

**Help save our beautiful  
and environmentally valuable  
native cypress.**

**Spread the word  
and spread the right kinds  
of mulch!**



**Notes:**

**1** National Audubon Society's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary in central Florida contains the world's largest remaining old-growth Bald Cypress forest. In north Florida you can see some very large old cypress trees in Florida's first state forest, Pine Log State Forest.

**2** Several counties in Florida restrict cypress mulch use. This is done by ordinances, land development codes or regulations. Dade County's code for new developments #1897-15(G)(3) even says, "cypress mulch shall not be used because its harvest degrades cypress wetlands." And Florida Department of Transportation Standard Specifications for Road and Bridge Construction #580-8 says, "no cypress mulch is allowed."

**3** There is more evidence that cypress does not make the best mulch. According to the Florida Cooperative Extension Service's March 1994 Fact Sheet ENH 103, "When dry, cypress mulch repels water, making it difficult to wet, particularly if it is on a mound or slope." Moreover, once it is wet "cypress mulch appears to have a high water-holding capacity that may reduce the amount of water reaching the plant root zone."

This brochure was written by Barbara Waddell and the Pepper Patrol of Ruskin, Florida. Illustrations by Susan Johnston. Graphic design by Mariella Smith (<http://insightgraphicdesign.net>). Produced by the Suncoast Native Plant Society. Distributed by the Pinellas Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society.

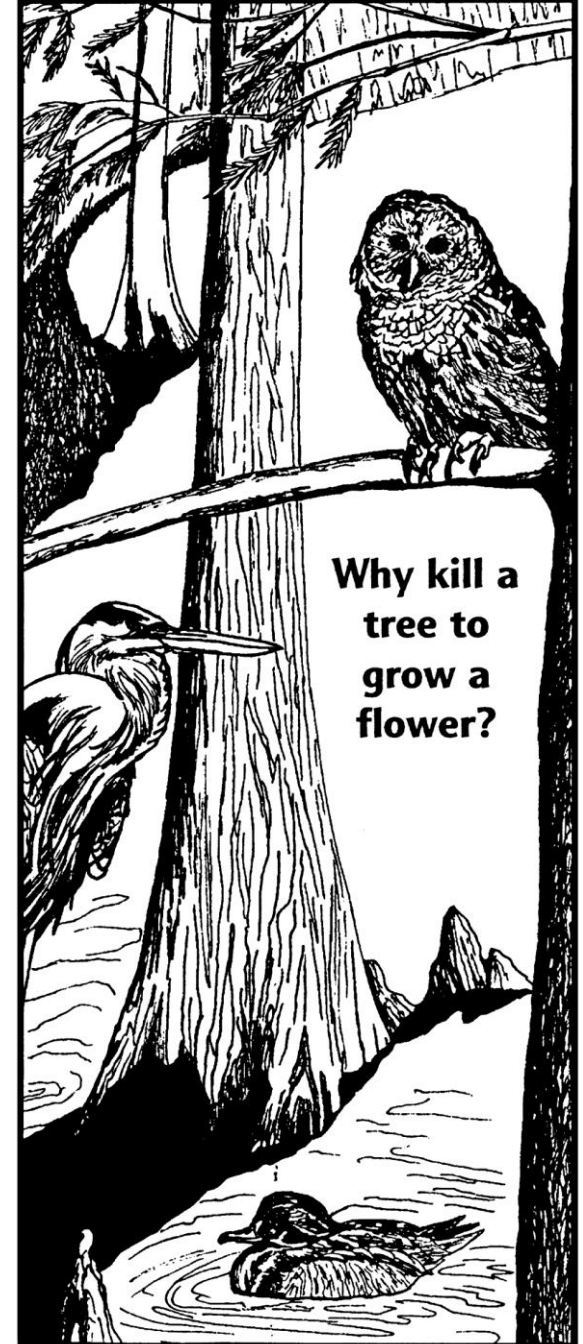
To find the FNPS chapter nearest you visit:  
<http://www.fnps.org/chapters/>



Contact the Pinellas Chapter  
of the Florida Native Plant Society:  
<http://pinellas.fnpschapters.org/>  
[pinellas@fnpschapters.org](mailto:pinellas@fnpschapters.org)



# Cypress Mulch





## In any garden supply

or nursery store you're likely to see bags and bags of cypress mulch for sale. Did you ever stop to think about the resulting fate of our magnificent Florida cypress tree?

The unique cypress forest is a beautiful Florida treasure with an important ecological role. It naturally filters pollutants and serves as a reservoir for flood-water, and so it is essential for protecting ground water—quality and quantity. It is a prime habitat for woodpeckers, wood storks, limpkins, several types of owls, opossums, bobcats, and wood ducks. Cypress forests protect our wildlife and our wetlands.

Almost all of Florida's old-growth cypress forests are gone now. They were clear-cut for lumber decades ago. Most of the cypress stands we see today are relatively young trees. You may be fortunate to still see examples of huge old-growth cypress in a very few nature preserves. They can live up to 1500 years and grow up to 150 feet tall and 25 feet in girth.<sup>1</sup>

### Thousands of acres of cypress are logged every year simply to produce mulch.

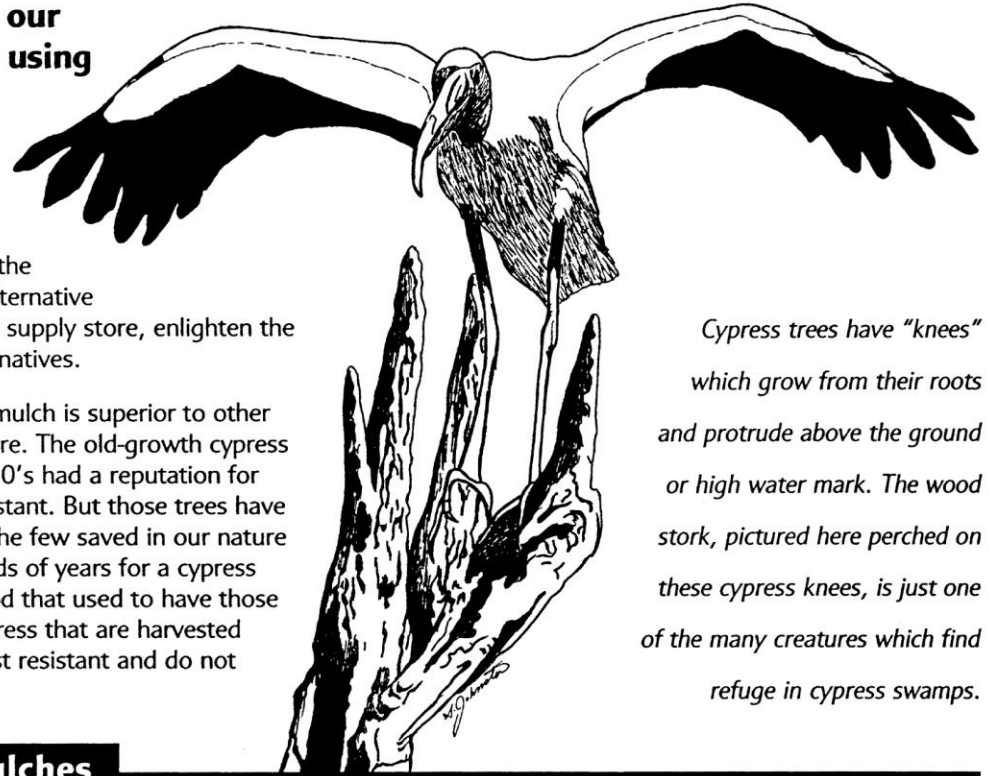
Most of Florida's cypress sawmills are mulch mills, grinding the entire tree in large chippers, producing nothing but mulch. Cypress mulch used to be produced mainly as a by-product of lumber operations, but the increasing demand for mulch has led to the use of whole trees—whole forests—for nothing but mulch.

Cypress mulch is being clear-cut from our native wetlands and the destroyed cypress trees are not being replanted. (Establishing the proper hydrology for cypress seed germination is difficult and rarely accomplished by anyone but Mother Nature.) When a cypress area is clear-cut and bare, that land is easily taken over by invasive pest plants such as Brazilian pepper. Sometimes the land is planted in pine for future logging, or drained for development. Either way, the cypress forest and its wetland and wildlife are lost forever.

### You can help save our cypress forests by using environmentally friendly mulch

for your home and business landscaping, and by asking your friends and county government to do the same.<sup>2</sup> If you don't find alternative mulches at your landscape supply store, enlighten the manager and request alternatives.

The old idea that cypress mulch is superior to other mulches is not true anymore. The old-growth cypress harvested prior to the 1950's had a reputation for being rot- and termite-resistant. But those trees have all been taken except for the few saved in our nature preserves. It takes hundreds of years for a cypress tree to grow the heartwood that used to have those properties. The young cypress that are harvested today are not decay or pest resistant and do not make a superior mulch.<sup>3</sup>



*Cypress trees have "knees" which grow from their roots and protrude above the ground or high water mark. The wood stork, pictured here perched on these cypress knees, is just one of the many creatures which find refuge in cypress swamps.*

### Alternative Mulches

#### Recycled Yard Waste

Mulch made by your county or city from recycled urban plant debris is very inexpensive (or even free in some areas). To locate your closest source, contact your Solid Waste Department or county Extension Service.

#### Eucalyptus Mulch

Produced from plantation-grown trees, this mulch is naturally insect-repellent, with a rich, long-lasting color.

#### Pine Bark

An excellent mulch with long-lasting color, it is often cheaper than purchased pine straw.

#### Pine Straw

Available commercially by the bale, or tree if you rake it yourself. (Fallen leaves, especially oak leaves, make great mulch too.)

#### Melaleuca Mulch

Melaleuca, or punk tree, is an invasive non-native tree that has taken over 500,000 acres of the Florida Everglades. Turning this tree into mulch helps rid the state of this terrible pest plant. Hopefully this mulch will be sold more widely as people learn to request it from their stores. Sometimes called "Enviro-mulch," one brand is "Florimulch." It is extremely long-lasting and termite-resistant.

#### Promulch

Made from recycled rubber tires, this is used in some playgrounds. It stays in place even in areas that flood occasionally, comes in different colors, and does not emit toxin. It is somewhat expensive.

