

The

# Understory

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

October - November 2008

## Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park

by Christina Evans

My appointed task is to convince you to join us on the field trip to the 54,000 acre Kissimmee Prairie Preserve on Saturday, October 18th -- all in the space of a couple of paragraphs and using a few photos. Before I begin, it may help to know that when I talk about Kissimmee Prairie to others, my eyes shine with excitement and I speak with the passion of someone in love. The Florida prairie is a place that inspires that kind of feeling in me, and it is not easy to convey exactly why, even with many words.

I try to explain about vast expanses of wildflowers, grasses, and palmettos, that go as far as the eye can see - where white-tailed deer and Osceola turkeys with blue heads magically appear and disappear at will, and the sky is uninterrupted by much of anything except perhaps a graceful Northern Harrier, or -- on a very lucky day -- a hovering White-tailed Kite. Or I attempt to convey the delight felt at each one of endless small discoveries — a single orange pine lily blooming in the midst of a sea of purple liatris, a small green tree frog resting in the throat of that perfect flower, a fresh Red-banded Hairstreak slowly spinning on flat-topped goldenrod, or a tiny Citrine Forktail damselfly hunting for even tinier creatures from a blade of wiregrass.

It is not enough and photos seem a mere tease. The only way you can understand is to come along and see for yourself.

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Plan to stay all day and watch the sun set. And prepare to be inspired. Please join me on our upcoming field trip to this magical place. Perhaps it will inspire you in much the same way. See page 7 for details.

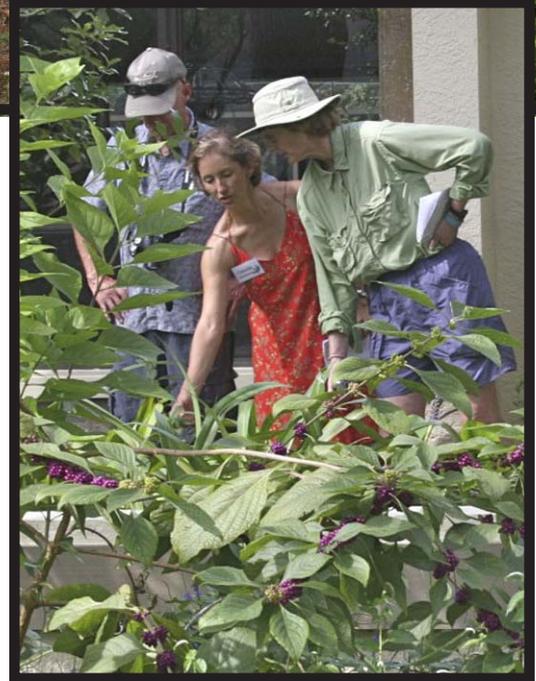
*Kissimmee Prairie, photo by Christina Evans*



## Second Annual Landscape Tour a “Natural” Success by Jim McGinity

The second annual Native Plant Landscape was held on Saturday, September 20<sup>th</sup> and Sunday, September 21<sup>st</sup>. Several improvements were made based on feedback the organizers received from the initial tour last year. There were still north county and south county loops, but this time they were offered on separate days allowing attendees to tour landscapes at both ends of the county. Both tours offered something for everyone with a good diversity of sizes and types of landscapes. Other improvements were more colorful and visible signage, official tour booklets, and name tags for the homeowners and volunteers stationed at each home. Jennifer Moore designed the tour booklets and they included native plant artwork by Cathy Vogelsong. The tour was strongly supported by several businesses again this year. “Wilcox Nursery” in Largo, “Twigs & Leaves Nursery” in St. Petersburg and “Nice, Green & Beautiful Landscaping” in Dunedin all served as registration points for the tour as well as providing assistance in promoting the tour to their customers several weeks in advance.

After a modest one-day tour during the first year with approximately 80 attendees, the tour has really grown. This year the tour had a combined total of 225 attendees with 116 taking in the south county tour and 112 the north county tour. One surprising discovery from the registration process was that numbers of members and non-members was skewed. We had 48 native plant society members attend to 180 non-members. This trend may represent a good opportunity to not only increase our membership, but to reach many more people in our community that are not familiar with the value of native plants. In talking with some of our volunteers and homeowners, it was clear that they both enjoyed the event and loved sharing what they know with others. Lilian Norris, who volunteered at one of the north county homes said that, “Overall, I think the Native Plant Society held a very successful event on all fronts. It seemed like a good fundraiser, it was a good marketing event for the group – which could increase membership or meeting attendance – and it educated people on native plant alternatives and how to use them in the landscape.” According to Pat Cigoi, homeowner



on the south tour, “My goal with my landscape was to no longer be a “slave” to a lawn. We used to live in the East Lake area in north county and had a large lawn.” Another homeowner, Claudia Lewis on the north tour, shared this reflection on her experience during the tour. “Most of the visitors really like the natural look to my yard. It confirms that there is a misconception out there that most people won’t like a yard with natives. If it is designed and installed properly, it can look beautiful.”

Special thanks to the homeowners who opened up their landscapes to hundreds of people and shared their passion and enthusiasm for native plants. Also, the volunteers including the planning committee (Bill Bilodeau, Alexa Huegel, Sharon Kane, and Karen Mason) are to be commended for contributing to making this second annual

tour a “natural” success. Let’s keep it growing (and going)!

### Quotes from the Landscape Tour surveys:

- o Homeowners and volunteers at each site were gracious, competent, and a delight to speak with! Well done!
- o Tour organization and booklet are excellent! Keep it going please!
- o I learned that it doesn’t have to be all grass all of the time.
- o It was good to see the performance of the different varieties in the different ranges of environments. Also, to have the option of the north and south ends of the county.
- o I learned that there are many attractive, useable varieties of native plants available.
- o This is my favorite FNPS event. I take lots of pictures.



## November Elections: Board of Directors, Pinellas Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society

It is that time of year when we present to our membership a slate of officers to guide us through the 2009 year. The duties of those so chosen are:

- To meet regularly at least eleven times per year
- To control and conduct the business of the chapter
- To serve on ad hoc committees as needed

At the November membership meeting, the membership shall, by a plurality decision of those present, elect Chapter Officers and Directors. Those so nominated are:

President:	Bill Bilodeau
Vice President:	Jim McGinity
Secretary:	Melody Staunton
Treasurer:	Jane Williams
Chapter Representative:	Debbie Chayet
Past President:	Cathy Quindiagan
Directors:	Bruce Turley and Danie Cutler

The by laws allow for up to five Directors. The duties of the directors shall be to act as liaisons for standing committees and the membership. If you are interested in serving as a board member for the 2009 year, please contact me, Cathy Quindiagan, at 327-7573, immediately.

### President's Message: Creativity and the Mission

In recent months, I had the pleasure of being part of a team of five chapter members who planned our 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Native Plant Landscape Tour. There was much to do: previewing and deciding the suitable sites, creating a tour guide booklet, planning pre- & day-of- tour registrations, publicity, taking photographs and developing a PowerPoint presentation for the members’ meeting, signs for the tour sites, arranging for volunteers... hundreds and hundreds of details to create and execute. It was much effort, but most gratifying because of the teamwork. Along with coordinator Jim McGinity, each committee member, Alexa Wilcox-Huegel, Sharon Kane, and Karen Mason, effectively executed their tasks and the project took shape. The tour went from a vision /desire, through planning, and execution, and now, after writing this, we have given it to the general public; a creation that manifested in visible form the landscape dimension of the Florida Native Plant Society mission of preserving, conserving, and restoring the native plants of Florida.

To see the whole process as one of creation was rewarding. It is uplifting to see what a small group of people can do when there is caring and giving so that something worthwhile can take form. To the members of the tour committee you have my thanks and respect for your significant efforts and the excellence of your work

-- *Bill Bilodeau*

## Plant Profile: Blazing Stars

by Craig Huegel

There are more than 15 species of blazing stars (*Liatris* spp.) native to Florida. Some of these are rather rare in our state, but much more common further to our north. Others are extremely rare endemics found only in a few counties and in very specialized growing conditions. What remains are about a half dozen rather widespread species well adapted to the home landscape.

Having lived in a part of the country where prairies are possible, I learned early in life to admire the tall purple spires of blooming blazing stars. In the late summer or early fall, blazing stars come to life. Their bright lavender flowers pull your attention away from the yellows and greens of the wildflower meadow and draw it to them alone. They make their entrance from humble beginnings. Most are completely deciduous. In early spring, their grass-like leaves emerge and they spend the next several months looking like a sorry excuse for a bunch grass. Eventually, in early summer, they begin the long laborious task of sending up their flower stalk. Blazing stars bloom from the top buds down, so blooming does not occur until the last bud is formed and the stalk has reached its final height.

Blazing stars are in the aster family. Each bud is composed of several to a great many small flowers. The individual flowers do not differ greatly between species. What varies most is the way they are arranged on the stalk and the shape and structure of the buds. There also are often differences in the way the leaves are arranged and whether the leaves have ciliate hairs or not. Most prefer well-drained soil and all prefer sunny locations. In these conditions, they are also magnets for nectaring butterflies of all shapes and sizes.

In the garden, blazing stars do best when planted with grasses and other plants that will provide some structure. Otherwise they sometimes fall over and twist along the ground a bit before heading skyward once more. Although some species are more likely to do this than others, more common reasons for this to occur are planting them in areas with too much shade and/or planting them in soils that are too rich. Be careful where you plant them, if this possibility concerns your sense of aesthetic.

The following species are the most commonly available and better species to try here in Pinellas County.

### Dense blazing star (*Liatris spicata*)

A resident of flatwoods and moist-soil areas, this is the one species that adapts well to poorly drained sites and to areas of more normal drainage. It also is the tallest and most robust species of the group. Dense blazing star may reach 5 feet tall and it produces a thick stalk dense with flowers. Because of its size, use this species towards the back of a wildflower area instead of near the front. My plants reseed heavily and I get many new seedlings each spring.

*Liatris spicata*



*Liatris gracilis*  
with bud detail



### Graceful blazing star (*Liatris gracilis*)

This may be one of the most common species in our area of the state and it is fairly adaptable. Although it will not tolerate seasonably flooded conditions, graceful blazing star is common in mesic to xeric flatwoods, old fields and other well-drained sites. At maturity, it often stands 4 feet tall. It is characterized by its small buds that are held away from the flower stalk and the ciliate hairs that are abundant on the foliage. Although the individual flowers are small, the sheer number of them along the flower stalk, makes this a striking member of the genus. Graceful blazing star is more prone to “falling over” than the other species.

**(Plant Profile: Blazing Stars, cont.)**

**Elegant blazing star (*Liatris elegans*)**

This is one of my personal favorites, but not as widely grown as some of the others. It is unique in many ways. The individual flowers are white, but the flower heads are surrounded by a light lavender bract. This bract gives the stalk of flowers a look of lavender, but its all a bit of a ruse. Elegant blazing star is a large robust species that is usually between 4-5 feet tall at maturity. The flower buds are held close to the thick stalk and when it is in bloom the plants are richly clothed in flowers. I have found this species to be very drought tolerant, but it is less able to stand too much water than the two species described above.

**Shortleaf blazing star (*Liatris tenuifolia*)**

Perhaps the least showy of the genus, this species is found most commonly on excessively well-drained soils. It is not very forgiving of soils that are not sandy or sites where water may collect – even for brief periods. Shortleaf blazing star maintains its basal leaves through the winter. Its thin wand of a flower stalk may reach 3-4 feet in height and the flower buds are rather small and not too densely packed together. As such, it is less noticeable when in full bloom than the other species. If you have the right conditions, use this species in mass and do not hide it too far back in the landscape bed.

**Chapman’s blazing star (*Liatris chapmanii*)**

Although not as commonly seen around this region as the others I have described, Chapman’s blazing star is a beauty and should be more widely grown. It stands a bit lower than most other species (about 2-3 feet tall) and tends to bloom a few weeks earlier (mid-September). The flower buds are held close to the main stem and are densely packed together. When in bloom, therefore, the dense flower stalk is a sight to behold. Chapman’s blazing star needs well-drained soils or it will rot. It too tends to keep its basal rosette of grass-like leaves through the winter and it is one of the least likely of the group to fall over.

Over the years, I have grown nearly every species of blazing star native to Florida. Start with the species described above and get comfortable with the group. Then if you have the room and can find some seed or another grower to share, give the others a try as well. To me, blazing stars are my sign of fall and I will always have them in my garden.



*Liatris elegans*  
with bracts



*Liatris tenuifolia*



*Liatris chapmanii*



### **October Meeting, Wed., Oct. 1, 7:00 pm:**

Moccasin Lake Nature Park, 2750 Park Trail Ln., Clearwater.

Topic: Bees and Other Pollinators

Speaker: Bill Kern, Ph.D.

### **October Field Trip, Sat., Oct. 18:**

See Article, page 1. Now some important details:

You will need to bring both food and drinks for the day - there is no place to get food on the Preserve and only one water fountain at the office down at the end of the five-mile road. You will also want sun protection and to be prepared for sudden downpours. Bathrooms are not a problem, though they are at either end of that five-mile road. There is an admission fee of \$2.00 per vehicle (up to eight) -- honor system -- you put your money in an envelope just inside the gate and take a slip for your car window. If you have a state park pass, you still need to take a slip and write your number on the envelope. The gate opens at 8:00 a.m. and closes at sundown. Regardless of who is in charge, they do make people leave then, but if we are camping there (as I fully expect to be) we will have the combination to the gate, so if anyone wants to stay a bit longer, they probably can and then we can let them out. Realize, however, that it is a three hour drive and it will be very late when everyone gets home if they wish to stay until sunset.



### **November Meeting, Wed., Nov. 5, 7:00 PM:**

Debbie Chayet of the Pinellas County Parks Department will speak about the County's plan for adding more land to the beautiful and historic Wall Springs Park, a property which the County purchased approximately 10 years ago. Debbie's talk will focus on the new coastal additions to this property.

Debbie Chayet is a long-time FNPS member and serves on the Board of Directors. Currently a Grant Specialist whose park projects include habitat restoration and invasive plant control grants, Debbie graduated from the University of Florida with a degree in botany, and spent 18 years overseeing the Horticulture Operations for all the County's parks. A strong advocate of education and native plants, Debbie taught for two years at St. Petersburg College in the Environmental Resource Management program. She also teaches FCHP preparatory classes at PTEC.

### **November Field Trip, Sat., Nov. 8:**

On Sat. November 8<sup>th</sup>, Debbie will lead our Chapter field trip to Wall Springs Park. The field trip will primarily be spent exploring the four recently purchased Coastal Additions properties; frequently referred to as the McMullen Property. We should see a variety of fall wildflowers, as well as a nice black rush marsh, and sandhill and xeric hammock plant communities. If we have time, we may also go to the original section of the Park to see the spring and go up the 3-tiered observation platform.

We will meet at 9:00 a.m. at the end of Wai Lani Road, at the gate just north of Girl Scout Camp Wai Lani. Be sure to stop just outside the gate, however. Do not go into the camp.

It should be easy hiking, but you may want to bring water. . . . And as always be prepared with sun screen and bug repellent. Bring your lunch too, if you wish to picnic with us and share a bit of time together after the hike.

*Meadowlark, Kissimmee Prairie  
photo by Christina Evans*

## Some Days You Just Have To Play In The Rain: Reflections on the August Field Trip

by Jim McGinity

If you are one who always checks the weather before stepping foot outside, then you don't know what you were missing. A small group of intrepid native-plant members ventured out on a stormy morning in August for our monthly field trip. The Saturday, August 9th field trip was to the new Plant City campus of Hillsborough Community College; just off Interstate 4 in Plant City. The campus also contains the College's horticultural greenhouse and the unique Institute of Florida Studies Program, which features the Florida Studies Center and the College's other environmental centers. The brand new Florida Studies Center is a 28,00 square foot "green building" with a host of neat environmentally friendly features.

We met the designer of the Center's landscape, Tom Levin, at the site for a tour of the building and the grounds. Although the plants had just recently been installed, we were able to see and hear firsthand,



the designer's intent, why certain plants were selected over others, and how the landscape integrates with the building architecture and the educational mission of the campus. As we walked around and through the building (often dodging heavy rainfall), we were able to see how the landscape and building were designed to handle rainwater on the site. Water is collected on the metal roof, directed into the open gutter system and emptied into the reflecting pond.



### FALL Native Plant Sale at Brooker Creek Preserve. Sat. Oct. 4:

Our Fall Native Plant Sale will be held at the Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center on Saturday, October 4th, from 8:30 am - 3:00pm just outside the Lecture Hall by the Education Building. For those of you unfamiliar with this location, the entrance is immediately off of Keystone Road (Tarpon Avenue), east of East Lake Road and almost at the Hillsborough County line. Please flag the date and be sure to join us for this fun, educational and chapter fundraising event. Besides having hundreds of beautiful native plants for sale, we will have two mini talks:

10:00 A.M. - "Using Natives to Attract the Right Kind of Wildlife to Your Yard", by Craig Huegel, PhD.

11:00 A.M. - "Getting Started with Natives: Incorporating Native Plants into an Existing Landscape", by Bruce Turley, owner of Wilcox Nursery in Largo.

#### We Also Need Your Help!

Even if you are not a plant "expert" there are lots of ways to help us. This is an opportunity 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 anytime on Friday; helping to label plants and/or transport them to Brooker Creek, contact Bruce Turley @ 595-2073.

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

*Tom Levin (right) at the Florida Studies Center, HCC, photo by Jim McGinity*

## OFFICERS

**President:** Bill Bilodeau 322-9695  
**Vice-President:** Cindy Peacock 787-4031  
**Secretary:** Melody Staunton  
**Treasurer:** Jane Williams 447-7394  
**Chapter Rep:** Deborah Chayet  
dchayet@verizon.net  
**Past President:** Cathy Quindiagan 327-7573

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Lisa Curry, Alexa Wilcox-Huegel, Marie Hughes,  
James McGinity, Bruce Turley, Ray Wunderlich

## Welcome New Members!

Michael Andriola, Sydney Lemieux  
and Pat Simmons

## STANDING COMMITTEES

**Conservation:** Ray Wunderlich 525-1689  
**Education-Displays:** Marie Hughes 521-1261  
--**Scholarships:** Cindy Peacock 787-4031  
--**Special Events/Festivals:** Cindy Peacock  
**Field Trips:** open  
**Membership:** Cathy Quindiagan  
**Newsletter Editor:** Craig Huegel  
and Cathy Vogelsong 518-1026  
**Program Coordinator:** Alexa Wilcox-Huegel  
**Publicity:** open  
**Sales --Merchandise:** Rose Taylor 821-8267  
--**Plants:** Bruce Turley 595-2073

## COORDINATORS

**Budget:** Jane Williams 447-7394  
**Newsletter Reporter:** Jan Allyn 399-1022  
**Refreshments:** Hilary Edenfield  
**Volunteer Coordinator:** open  
**Web Master:** Jan Allyn 522-3453



P.O. Box 1661  
Pinellas Park, FL 33780-1661

**Pinellas Chapter Info Line:**  
(727) 544-7341

**Pinellas Chapter web address:**  
<http://pinellas.fnpschapters.org>

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



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