

The

# Understory

Newsletter of the Pinellas Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society, Inc.

August - September 2008

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

In August and September you will find our programs and field trips devoted to landscaping. Tom Levin, a Tampa based landscape architect, will present us at our August members' meeting with a description of the new Hillsborough Community College campus which will be LEED certified. This means that all phases of construction and the landscape as well are completed to high environmentally friendly specifications. The landscape, just being completed, is comprised of native vegetation and we will visit it on the monthly field trip. I'm excited to see what species of plants have been chosen and how they have been arranged. Because of their accessibility and high traffic, public landscapes such as this one are an important component of educating people to the possibilities of the beauty and utility of native landscaping. Hopefully, many folks will be inspired to do more with natural plantings on their own private properties.

September will bring around again our annual Landscape Yard Tour on the weekend of the 20<sup>th</sup> & 21. Last year

we got off to a very good start and this year we will invite the general public. The focus is educational, showing attendees the possibilities of a native landscape created by homeowners themselves, sometimes with professional design and installation assistance. Talking to these homeowners who have taken the plunge to transform their yards and meeting other tour goers who have a similar interest is highly informative and very enjoyable. .

Are you a chapter member who has yet to begin the transformation of your property to native plant species or is slow in completing a process already begun? If so, make good use the chapter programs and field trips of the next two months. Remember that good design and good maintenance make for good gardens. If you need help with design layout or installation, there are chapter members who are professionals in this field. Unless you are highly experienced, a professional design is well worth the modest expense. You then can do the installation yourself if physically able. Even an hour's consultation can be a big help if you intend to plan and install yourself.

However you proceed, do so with the idea that your yard can make a major contribution to your neighborhood by becoming a demonstration garden. Passers-by will stop and engage you in conversation about your plantings and it will be an opportunity for you to discuss the value of native plants in creating a healthy environment and supporting wildlife. To quote Douglas Tallamy author of Bringing Nature Home (see Jan Allyn's review in this issue), "My central message is that unless we restore native plants to our suburban ecosystems, the future of biodiversity in the United States is dim...It is now within the power of individual gardeners to do something that we all dream of doing: to "make a difference." In this case, the "difference" will be to the future of biodiversity, to the native plants and animals of North America and the ecosystems that sustain them."

-- Bill Bilodeau

## Plant Profile: Black-Eyed Susans

by Craig Huegel

Black-eyed susans (*Rudbeckia* spp.) are native to the entire eastern United States, but have become established throughout the rest of North America. As such they are probably the most common of all American wildflowers and have essentially become their symbol. Forget the coreopsis; my vote rests with the black-eyed susan for state wildflower. Nearly everyone recognizes the characteristic black/brown, domed center surrounded by bright yellow ray florets and nearly everyone has, from time to time, included them in their home landscape. But, despite their widespread presence and use, there seems to be a good many things that most gardeners fail to appreciate about these wonderful species.

First, and perhaps most importantly, the common black-eyed susan (*R. hirta*) is a much different species in Florida than it is elsewhere. In the prairie states, such as southern Wisconsin and Iowa where I come from, black-eyed susans are a common component of the rich black organic soils of the tall grass prairie. In these conditions, they produce large, expansive blooms. These “Gloriosa daisy” types are extremely showy flowers and they are sold even here in many of the non-native nurseries. They are the same species as our Florida ones, but a very different plant. Gloriosa daisies in Florida are much like petunias and zinnias. Great short-lived annuals for the cooler times of year, but not much more. They will not live long or reseed at all. To be successful with this species, you need to use Florida stock.

In Florida, the black-eyed susan is a much less showy wildflower, native mostly to open areas and flatwoods where the soils are slightly moister than average. Its dark inner disc is surrounded by yellow petals that are rarely more than ¾ inches long. Instead of large robust foliage, the plants are normally only 1-2 feet tall with sparse narrow leaves. But, despite their lack of the dramatic, the Florida version of the black-eyed susan has a certain charm that is not easily describable. Perhaps it comes from its simplicity, its ease of growing, and its extended blooming season. It thrives in most soils in full sun and it seems to survive in most moisture regimes. In Florida anyway, the common black-eyed susan is a true sunshine worshiper that forgives neglect. What is often not made clear, however, is that the species also is an annual or very short-lived perennial that will not survive past its second year no matter how good a horticultural expert you are. Black-

eyed susans produce copious amounts of seed and they will persist in your landscape on their own terms. Provide them conditions that are not heavily mulched so that their seeds have some bare soil to fall into and germinate. Given this, they will persist – even if they do not stay put in the place you originally plant them.



*Rudbeckia hirta*

Lastly, there are a great many other black-eyed susans available to us other than the common *Rudbeckia hirta*. Sometimes we fail to recognize this too and for that reason, a number of other worthy species are largely neglected by those of us interested in wildflowers and native plant landscaping. Over the past years, I have been collecting and experimenting with most of the other species of *Rudbeckia*. Some of my favorites are described briefly below. Search them out and give them a place in your wildflower garden. They will not disappoint you – if you give them the conditions they need.

(Plant Profile: Black-Eyed Susans, cont.)

**Cutleaf Coneflower (*Rudbeckia lacinata*)**

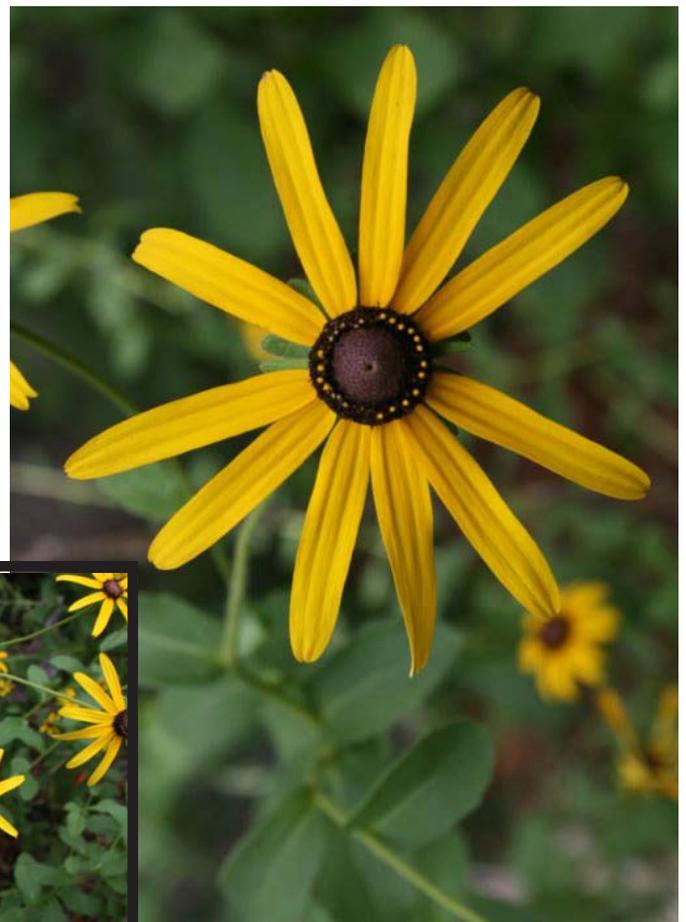
I really love this species. It is classified as a wetland species and is only naturally found in four counties within the panhandle and one county in the northern peninsula. But, despite that, I have found it to be a hardy addition to my backyard wildflower area. I give it partial sun (half days) and have put it in a lower area of the yard that tends to stay moister than some. In these conditions, it blooms every summer starting around mid-July and continues to flower for about a month. Cutleaf coneflower's central disc is greenish and decidedly raised. The petals are a rich showy yellow. When it is not in bloom, it exists as a small basal rosette of interesting dissected leaves.



*Rudbeckia lacinata*

**Softhair Coneflower (*Rudbeckia mollis*)**

Softhair coneflower is native to a great many counties in north Florida. It is an upland species that occurs in open woodlands and is adaptable to a great many situations. Alexa and I are rather new converts to this species. We planted it in our backyard woodland opening last year and it slowly kept growing. By June of this year, the plants had grown to a height of about 5 feet and then they started blooming. Softhair coneflower has blooms nearly twice as expansive as the common black-eyed susan. Other than that, the flowers are very similar. Each plant, however, may have as many as 50 open blooms and it is spectacular. Although we have not gone into year three, I suspect that it is not a long-lived perennial and will not likely persist. Therefore, I will collect seed and make sure I always have some of this amazing plant in my landscape.



*Rudbeckia mollis*



(Plant Profile: Black-Eyed Susans, cont.)

### **Brown-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia triloba*)**

This is one of Alexa's favorite wildflowers. Brown-eyed sasan is found in only 4 counties in Florida, scattered in the eastern panhandle and one county in the northern peninsula, although it occurs in every other state except Maine east of the Mississippi River.. Unlike the others in this genus, this species produces tiny flowers that are miniatures of the typical black-eyed susan. It stands about 2-3 feet tall and blooms for a good number of months during the summer. In some places it acts as a short-lived perennial. In Florida, it acts as an annual. Collect seed to ensure that you will have some of this beautiful wildflower each year – or hope that it reseeds itself. I have not had much success with this plant reseeding itself, but I have had others tell me they have.

There are a good number of other species that are sometimes available. All of them deserve a place in our landscapes. Start with the ubiquitous *Rudbeckia hirta*, and then experiment with some of the others. You will not be disappointed.

#### *Rudbeckia triloba*



**August Meeting, Wed., Aug. 6, 7:00 pm:**  
Moccasin Lake Nature Park, 2750 Park Trail Ln.,  
Clearwater.

Topic: Low-Impact Landscapes  
Landscape architect and urban ecologist Tom Levin will give advice on creating a sustainable landscape using Florida native plants.

### **August Field Trip, Sat. Aug. 9:**

Following on the heels of his Wednesday program, landscape architect Tom Levin will lead us on a field trip to his newly completed landscape project at Hillsborough Community College, 39 Columbia Dr., Tampa. See native plants used to replace the more conventionally used species in this type of setting by a landscape designer who has long been a proponent of incorporating natives. To carpool from Pinellas County, meet at the north side of the Home Depot parking lot, 22nd Ave N, St. Petersburg. For more info contact Bill Billideau: (727) 488-3163

**September Meeting, Wed., Sept. 3, 7:00 pm:**  
Moccasin Lake Nature Park, 2750 Park Trail Ln.,  
Clearwater.

Topic: Home Landscaping with Natives:  
Various Chapter members whose yards will be featured on the Landscape Tour will show pictures and describe their objectives and progress in landscaping their yards with native plants.

### **September Field Trip, Sat./Sun., Sept.20- 21:**

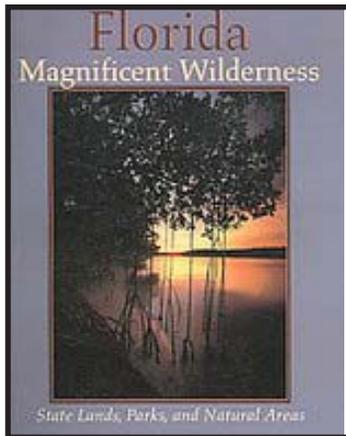
**2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Native Plant Landscape Tour (2 days):**  
**South Pinellas County** Yards will be featured on Saturday, Sept. 20, from 8 am - 12:30 pm  
**North & Central Pinellas County** yards will be featured on Sunday, Sept. 21, from 11:30 am - 4 pm

Each day of the tour will feature approximately six to eight home landscapes. Pre-registration will be available at Wilcox Nursery, Twigs and Leaves and several other sites to be determined. A detailed handout describing the various sites will be provided with your registration. You may then choose which yards you wish to see and in which order you wish to progress. Join us both days or pick which day best fits your weekend schedule. This year we are also advertising our tour to the general public. There is a \$5.00 fee for non-members, FNPS members are free.

## December Meeting -- date change!

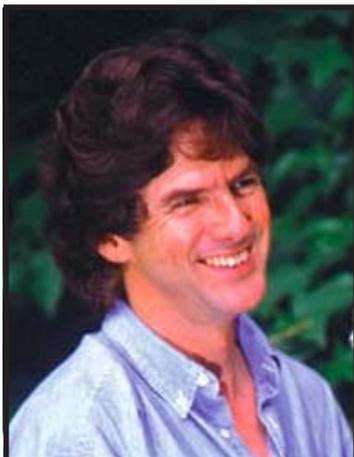
Our Annual Conservation Celebration meeting, held jointly with Pinellas Native Plant Society, St. Petersburg Audubon and the Pinellas Co-operative Extension, will be on **Thursday December 4<sup>th</sup>** this year at the Pinellas County Cooperative Extension Building. Doors open at 6:00pm for the Exhibits & preview of Silent Auction items.

Our featured speaker will be James Valentine, renowned photographer and co-author of *Florida's Magnificent Wilderness*, with Dr. Bruce Means. This book was the recipient of one of the most prestigious environmental awards in the state: *The Governor's Environmental Education Award*.



James will present the program of *Florida's Magnificent Wilderness*, produced by Breathing Earth Productions: the publications, music and film making division of Quest Foundation, Inc., a non-profit 501 C3, publicly supported conservation education organization.

As their publicity so accurately states: **“The environmental images in this presentation will forever change how you see the state; you will leave with a heightened awareness that what we see is irreplaceable and cannot be taken for granted. The quadraphonic sound orchestrated performance will heighten one’s awareness / action to celebrate and preserve Florida’s wilderness and wildlife.”**

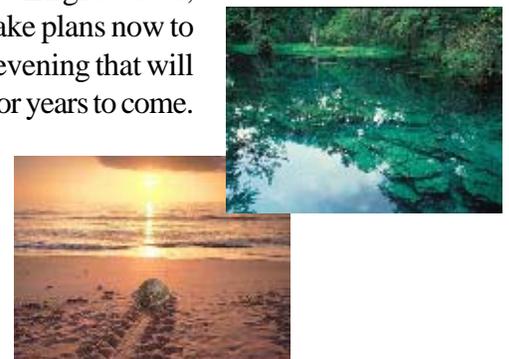


Breathing Earth Productions was created to showcase gifted and renowned artists, musicians, environmental educators, writers, poets, biologists, ethnobotanists, bio-acoustical researchers and photographers who desire to direct their life’s work for stewardship of



the planet. In this program James uses varied projectors and music to photographically explore six distinct ecosystems with its varied landscape, moods of weather, and seasonal change. The images depict a sustainable Florida with the dynamic interaction of open space/wildlife/wilderness.

Valentine’s camera, “a carrier of the light”, is used to create archival photographic art that reflects the creations of nature and culture. He has devoted his life’s work for the stewardship of wilderness, wildlife and the understanding of sustainable living. As president of Quest Foundation, Inc., James pioneered the concept of Environmental Art Photography; images that work for the conservation of our wilderness.. In 1969 he accomplished a three-year trek that followed the journey of 18th century naturalist, William Bartram, throughout coastal Georgia. This extensive exploration and environmental photographic commission led to the development of the largest environmental art and natural sound exhibition in the country at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, GA. The natural history journey of the early explorers and naturalists who first set foot into the wilds of Florida is captured in his book *Florida - Images of the Landscape*, Westcliffe Publishers, Englewood, Colorado. Make plans now to join us for an evening that will last with you for years to come.



Note: These James Valentine photos are available as free downloadable wallpaper from: [http://www.dep.state.fl.us/lands/FLForever/FF\\_Acquisition/wallpaper.htm](http://www.dep.state.fl.us/lands/FLForever/FF_Acquisition/wallpaper.htm)

## Field Trip Report -- July 13, 2008

### Kayaking on the Chassahowitzka River

by Jane Williams

After a very good lecture on fresh water riverside systems by Craig Huegel at our July General Meeting, it was a good lesson learned to follow it up with a trip to a freshwater river. It was HOT, but fortunately it was also overcast and the Chaz is a spring-fed river so the water was cool. The river is wide with numerous springs, but none of the crystal clear version seen at Weeki Wachee or other first magnitude springs. Still, there was plenty of cool water and a wide floodplain filled with wildflowers and trees we had heard about the week before.



the shiny leaves and small white flowers with bright yellow centers. Grasses included American bulrush (*Scirpus americanus*) in flower, saw grass (*Cladium jamaicense*), and, again something I had never seen before, giant plume grass (*Saccharum giganteus*).

After paddling downstream slowly (plant folks never move too fast) we moved up into the backwaters of Salt Creek and then reversed to return to a pull out on the side of the river for lunch. This must have been a house or man-made clearing at one time since there was a well-established patch of grass – great for a picnic, but not a scene one would expect on a natural river floodplain with little or no high ground. Still we were grateful.

Then we paddled up a narrow side channel, guarded by a large alligator which left when he saw us coming, to “the Crack”, a natural spring that is a narrow slit in the ground, surrounded by rock, with cool, fresh water pouring out. This passageway was narrow, so we got a closer look at the shoreline. And in the end, we had to park our kayaks and walk. Multiple types of *Tillandsia* were in the trees and multiple ferns including a good supply of shoestring fern (*Vittaria lineata*), giant leather fern (*Acrostichum danaeifolium*), swamp fern (*Blechnum serrulatum*), and golden polypody (*Phlebodium aureum*). As a special treat, there were clumps of butterfly orchid (*Encyclia tampensis*) in bloom along the stream banks.

The best part was the rope swing from the side of the spring out into the deeper water over “the Crack”. Only the daring tried it, but our president was one of the daring. After that, it was a short paddle back to the launch site at the spot where the river starts its wide, slow meander to the Gulf. We had been on the water, in July, for 5 hours, and lived to tell the tale.



Swallow-tailed kites met us and passed over several times during the trip – a magnificent black and white soaring bird with a deeply forked tail. We paddled downstream with little or no current since we were at high tide and the river backs up waiting for the tide to reverse. The Chaz is a lovely river, but we did not have the heavy boat traffic that is so common on other rivers on a hot July weekend day. And, it never rained even though we had left rain behind in Pinellas County



In bloom along the shore were saltmarsh mallows (*Kosteletzkya virginica*), a beautiful light pink open flower, and swamp or string lily (*Crinum americanum*) with white delicate flowers with long drooping petals on lily-like stalks. The white is striking against the intense green of the floodplain flora.

Along the side of the river, in the floodplain, were the typical riverside trees, but of special note was basswood or American linden (*Tilia americana*), a tree that I had never seen before. We also found a sweetbay magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*) in bloom, again something I had never seen except in a tree nursery. It was good to see



*Magnolia virginiana*

### **FALL Native Plant Sale at Brooker Creek Preserve, Sat. Oct., 3:**

Our Fall Native Plant Sale will be held at Brooker Creek Preserve on Saturday, October 3, 2008, from 8:30 am -- 3:00 pm just outside the Lecture Hall, by the Education Building. (Entrance is off Keystone Road)

Flag the date and be sure to come out for this fun, educational and chapter fundraising event. Bring your friends and neighbors!

We will have mini talks:

10:00 am -- "Using Natives to Attract the Right Kind of Wildlife to Your Yard "

11:00 am -- "Getting Started With Natives: How to Incorporate Native Plants into an Existing Landscape"

If you'd like to participate, we will be needing some extra help on Thursday & Friday to label plants and get them transported to BCP. This is a chance to have some fun, get to know other members a little better, and learn a lot about the plants.

If you are able to help a few hours on either Thursday or Friday, contact Bruce Turley @ 595-2073 .

OR

if you are able to work any time at the sale on Saturday, please contact Alexa Wilcox-Huegel @ 251-7376. It's fun! (Really....)

### **Plant News: A New Orchid Species**

Fieldwork conducted by Craig Huegel and co-worker Kathleen McConnell resulted in the discovery of a new population of a very rare species of terrestrial native orchid in Sarasota County. This is more than 90 miles from the only other recorded natural population, which is located in Fakahatchee Strand Preserve. Before this find, the Fakahatchee population was considered to be an aberrant variety of the more common ladiestreeses, *Sacoila lanceolata*. The taxonomic analysis by Paul Martin Brown and the fieldwork by Craig and Kat have since provided strong evidence for it to be considered a separate species, *Sacoila paludicola*. If you would like a pdf copy of the papers that appeared in the July issue of the **North American Native Orchid Journal**, you can request one from Craig by e-mailing him at [Huegelc55@aol.com](mailto:Huegelc55@aol.com)

*Sacoila paludicola*



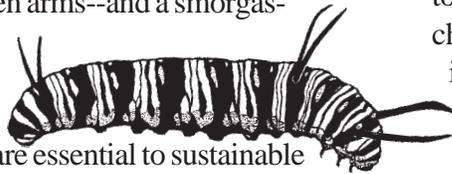
## Book Review: Bringing Nature Home

by Jan Allyn

*On every stem, on every leaf ... and at the root of everything that grew, was a professional specialist in the shape of grub, caterpillar, aphid, or other expert, whose business it was to devour that particular part.*

--Oliver Wendell Holmes

Bugs are good! That's the takeaway message of Douglas W. Tallamy's book *Bringing Nature Home: How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in Our Gardens* (Timber Press, 2007). Tallamy is an entomologist so his affection for insects is not surprising, and he clearly admires them for their aesthetic beauty and clever evolutionary adaptations. But he also argues, persuasively and passionately, that there are sound ecological reasons for welcoming insects into our landscapes with open arms--and a smorgasbord of native plants.



Healthy insect populations are essential to sustainable ecosystems that support the birds, butterflies, mammals, reptiles and other "charismatic megafauna" we cherish. Birds, especially, rely on insects and their larvae to feed their young. In the areas we humans have disturbed with our roadways and infrastructure, commercial buildings, residential developments, and agricultural plantations, we have wiped out the native plant diversity that supports wildlife. Tallamy estimates that perhaps only 3% to 5% of the United States remains as undisturbed, natural land, and much of that is composed of "ecological islands" that preclude immigration, making both plant and animal species vulnerable to local extinctions. So unless all of us actively work to convert human-disturbed lands--including our suburban gardens--for the preservation of wild creatures, we will no longer have the opportunity to observe nature on a daily basis. We will have to travel to outlying preserves to visit the few remaining species that survive.

So, what's the connection to native plants? All plants convert the sun's energy into organic matter usable by life. They are the first "trophic level." Insect herbivores eat plants and, in turn, provide food for all the other animals in higher trophic levels: insect carnivores, birds, mammals, reptiles, etc. But insects are often specialists, able only to eat those plants they have evolved with. And in our residential landscapes and agricultural plantings, we have sys-

tematically chosen exotic plants or created plant cultivars that are distasteful to our native insects. We have done this to protect our valuable food crops and because we view our landscapes as mere decoration, wanting them to be aesthetically perfect and unmarred by chewed leaves. But deliberately excluding insect herbivores in this way deprives our ecosystems of a vital link in the food web. And introduced exotics are doubly problematic because these "pest-free" species escape our grasp and themselves become pests, precisely because they are distasteful to the insect herbivores that keep native plants in check. Our native plants, by contrast, are tasty insect food, and insects provide the basis for all the other animals.

To help us choose plants that are insect-friendly, the chapter "What Should I Plant?" identifies and describes those plant genera that have demonstrated the greatest ability to support butterfly and moth larvae. This criterion was chosen because Lepidoptera comprise over 50% of all insect herbivores in the US, because caterpillars are important components of many vertebrate diets, and because there is more published data about host plant use by butterflies and moths than there is for other insects. All of the plant families recommended have species that are native here in Florida, and Tallamy's descriptions are interesting both for his suggestions for landscape applications and his knowledge about which caterpillars make use of each plant group.

The cleverly-titled chapter "What Does Bird Food Look Like?" describes various insect families, including but not limited to Lepidoptera. Tallamy tells us what plants these insects eat, what eats them, and describes interesting or curious facets of their life histories. (Initially I was tempted to skip this chapter but was glad I didn't because I found it fascinating.)

The book is illustrated throughout with wonderful color photographs of plants and insects, and has useful appendices: a list of native plant species that have both wildlife value and desirable landscaping attributes (sorted by region and plant type), a checklist of host plants of butterflies and showy moths, and a summary of Tallamy's survey data that demonstrates his thesis. I enjoyed this book immensely and highly recommend it to anyone who wants to make landscape choices that are more likely to attract birds, butterflies and other creatures. Whether you read the book or not, when you see insects dining on your landscape, rejoice!



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**FNPS Bulletin Board**  
<http://fnps.org/phpBB>



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