knew their mission was to take down the noted trees such as a huge, five feet in diameter reclinata and forty-five foot tall Washingtonia palms, bamboo, java plums, schefflera, Brazilian peppers and all vines still standing.

As a result of this culling, the park now looks very open and uncluttered. With the support of the Parks administrative branch, the city crew has done remarkable work and should be commended for their efforts.

The FNPS has a few individuals who continually monitor the park and do small work days on their own. However, the next phase in Little Bayou's restoration involves fine tune work such as small debris pick up, clearing vines away from trees, potato pick up, and digging up "mother-in-laws-tongue" plants. This work requires many hands. A larger work day is scheduled for **MARCH 31ST at 9:00am** at the park. Food will be available. There will be air potato pick-up contests for size and quantity.

After this next volunteer work day is completed, ongoing spraying is necessary due to the growth of the exotic plant species. This spraying will occur approximately every month beginning in May through November or December. The spraying is needed mostly in the oak hammock area in the western part of the park. When the spraying is finished in this section, it will be restored with many appropriate Florida native plant species and develop into a diverse, ecologically sound, quality hardwood hammock habitat.

The eastern part of the park is more open and consists of slash pine trees and palmetto habitat. It does not have as severe a problem with the exotic invasive species and will be replanted with more diverse pine flatwoods plant species, probably this year. Progress Energy Company has graciously given this project grant money to assist in its restoration; to improve this parks chances for redemption into a habitat for the critters that need it. Both four and two legged critters.

Ray Wunderlich III - Conservation Chairperson

"We abuse the land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."

- Aldo Leopold

Weedon Island Preserve

The Swamp: The Everglades, Florida , and the Politics of Paradise

Wednesday, March 28th 7:00 pm – 8:00 pm

Michael Grunwald – Author, Florida Humanities Council. The Everglades was once reviled as a liquid wasteland, and many Americans dreamed of draining it. Now it is revered as a national treasure, and Americans have launched the largest environmental project in history to try to save it. *The Swamp* is the stunning story of the destruction and possible resurrection of the Everglades, the saga of abuse of nature in southern Florida and unprecedented efforts to make amends.

Pre-registration required. No charge for program.
Recommended for adults.

Paradise Lost?

Friday, April 13th 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm

Jack Davis – Author, Florida Humanities Council Road Scholars Program. The enduring struggle that has shaped Florida's past has not been between human groups, but between humans and the environment and between Florida's

natural beauty and visions of paradise. Davis discusses the natural side of the human saga in Florida's history. Pre-registration required. No charge for program. Recommended for adults.

The Science of Fire Ecology

Saturday, April 14th 10:00 am – 12:00 pm

Weedon Island Preserve Cultural and Natural History Center Staff and Environmental Lands Division Staff. Today, Smokey Bear now warns "Only you can prevent wildfires." To prevent the occurrence of a natural disaster, government manages preserves and wild spaces using the principles of fire ecology. The many benefits of wildland management will be presented in a discussion followed by a hike to some recently burned areas of Weedon Island Preserve. Pre-registration required. No charge for program.

Recommended for all ages.

Contact Weedon Island Preserve Cultural and Natural History Center (727) 453-6500 to learn more about upcoming programs and to register.

Brooker Creek Preserve

Cypress Swamp Cafe: Living on the Edge: Becoming "Fire-wise" Neighbors

Wednesday, April 4th 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm

Lisa Baltus – Pinellas County Environmental Lands Division, Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center Staff. Join us for this series of presentations and discussions to explore ways you can live a sustainable lifestyle. Join us to learn about the history of fire in Brooker Creek Preserve and how residents living around the Preserve can become better "Fire-wise" neighbors. Participants will receive tips to make their landscape less susceptible to potential wildfire impacts. Pre-registration is required.

Admission: Free. Recommended for adults.

Butterfly Gardening in Your Backyard

Thursday, April 12th 10:00 am - 11:00 am

Cindy Peacock – Pinellas County Cooperative Extension Service. Butterflies can bring colorful life and beauty to your backyard landscape. Learn to understand the life cycle of a butterfly and how to create a butterfly garden by planting the right plants for butterflies and identifying the butterflies in this area that will use the garden you create.

Pre-registration is appreciated. Admission: Free.
Recommended for adults.

Landscaping with Natives

Saturday, April 14th 10:00 am – 11:00 am

Wilma Holley - Pinellas County Cooperative Extension Service. Beautyberry with its bright purple berries in the fall and red maple with its lovely red spring growth are just a few examples of the native plants that can add color and spice to your home landscape. Join us for this one-hour workshop to learn how planting natives can reduce your water use and fertilizer needs and give you more free time to do the things you enjoy! Recommended ages: 12 and up.

Water Gardens 101

Sunday, April 29th 1:00 pm – 2:30 pm

Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center Staff. You don't have to be an expert to add the beauty and tranquility of water to your home landscaping. Join us for an introduction to garden ponds and water gardens and receive helpful tips for creating your own aquatic landscape. Participants will have the opportunity to create their own container garden to take home. Pre-registration is required for this program. Admission: \$5.

Recommended ages: 12 and up.

Contact Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center at (727) 453-6800 or www.pinellascounty.org/environment.

Learn how to become a Friend of Brooker Creek at <http://www.friendsofbrookercreekpreserve.org/>

Members of the Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve receive a discount on admission fees.

Calendar of Events

Thursday, March 29th at 7:30 pm

"The Natural History of Birds in Ecuador" will be presented by Rudy Gelis at Eckerd College (Galbraith Auditorium). Mr Gelis will take us on a journey across Ecuador from the Pacific Choco rainforest to the deserts, then on to the Andes and the Amazon Basin. His presentation is based around the extraordinary photos by Murray Cooper of the fascinating birds of Ecuador and their stories. Eckerd College is located at 4200 54th Ave South, St Petersburg. Stop at the entrance for a map to Galbraith Auditorium. Contact Barbara Howard at 727/343-1272 or b_howard2001@msn.com if you need further information.

Wednesday, April 4th 7:00 pm

Monthly FNPS meeting. Topic: "The REAL Dining Out Guide to Florida"

Moccasin Lake Nature Park, 2750 Park Trail Lane, Clearwater

Dr. Anna Dixon will give a hands-on program on "wild edibles." Fernald and Kinsey's classic guide Edible Wild Plants of North America lists hundreds of tasty native plants, many of which can be found in Florida. The revered "Three Sisters" of aboriginal North America (maize, beans and squash) were not cultivated throughout Florida, so what else did native peoples eat? Come find out about Florida's bountiful flora, watch a demonstration of how to prepare a few of these foods, and even give them a taste.

Saturday, April 7th

Field Trip: Weedon Island Preserve

Preserve Staff will lead a hike on the Preserve's trails where we will look for native plants that are edible or which have ethnobotanical value. Call 727/322-9695 for more information.

SPEAK! ST. PETE – A Celebration of United Nation's International Days Events, Presented by St. Petersburg Environmental Research Center

Saturday, April 21st

Earth Day Celebration

Eckerd College, 4200 54th Av South, St Petersburg

6:00 PM - Lori Michaels in Concert

7:00 PM – Lecture by Sam Keen: speaking on Global Justice

8:30 PM - Stephen Longfellow Fiske in Concert

Tuesday, May 22nd

Biological Diversity Day

Mahaffey Theater, 400 1st ST South, St Petersburg

7:00 PM - Lecture by Sheila Watt-Cloutier

Tickets can be purchased at the Mahaffey Theater at the Progress Energy Center Box Office, all Ticketmaster outlets, online at www.ticketmaster.com. Visit www.mahaffeytheater.com for more information or call 727/892-5767.

Wednesday, May 2nd 7:00 pm

Monthly FNPS meeting. Topic: "Landscapes: Beyond the Puritan Mandate"

Moccasin Lake Nature Park, 2750 Park Trail Lane, Clearwater

Dr. Martin Quigley, Interim Chair of Biology at the University of Central Florida, will put landscape architecture into anthropological and ecological context. He contends that an installed landscape that most resembles an ecologically balanced plant community will be the most sustainable, with the fewest required mechanical or chemical inputs. Landscape architects in the 21st century must balance the goals of creating designs that are both aesthetically satisfying and ecologically appropriate.

Saturday, May 12th

Field Trip: Stetson University Campus, Deland

Through its Florida Native Plant Initiative, Stetson University is coming forward as a leader of a new approach to landscaping. Its policy is to allow use of only native Florida flora on its 174-acre main campus in DeLand, a small city halfway between Orlando and Daytona Beach on the rapidly developing I-4 corridor. Gradually, the campus is being transformed as nonnative flora is being replaced with indigenous plants. The University's evolving native-plant landscape also functions as a living laboratory rich in educational and research opportunities in the environmental sciences. Call 727/322-9695 for more information.

Volunteers Needed

Saturday, March 31st, 9:00 am

Little Bayou Park, St. Petersburg

Volunteer Fun/Work Day. Come join us for a morning of fun in a unique habitat on the water in part of the restoration of one of the last wild, bayside parks in St Petersburg. Volunteers needed to pick up air potato tubers, trim cabbage palms, pile up and haul out debris, dig up small shrubs, etc. Food and drinks provided. There will be contests and prizes for the air potato pick ups including: largest & smallest potato, first to fill up a bucket, weirdest looking potato, first child (under 12) to pick up 50 potatoes. Please wear long sleeved garments and bring spades, shovels, gloves, heavy rakes, sunscreen and hats. Little Bayou Park is located on 4th Street between 54th and 55th Ave South. To park: From 4th Street, go east, 1/4 mile down 55th Ave. S. into the park and look for attendant(s). For more information contact Ray Wunderlich III at rayrunner@yahoo.com or 727/577-4344

Saturday, March 31st, 8:30 am to 1:30 pm

Crescent Lake Park Restoration, St. Petersburg

Clean up and Invasive Plant Removal. Light refreshments and water provided. Complete removal of debris and vegetation from both within and around the shoreline of the lake. Prepare the lake bottom and soil along the shoreline in approved areas for planting. Bring gloves, waders, insect repellent, rakes, shovels, hoes, fishnets or pool nets. Restoration area is located at 22nd Avenue North between 5th and 7th Streets in St. Petersburg. If you have a kayak or canoe, please call first to see if we need it. Contact Lucy at 727/821-2133 or email lucyt@ij.net

Saturday, April 7th and 28th, 9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Lake Seminole Park, Seminole

Native Plant Restoration Days. The **April 7** event will include the installation of aquatic plants along the southern shoreline of the lake. Volunteers will get a little wet and will need to be comfortable in 1 to 2 feet of water. Old tennis shoes work fine as do vinyl gardening boots. Plants arrive as a root ball and are installed with a hand trowel. No training is needed - it is very simple for volunteers of all ages. Contact Kelli Hammer Levy at klevy@pinellascounty.org to volunteer. The **April 28** event will include the installation of plants along the shoreline and bank around the new observation pier. This is an Eagle Scout candidate project, grant funded, that includes planting native trees, shrubs, groundcover, wildflowers and aquatics along the shoreline of the park. Expect to get wet and muddy. Closed toe shoes, sunscreen, hat and insect repellent are recommended. Please bring a trowel or shovel. Contact Debbie Chayet at 727-464-5111 or dchayet@pinellascounty.org to volunteer.

Friday, April 20th and Saturday, April 21st

Spring Wildflower Extravaganza at Florida Botanical Gardens, Largo

Volunteers needed for the FNPS spring plant sale. Volunteers are needed to label and transport plants to the Botanical Gardens starting Friday, 12:00 pm at Wilcox Nursery in Largo. Volunteers also needed Saturday 9:00 am to 4:00 pm to help customers select plants, write up sales and answer questions. Saturday breakdown will include loading and transporting plants back to Wilcox Nursery after the sale. Proceeds from our twice-yearly plant sales go to pay for program expenses, to fund scholarships at Pinellas County summer camps, and to fund projects like new signage for Shirley's Trail. If you can help, please call volunteer coordinator **Joy Wharton** at 727/522-8769

“Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do only a little.”

- Edmond Burke



Spring Native Plant Sale

Saturday, April 21st ~ 10am-4pm
Florida Botanical Gardens at
Pinewood Cultural Park
12520 Ulmerton Road, Largo
*IN CONJUNCTION WITH FAMILY EARTHFEST**

Sponsored by the Pinellas Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society

Choose from a vibrant selection of flowering plants that will attract birds, bees, butterflies and other creatures to your garden. Pinellas FNPS members will be on hand to help you choose the "right plant for the right place" and give advice about sustainable gardening techniques and natural landscaping principles.

Why Native Plants?

- Provide Habitat for Wildlife • Conserve Water • Need Less Maintenance •
- Give a "Sense of Place" • Have Fewer Pest Problems • Are Not Invasive •

For More Information...

Please visit our website! www.pinellasnativeplants.org
or call our Info Line 727-544-7341

**Family EarthFest is a free annual festival produced by Pinellas County celebrating Earth Day and Arbor Day. Its fun, educational activities encourage citizens of all ages to adopt conservation-friendly habits. We can all help to protect our community's natural resources and improve its environment. Planned events include entertaining programs, music, speakers, exhibits and more!*

A copy of the official registration and financial information may be obtained from the Florida Division of Consumer Services by calling toll-free within the state (800-435-7352, reg. no. CH4271). Registration does not imply endorsement, approval or recommendation by the state. (FDACS/DPI Cert. #47222877)

Paynes Prairie Field Trip

A sizeable group of approximately 20 participated in the field trip to Payne's Prairie on March 10th. We were led by Lars Andersen of AdventureOutpost.net with enthusiastic literary and aesthetic support supplied by Prof. Thomas Hallock, who had previously treated us to this month's lecture on the 18th century naturalist William Bartram.

Payne's Prairie is a 21,000 acre preserve in an artifact rich area just south of Gainesville and is Florida's first state preserve. We hiked on La Chua trail, which is within a limestone depression. The preserve basin consists of wet prairie, marsh, and open water. The part we hiked had undergone a prescribed burn less than two months ago and because of this, the majority of the day's observations were of a multitude of waterfowl, hawks, wading birds, and alligators, rather than of flora.

The hike started to the north, on an oak hammock which leads right by the Alachua Sink, where all the water from the Prairie drains into the aquifer.

Lars told us that although this drainage sink is only about the size of a picnic table, it drains the entire 20 square mile basin. Since it takes a while for so much water to drain, the Prairie is rarely dry and upon occasion, the sink has become plugged. This happened most recently due to several significant hurricanes a few years back and the basin remained flooded until about one year ago, requiring the use of paddles to navigate the bulk of the preserve.



We observed flocks of white pelicans in the air and in the water, with some males exhibiting bumps on their bills indicating the start of their mating season. We also saw

glossy ibis, coots, egrets, Little Blue and Great Blue herons, anhinga, wood storks, and iridescent tree swallows. Trailside we saw large numbers of gators basking and wild horses. A swimming water moccasin approached us quite closely before reconsidering his landing site.

Because of the recent burn, the vegetation we saw was sparse. Plants of note included amaranth, likely *Amaranthus cannabinus* or Water Hemp, which grows to 9' tall and likes wet disturbed sites. Its seeds were ground into flour by the Seminoles. The trail was also littered with American Lotus (*Nelumbo lutea*) seed heads although we saw little actual growth. These stands should be spectacular when in bloom in May and into the fall. Toadflax, related to the snapdragon, and white sweet clover (*Melilotus alba*) were in bloom. Lars told us that the clover was likely introduced to the Prairie when it was used to graze cattle.

It was a spectacular day and well worth the trip. Thank you, Lars! We look forward to going back to see bison, eagles and cranes, which are plentiful on this Prairie.

Join us on our next field trip on April 7 when we visit Weedon Island Preserve in St. Pete. Highlights include a 45-foot observation tower and a boardwalk trail among the mangroves. There will be an ethnobotanical emphasis on native wild edibles.

- Erica Powell

Adding Color to Hammocks - Part 3

In previous articles, I have written rather extensively about the challenges of incorporating color into landscapes that are shady. Many of the most colorful native plants do not bloom in shade or are not well-adapted to shady conditions. Woodland plants often are rather drab or produce their flowers during those months when shady over-story trees are leafless. In Florida, that means late winter/early spring. My last article discussed mid-canopy trees that are some of my favorites to add color to the landscape. This article continues that discussion with shrubs.

To me, shrubs are woody perennials that tend to grow not as single-trunked trees, but as multi-trunked specimens. As such, shrubs can be fairly short at maturity or fairly tall. It is the growth form that determines a shrub from a tree.

Within the shady forest, there are a great many shade trees and a limited variety of understory herbaceous plants – and shrubs. Nevertheless, there are a few wonderful shrubs that provide color at certain times of the year. Some of my favorites are described below. Omitted from this list is Walter's viburnum (*Viburnum obovatum*). Although this plant is definitely a shrub and quite attractive, it does not bloom well in shady conditions. Those that I discuss below are better in the shade.

Firebush (*Hamelia patens*)

Almost everyone familiar with native plants is familiar with firebush. This evergreen shrub is native to the southern third of peninsular Florida and tolerates a wide variety of conditions. I have found it in fairly deep shady hammocks – such as Highland Hammock State Park – and in coastal communities where it gets quite a bit more light. Although tolerant of a variety of conditions, it freezes to the ground at even the hint of 32° F and does not do well in truly xeric soils. Firebush will resprout from the ground if freezes are not severe, and in these conditions it is maintained at medium heights. When it doesn't freeze, it may reach 15 feet tall. What makes a firebush a significant addition to the landscape is its many clusters of bright orange/orange-red flowers. These flowers are present nearly year-round and provide a splash of color that also attracts butterflies and hummingbirds. Like many shade-tolerant shrubs, however, blooming is best in partial shade. Plant your firebush in a spot that gets at least some direct sun or in an area that gets significant indirect light.

Wild Coffee (*Psychotria nervosa*, *P. sulzneri* and *P. ligustrina*)

In this region of Florida, you have a choice of 3 different wild coffees to add into your landscape. All have attractive evergreen foliage and clusters of white blooms that turn into clusters of bright red fruit. Of the three, the most adaptable and widely available is *P. nervosa* – which is simply named “wild coffee” in most references. Soft-leaved coffee (*P. sulzneri*) is also native to Pinellas County, but is generally weaker in aspect, produces flowers that are more greenish than white, and has fruit that is often more orange than bright red. Bahama coffee (*P. ligustrina*) is native to hammocks south of our region, but I have grown it for years in Pinellas and through a good number of freezing nights without adverse impacts. It has a growth form similar to regular wild coffee, but the leaves are less deeply incised and the fruit tends to be a bit less bright – though definitely red in color. Wild coffees are magnets to zebra longwing butterflies when in bloom and their fruit provides a great bright beacon to a host of songbirds throughout the winter months. Although often seen as 2-3 feet tall specimens, wild coffee can eventually grow to 6 feet or more. They also can spread from fallen fruit or by birds. Planted in mass in shady conditions, wild coffees are beautiful and colorful additions to a landscape.

Marlberry (*Ardisia escallonoides*)

Though marlberry often grows more as an understory evergreen tree than a shrub, I am including it here because it often fits my shrub definition also. Marlberry is a semi-tropical understory plant that is native to Pinellas, but whose range does not extend much further northward. For much of the year, marlberry basically blends into the landscape. Its shiny oval-shaped leaves are attractive, but are not that noticeable. When it blooms in late spring, however, it is a knock-out. A well-established marlberry, 6-feet tall or taller, is a sight to see when the entire crown is covered by clusters of showy white blooms. These flowers also are sweetly fragrant and can fill a landscape with their scent for several weeks. These flowers eventually turn into clusters of round green fruit that eventually ripen to a rich dark purple. Marlberry is a fairly tolerant shrub, but does best in shady hammocks with moist rich soils. They also look best when planted in small groupings, instead of as a specimen plant.

Jamaican caper (*Capparis cynophallophora*)

This is another semi-tropical shrub that is native as far north as Pinellas, but far more common in south Florida coastal hammocks and shell mounds. It is fairly tolerant of cold temperatures – more so than firebush. A specimen that I planted at the County Cooperative Extension office has thrived there for the past nearly 20 years through every condition that has occurred and with no irrigation. Jamaican caper is a fairly slow grower, but will eventually reach 15 feet or more in height – if you live that long. I have included it in this group because it does well in fairly shady conditions, but it also will thrive in a good deal of sun. Like firebush, however, I think it does best in partial sun or in areas with a lot of indirect light. The foliage is attractive throughout the year – a deep glossy green on the upper surface and a coppery felty undersurface. What really makes this a show-stopper; however, are the

showy large tubular white flowers in the early summer. Jamaican caper produces hundreds of these night-scented blooms that close shortly after sunrise and attract sphinx moths and other nighttime pollinators. These are followed by long, bean-shaped fruit that eventually split open to reveal a bright orange interior. These fruit give it its scientific name – which I will not decipher here for the good of family values. I love this plant for all of its many attributes. Plant it near a place where you can sit in the evening so that you can enjoy its beauty and its fragrance.

Sweet Shrub (*Calycanthus floridus*)

My final entry for this article is a north Florida shrub, listed as a state-Threatened species, which occurs in rich hammock communities in portions of the Panhandle east to the Ochlockonee River and northward to Kentucky. Although sweet shrub is not native to our region, I have planted it in shady hammock conditions here and it has thrived for more than 15 years without fussing. Because of this, I have included it here. Sweet shrub generally stays less than 10 feet tall and is unlikely to get taller than 6 feet in our climate. It is deciduous and is one of the last plants to leaf out again in the spring. What makes it so attractive are its unusual starry-shaped fragrant flowers that bloom for many months in the late spring and summer. These blooms were picked by early settlers and placed in chests to scent clothes and other linen materials. Most specimens produce flowers that are a deep rich maroon, but several nurseries offer clones that have cream-colored yellowish blooms. Not all clones are fragrant, so if that is important to you (and it should be for this species) you should make sure you purchase yours from a source that is propagating clones with this trait.

I hope that this article has given you a few ideas. In my last and final one, I will discuss herbaceous plants that provide color.
- Craig Huegel

Be sure to watch for the conclusion of this series in upcoming issues.

Eco-Tips

We are all cognizant of water restrictions and the amount of fertilizer and/or pesticide runoff contaminating our waters. We are also aware that planting natives (right plant, right place) will reduce the amount of water and fertilizer needed to sustain our landscapes. However, to truly be good environmental stewards, we must view the big picture and realize this is not the only activity to help ourselves and generations that follow. The following are some simple steps to take to help reduce air, water and soil pollution.

- Replace incandescent bulbs with florescent which use less power. Although the initial cost is more you will save in the long run as they last longer and use less energy.
- Recycle, recycle, recycle. If you do not have curbside pick-up, find a recycling center near you. You can also contact Pinellas County Utilities at 727/464-7500 or <http://www.pinellascounty.org/utilities/recycle.htm> for a list of centers and items to recycle.
- When purchasing your groceries don't be afraid to look at the packaging. If it can't be recycled, rethink your purchase. Stay away from Styro-

foam or Expanded Polystyrene foam (EPS) which never biodegrade.

- You hear it as often as I do, “paper or plastic”. (I am always trying to remember which is the least environmentally toxic.) Why not bring your own cloth bags and answer “neither, I have my own”, save yourself the headache.
- Purchase environmentally friendly detergents that don't contain phosphates. I use them in my home and they clean the same as phosphate laden detergents. Buy in concentrated form for less packaging and look for recyclable containers.
- Install florescent night lights in halls and rooms rarely used at night. They produce enough light to find a light switch or even eliminate the need to turn the light on.
- Install motion sensors in dark stairwells or areas that only need light long enough for you to pass through.
- Always cover pots when cooking, it reduces the cook time and uses less energy.

I will continue writing more eco-tips as space allows. If you have eco-ideas you would like to share contact Lisa Curry at lkcurry1@tampabay.rr.com or 595-2073

