

# The Understory

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

April - May 2011

## President's Message By: Alexa Wilcox-Huegel

Hi Friends,

Don't you just LOVE spring! I love seeing all the wonderful flowering trees and shrubs, and what is newly blooming each week. The chickasaw plums and redbuds have finished their show, and right now in our yard, the fringe trees, red buckeye, and native azaleas are going strong. The silver bells were exciting to see in bloom this year as they are new to our yard. Right now, the turkey oak is putting out lots of new foliage, the oakleaf hydrangeas are putting on blossoms, and the winged elm is almost completely leafed out..... I love walking through our yard early in the morning and seeing the daily changes. Most of the hawthorns are in full flower, and hopefully some will still be in bloom for the upcoming Native Garden tour at the Extension office for our April meeting.

Speaking of our upcoming April meeting, I hope many of you will be joining us for our annual "Tour of the Native Garden". We are doing it a month earlier this year to (hopefully) see some of the flowering trees still in bloom, and before the weather gets even warmer. Hope you will join us, and bring family and neighbors too. Remember, we are starting the first groups a half hour earlier (6:30 pm) so we have more daylight to get the last groups in. The earlier groups will also be able to take in more of the landscape before it gets too dark. I am always excited about this meeting as it is a chance to show folks so many wonderful native specimens they might not even know exist. I have been to gardens all over this state; gardens like Selby, Fairchild, Leu, Kanapaha, and McClay, that are promoted for their native plant collections, but I have to say that the best NATIVE garden I've been to in our state is the one right here in our own County Extension. (See tour of the Native Plant Demonstration Garden, p.3.)

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Hiking Morris Bridge Park along the Hillsborough River

The other exciting event coming up is our “Pinellas Chapter Spring Native Plant Festival and Sale,” to be held on April 16<sup>th</sup>, 9:00 am -4:00 pm, at Wilcox Nursery on 1201 Indian Rocks Road (see flier, p. 4). This event will feature educational talks about landscaping with natives, have nature-inspired art, a booth about water features, and a small number of rare or hard to find wildflowers. During this event we try to have plant species that are often more difficult to find, so come join us for some beautiful and unique species. We need your help too, so if you are willing to come help for a few hours, please either sign up at the meeting, or contact our Volunteer Coordinator Mary Ann Beekman [mbeekman@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:mbeekman@tampabay.rr.com) or (727) 319-3217.

Hope many of you will be able to join us for the State FNPS Conference in May. This is always a great place to see new areas of our wonderful state, enjoy field trips led by some of the state’s best botanists, and glean lots of new information. Anyone can attend this function. . . . . you do not have to be on the Board. It is not all dry scientific stuff either. There are lots of fun and interesting things to participate in. Check out the site at [www.FNPS.org-Conference](http://www.FNPS.org-Conference). And take time to get outside and enjoy this beautiful weather and GO NATIVE!

Alexa



Devil's Millhopper

## **You Are the Voice for Conservation**

By: Jan Allyn

*I am the Lorax, and I'll yell and I'll shout for the fine things on earth that are on their way out!*

This legislative session has the potential to do more damage to growth management and conservation funding than any in memory. The Department of Community Affairs, regional planning councils, water management districts, the Florida Forever program and the Department of Environmental Protection are all under pressure of reduction or outright elimination. Legislation that would protect water quality by requiring septic tank inspections, restricting fertilizer application and enforcing the EPA’s nutrient limits is under threat of repeal. Yes, we need more jobs and economic growth, but these are possible while still protecting Florida’s environment. The so-called “conservative” members of the Legislature are using the state’s budget shortfall as an excuse to kowtow to development and agricultural interests, and with their majority status they can ram through bills that in other years would not have a chance.

Because of budget shortages, the lobbyist that represents FNPS may not be promoting our interests this spring.

This makes the influence of individual FNPS members more important than ever. Please, educate yourself about your representatives and their positions. Call, email, and visit them and let them know what your concerns are. In the face of vociferous opposition, sponsors of legislation to allow the construction of golf courses of state parks have retreated. This shows that legislators do listen when enough people speak up. Please, please be one of the few who takes the trouble to communicate with your elected officials. It’s our only hope to preserve the Florida that we love.

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## Chapter Calendar

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**April Program:** Wednesday, April 6, 6:30 pm  
Pinellas County Extension, 12520 Ulmerton Rd, Largo.  
**Topic:** Landscape Tour of the County Extension Native Plant Areas

This month, we will have guided tours of the Native Plant Demonstration Garden plantings to highlight the many species of native plants there. **Starting at 6:30**, so we have a little more time before it gets dark, we will begin tours with the first 10-15 people, and start new groups every 10 minutes thereafter as people arrive; each with a guide to tell you about the various plants and answer questions. Tours will take about an hour and we will return to the auditorium afterwards for refreshments and a short business meeting.

We are particularly fortunate to have this incredible Native Plant Demonstration Garden (including the landscaping around the large pond area) right here at our own County Cooperative Extension office. The Extension grounds contain the largest collection of *native plants* of any public landscape in Florida! This outstanding collection and demonstration of native plants, currently includes nearly 170 *species* of native trees and shrubs and approximately 66 wildflowers, grasses, and ferns within the grounds. Here you will be able to see almost every native oak that grows in Florida (over 15 different species!), most hawthorns and pines, and can see the difference between a bald and a pond cypress. The collection includes a great many underused native species and because of our latitude, it includes many south and north Florida trees and shrubs adapted for use in our region. Over the past 20 years, we have learned which species native to south Florida have tolerated our coldest winter temperatures and which north Florida ones are adaptable to our warmer ones. But, most importantly, you can see what they look like in a landscape setting when they are mature – not in 1 or 3 gallon pots. There is no better way to evaluate potential plants for your own landscape than to take a close look at the plants in this garden.

If you have friends and neighbors that are interested in learning more about native plants, please bring them along. This is an easy and informative tour and designed to answer your questions.

**April Field Trip:** Saturday, April 9  
*You must sign up for all Field Trips — see info below.*  
**Location:** Brooker Creek Preserve, Keystone Rd, Tarpon Springs, FL.

**Time:** Meet at 9:00 am at Perkins Pancake House, Gulf to Bay, just east of US 19, if you wish to carpool. If you drive separately, meet at 9:30 am at the Preserve parking lot.

**Description:** Brooker Creek Preserve is the largest natural area remaining in Pinellas County and contains some excellent examples of pine flatwoods, hammock forest, and cypress strand. We will explore the main trail from the education center and some of the off-shoot trails not generally open to the public. This is an excellent opportunity to see some of the best parts of the Preserve at a good time of year. Wear good walking shoes or boots, and bring water, insect repellent, and binoculars if you have them. There are picnic and restroom facilities at the education center and drinking fountains. We will eat lunch at the Preserve's picnic area after the hike.

**Sign-up / Information:** Contact Alexa Wilcox-Huegel by e-mail: [alexa776@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:alexa776@tampabay.rr.com) or call (727) 422-4792.

**May Program:** Wednesday, May 4, 7:00 pm  
Pinellas County Extension, 12520 Ulmerton Rd, Largo.  
**Speaker:** **Christina Evans**, Graphic artist, nature photographer, and Chair of The Friends of Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park  
**Topic:** Kissimmee Prairie Through the Seasons: A Photographic Tour of One of Florida's Most Unique Natural Areas.

Christina Evans, award-winning nature photographer and Chair of the Friends of Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park, will take us on a photographic tour of one of Florida's most beautiful and unique natural systems. The Kissimmee Prairie is a vast area of treeless prairie north of Lake Okeechobee and home to unique plants and wildlife. Join us as one of Florida's best nature photographers takes on a visually stunning look at this special place.

**There will be no field trip in May.**

**Pinellas Chapter Native Plant Society  
Presents:**

**Spring Native Plant Festival & SALE**



- \* Native Plant Experts on hand to give guidance about plant choices;
- \* Water feature/Ponds information;
- \* Books & Publications about gardening with Florida's native plants available;
- \* Nature-oriented art & pottery;
- \* Small selection of rare and unusual native wildflowers will be available for purchase.



**Add Life to Your Landscape with Florida Native Plants**

**Schedule of Talks**

**10:30 am -- Landscaping with a Purpose.** As Pinellas County becomes more developed, it is important for us to design our landscapes with a purpose, to build back some of the habitat that birds and wildlife depend on. Learn to add life and beauty to your yard using Florida's native plants. **Dr. Craig Huegel**, PhD. Wildlife biology & ecology, naturalist and author (books available for autographing).

**11:15 am -- Keeping the Bloom in Your Landscape.** How can we keep color and interest in our landscape year round? Bruce will show you what to plant for maximum effect with each season. **Bruce Turley**, Horticulturist, landscape designer and owner of Wilcox Nursery.

**1:00 pm -- Protecting Our Valuable Watershed.** Learn how pollutants can affect our local estuaries and coastal system, and how responsible gardening techniques can protect them. **Pat Admonds**, Naturalist trained in Florida's ecology.

**2:15 pm -- Fertilizers? If, How and When.** Learn responsible use of these chemicals so that they do not cause more harm than good. **Anamarie Rivera**, Pinellas County stormwater management.

**Wilcox Nursery**  
**1201 Indian Rocks Rd., Largo, FL (727) 595-2073**  
**Saturday, April 16, 2011 -- 9am to 4 pm**

## February Field Trip – Morris Bridge Park

By: Craig Huegel

A large group of us ventured out to one of Hillsborough County's most beautiful natural areas, Morris Bridge Park, on Saturday February 5. This 106-acre preserve is part of the much larger Lower Hillsborough River Wilderness Preserve; a 16,000-acre mostly contiguous area along the lower Hillsborough River. Portions are managed by the Hillsborough County Parks, Recreation and Conservation Department and the remaining portions by the Southwest Florida Water Management District. Though the weather forecast called for a good chance of rain, it held up until well after we were through. What we experienced was a beautiful morning in an exceptional place.

The Park is part of an extensive bicycle trail, but we mostly hiked the walking trails and only caught glimpses of the many bikers who take full advantage of their trail system. We began, from the main parking lot off Morris Bridge Road, on the loop boardwalk that skirts the bottomland forest surrounding the Hillsborough River. It was early in the season, so many of the canopy trees were just leafing out. We saw some wonderful Walter's viburnum in bloom, but the parsley hawk and swamp dogwood were still a few weeks or so away from flowering. The lower stretch of the Hillsborough River has extremely well developed cypress strand and bottomland hardwood hammock. The canopy is diverse. We saw the usual suspects: bald cypress, red maple, tupelo, pignut hickory and the like, but we also saw a few trees we don't often encounter.



I think the one that impressed us the most was the water locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*), with its multiple-headed thorns pointing menacingly out from their trunks and branches.



Banded water snake, cypress trees, group photo, *Viola sororia*



We did manage to see a few of the earliest spring-blooming wildflowers; annual golden ragwort (*Senecio glabellus*), blue violet (*Viola sororia*), and a solitary leatherflower (*Clematis crispa*), vining its way through the vegetation near the boardwalk.

From the boardwalk, we took the walking trail south of Morris Bridge Road. This trail winds its way through the extensive hammock forest adjacent to the Lower Hillsborough River, and took us beneath some outstanding trees and a relatively open understory. Eventually, the trail also took us through pinelands – some of it quite xeric. As we neared Morris Bridge Road and our way across to the parking lot, we came upon large areas adorned by Carolina yellow jessamine in full bloom. It was a fantastic ending to a beautiful day.

Morris Bridge Park and the other sections of the Lower Hillsborough River Wilderness Preserve are close to us and warrant exploration. If you have not explored them, I encourage you to visit – and visit at different times of the year. Bring your bike, if you are inclined – as those trails are beautiful rides, or simply hike. Bring your binoculars with you.

## March Field Trip – Devil’s Millhopper and San Felasco Hammock

By: Craig Huegel

Spring to me means spring-blooming trees and shrubs and there is no better place to immerse yourself in them than the forested parks at the northern edge of Gainesville – Devil’s Millhopper and San Felasco Hammock. Though these two nature preserves are only a few miles from each other and managed by the state, they are quite unique floristically from each other and each must be explored to get the full experience. We did just that on Saturday, March 19.

It was a perfect day to be outdoors; sunny with temperatures in the 70’s F. About 15 of us carpooled up I-75 from Pinellas and arrived about 10 am to the parking lot at Devil’s Millhopper. If you are not familiar with this outstanding natural area, Devil’s Millhopper contains a deep and well-established sinkhole. From the parking lot, which sits atop xeric sandhill habitat, the boardwalk to the bottom of the sinkhole drops rather steeply. Inside, the temperature drops a bit too and sounds of the water from the ephemeral streams cascading down the walls can be heard above the bird calls. The walls of the sinkhole are limestone and support a unique flora. Many species of ferns can be seen, along with large colonies of jack-in-the-pulpit, blue violet and other wildflowers. We reached the bottom and simply took in the atmosphere for a while, before ascending once more to the rim trail.

The rim trail winds through xeric hammock and a bit of flatwoods. The hammock is diverse and includes many outstanding

canopy trees. I believe the ones that made the greatest impact were the gigantic spruce pine (*Pinus glabra*) and swamp chestnut oak (*Quercus michauxii*), though we saw excellent examples of Florida sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), American holly (*Ilex opaca*), bluff oak (*Quercus austrina*), pignut hickory (*Carya glabra*), and red mulberry (*Morus rubra*), to name just a few. The rim trail took us up to lunch time to complete and we ate together at the picnic tables before packing up for the short drive over to San Felasco Hammock.

At 7,000 acres, San Felasco Hammock Preserve State Park is one of the finest examples of climax mesic hammocks in Florida. The limestone outcrops and extreme changes in elevation provide conditions for at least 18 biological communities within the hammock, including areas of sandhill, hydric hammock, upland pine, and swamp. Thanks to the region’s karst topography, sinkholes, steephead springs, ponds, and small lakes dot the landscape. Blues Creek, Turkey Creek, and Cellon Creek all enter San Felasco from outside the park boundary and flow through the park, finally dropping into swallows, which drain back into the aquifer. Of course, we did not have time to fully explore the park, but we did

manage to walk some of the loop trail off the main parking area and see a huge diversity of flora.

The parking lot loop trail is only a couple of miles long. From the parking lot at the edge of sandhill conditions, we were immediately met by blooming fringe trees, flowering dogwood, and horse sugar (*Symplocos tinctoria*); the latter looking a bit like a wild olive. The redbuds were past blooming, but we timed most of the others perfectly. The trail cuts through sandhill before dropping in elevation to mesic and hydric hammock along a small stream system. The sandhill was dominated by southern red (*Quercus falcata*), turkey (*Q. laevis*), and bluejack oaks (*Q. incana*), while the understory contained a wide variety of blueberry species and gopher apple. As we entered the hammock



Group at San Felasco Hammock, Devil's Millhopper (above)

habitat, we saw many of the trees seen at Devil's Millhopper, but many others as well. Some of the most unique were the needle and dwarf palms, the small grove of Devil's walking stick (*Aralia spinosa*), blooming rusty viburnum (*Viburnum rufidulum*), and box elder (*Acer negundo*). Because this is a deciduous forest, there is more diversity in the understory. We saw both species of jack-in-the-pulpits, Walter's violet, and ebony spleenwort fern to name only a few of the most unique.

Though Gainesville is not a short trip from Pinellas, it is not a long one either. And, it is another world – the closest place to us to see exquisite examples of deciduous hardwood hammock and the beautiful species that occur in them. I encourage all of you to stop by next time you are in the area. You can make a short or a long day of it - your call. I always wish I had more time, however.

***Off the Beaten Path Hike Series at Brooker Creek Preserve!*** By Barbara Hoffman, Chairman, Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve

Please join us for our nature-based fundraising hike series, *Off the Beaten Path!* This series of four hikes will take place in beautiful areas tucked away within Brooker Creek Preserve – areas that are closed to the public. We are lucky to have as our guide, Dr. Craig Huegel, who can identify everything – from the tiniest moss to the tallest tree and everything in between including animal prints, bird calls, lichens, and more. He is full of stories and very patient in answering questions. Every time I hike with Dr. Huegel, I come away with lots of good information and a time well enjoyed. You can count on me being there for these adventures *off the beaten path!*

\$80/series, \$25/each (10% discount for members of Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve)

March 27 – Sandhills – The only true sandhills of Brooker Creek Preserve. This site is in the northern end of the preserve and will feature an abundance of spring wildflowers.

June 26 - Cypress Swamp – Located in the central part of the preserve, this site features orchids, ferns, and epiphytes. Plan to get wet, really wet, as we plunge into the depths of the swamp!

Sept. 25 - Pine Flatwoods Catesby's Lily Site – Located in the eastern part of the preserve, this site features the threatened Catesby's Lily in full bloom along with a profusion of other fall wildflowers.

Jan. 22, 2012 - Anclote Spur – this site was once part of the preserve but is now a preserve in itself. We will start in Brooker Creek Preserve, then traverse from woodlands into saltmarsh to a secluded spot along the beautiful Anclote River.

Hikes will be 3-4 hours long and begin at 9:00 a.m. – bring water and lunch. Reserve your spot by emailing [fobcp@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:fobcp@tampabay.rr.com) followed with payment by check. Sign up early! Only 20 spots are open for these fabulous hikes *off the beaten path!*

## Chapter Directory

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## Plant Profile: Ironweeds (*Vernonia* spp.)

By: Craig Huegel

With spring well upon us right now, my ironweeds (*Vernonia* spp.) are once again making their appearances known and reminding me of how different they are from each other. Florida has five unique species; but only three are relatively common and found south of the panhandle. I have never experimented with the two northern species, *V. missurica* and *V. noveboracensis*, and to the best of my knowledge neither has ever been propagated in Florida or made available to the home garden. They are species more common to our north (the Latin means “Missouri” and “New York”) and are sold by native nurseries well to our north for prairie restoration projects. I would caution anyone from trying this stock here in Florida.

The other three, however, are rather commonly seen here and two are propagated with some regularity. Ironweeds deserve a place in our gardens. They are tough perennials that can survive most typical landscape conditions and they are likely to persist for years if given some attention. In fact, most will slowly spread by underground suckers when conditions are to their liking and by seed as well. Ironweeds are in the aster family. They produce multiple heads of flowers in the summer and fall that are especially good at attracting insect pollinators. That is why nearly every butterfly garden publication in North America lists at least one as a good nectar plant. The flower stalks are stiff and anywhere from 2-4 feet tall, depending on the species. No flopping over with this group, as is common with some other asters that also get this tall. The flowers themselves are a rich purple in color and a color not quite like other purple asters such as the blazing stars (*Liatris* spp.) and *Carphephorus*.

Despite their widespread appeal and propagation, I have found some confusion in their identification. Too often, plants in nurseries are misidentified. And, as you might expect, this can cause some problems when they are planted. The various species require different culture. So, use ironweeds, but pay attention to which one you are purchasing. Hopefully, this article will prove helpful.

**Tall ironweed** (*Vernonia angustifolia*) is aptly named. It is tall; often producing a flower stalk that is 4 feet above its basal leaves. Its Latin name means narrow-leaved



Tall ironweed  
*V. angustifolia*

and I like this name even better as it clearly defines its major difference with the other

ironweed commonly propagated; giant ironweed - *V. gigantea*. Tall ironweed has simple linear leaves that are about ¼ inch wide and several inches long. These linear leaves produce a dense basal cluster in the spring and keep their size and shape as they go up the elongated flower stalk in summer. On very close examination, the leaves may have a few tiny teeth along the margin, but the general appearance is of a plant with willow-like foliage and no teeth. Blooming occurs in summer and early fall. The flowers are arranged in an open panicle at the top of the stem and hundreds of flowers may be open at any one time and for several weeks.

Tall ironweed occurs throughout the panhandle south to Polk and Highlands counties. It prefers open habitats in well-drained sandy soils and does not do well if given too much shade or moisture. Use this ironweed at the back of open sunny butterfly gardens and mix it with other tall species that bloom at the same time.

**Giant ironweed** (*V. gigantea*) is also tall as its common and Latin names suggest. In fact, it is similar in size to tall ironweed and shares many of the same characteristics. Giant ironweed, however, has very different foliage and can be differentiated from tall ironweed without too much study once you have looked at both side-by-side. In the spring, giant ironweed produces a dense rosette of oval leaves that often are one inch wide or more. They are noticeably toothed along the margins as well. As the leaves go up the ascending flower stalk, they become a bit narrower, but they are never the simple willow-like leaves

Giant ironweed  
*V. gigantea*



seen in tall ironweed. Compare the two photos of the basal leaves in this article to see exactly what I mean. Giant ironweed is found throughout the northern two-thirds of Florida.

Because both species are “giants”, I have seen a number of *V. angustifolia* labeled as *V. gigantea*. The problem with this mislabeling is that giant ironweed is a plant of moist hammock openings; not sunny well-drained sands. Giant ironweed does well when planted in locations that receive no more than a half day of sun. Though somewhat drought tolerant, they also fade if planted in sites that are too droughty. Use giant ironweed in light gaps within a wooded garden or at the edge of the canopy that gets only morning sun. Be prepared to water it if extensive drought occurs also.



Blodgett's ironweed  
*V. blodgettii*



**Blodgett's ironweed/Florida ironweed** (*V. blodgettii*) seems to be the “forgotten” member of this group. This is a southern species and a near endemic; found only in the lower third of the peninsula and in the Bahamas. It is the only ironweed in Florida south of Sarasota/Highlands/Martin Counties. Throughout its range, it is a plant of open pine flatwoods and is therefore adapted to occasional extended drought and flooding. These seem like traits that should endear it to home gardeners, but Blodgett's ironweed is rarely propagated by any of the commercial nurseries affiliated with AFNN – the Association of Florida Native Nurseries.

As this is a southern species, Blodgett's ironweed is evergreen in the winter. The leaves do not form a dense basal rosette as seen in the other two species I've described in this article and they are somewhat succulent in appearance, irregular in shape and slightly toothed along the margins. Their deep shiny green color is attractive aesthetically. Blooming occurs mostly in summer, often in late July and August, though Roger Hammer describes them as capable of blooming during any month in his *Everglades Wildflowers* book. The flower stalks rarely exceed 18 inches in height and the number of flowers per stem is also a bit reduced. Despite this, it puts on a wonderful show – typical of the ironweeds. Use this wildflower near the front half of the wildflower garden and plant it in small clusters. Its range is likely restricted by cold winter temperatures, but it has no problem coping with mid-20's F. You may have to look a bit to find this species, but the search is worth it. Blodgett's ironweed fits well into a mixed wildflower planting and behaves itself much better than the other two.

### Welcome New Members!

Nancy Fitzgerald, Eloise Hayes, William Hulley, Raul Moreno, Lilian Morten, Michael K. Stallings

## Contacts

### Officers:

President: Alexa Wilcox-Huegel  
Vice-President: Mary Jackson  
Secretary: Jan Allyn  
Treasurer: Jane Williams  
Chapter Representative: Debbie Chayet  
Past President: Bill Bilodeau

### Board of Directors Members-at-Large:

Board of Directors: Mary Ann Beekman, Frank Brandt, Tiffany Custer, Andrew Karpinski, Ginny Nelson, Mary Sanders

### 2010 Committee Chairs/ Coordinators:

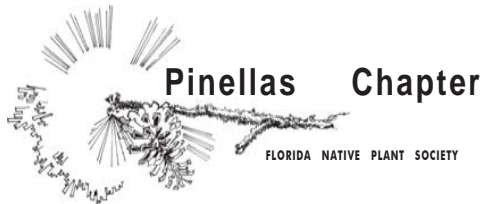
Advocacy /Conservation: Ginny Nelson  
ALP Representative: Bill Bilodeau  
Displays: Marie Hughes  
Subcommittee-Scholarships: Cindy Peacock  
Field Trips: Dr. Craig Huegel  
Grant Writer: Debbie Chayet

Chapter Grants: Mary Sanders  
Hospitality Coordinator: Mary Ann Beekman  
Membership: Cathy Quindiagan  
Newsletter Editor: Dr. Craig Huegel  
Co-editor/ Publisher/ Artist: Cathy Vogelsong  
Programs/ Special Events: Alexa Wilcox-Huegel  
Publicity: Mary Sanders  
Sales/Merchandise: Jane Williams & Jan Allyn  
Volunteer Coordinator: Mary Ann Beekman  
Speakers Bureau: Mary Jackson  
Web Master/Pinellas News: Jan Allyn

### Interim Committees:

Budget Committee: Jane Williams  
Plants Sales: Tiffany Custer  
Landscape Tour :Mary Jackson & Michael Stallings  
December Conservation Celebration: Cindy Peacock

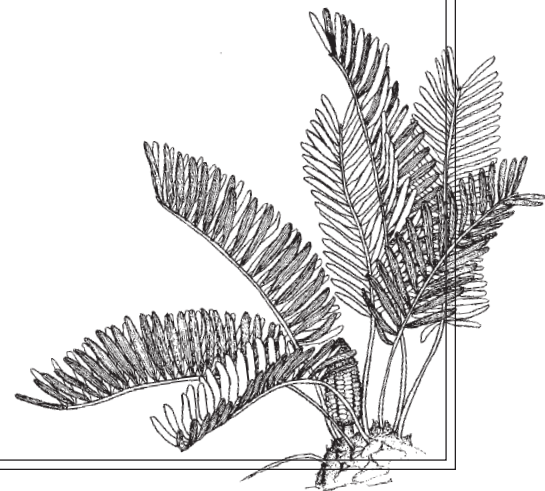
See Directory of phone numbers  
and e-mail addresses on page 7



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

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



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