



NATURE'S reflections

tips & quips about our environment
and its inhabitants

THE LAND OF FLOWERS

True beauty of Florida showcased by its native plants

The textbook definition of a true Florida native plant is any species whose natural range included Florida at the time Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de León explored the area in 1513, calling it the “Land of Flowers.” There are 2,800 species of plants in this group separated into six classifications: trees, shrubs, wildflowers, vines like the American wisteria (*Wisteria frutescens*) above, plus ferns and grasses. Of these, 170 species occur naturally only in Florida such as Florida watercress (*Rorippa floridana*). On the endangered list are 418 species and 104 of those are found nowhere else in the world except Florida. 7432394713

Today, our native plant list has been expanded to include 1,300 recognized naturalized species, like the Phlox, (*Phlox drummondii*), an apparent transplant from Texas named for frontier naturalist Thomas Drummond, (1780-1835). The Phlox is now an established part of Florida’s spring bloom, bringing our combined native plant total to 4,100 plants.



Native plants are those that have adapted to our climate, soils and wildlife. There is always some species of native plants in bloom year round. In fact, any butterfly species will pick natives over exotics every time.

Our warm, moist and very humid air makes it possible for Florida to live up to the “Land of Flowers” name.

Weed or wildflower? It all depends on your perspective. Wildflowers can be a beautiful addition to the garden, but they quickly become weeds if they are growing in the wrong place. It makes good sense to incorporate native plants into the landscape whenever possible. Once established in the right places, native plants are more drought tolerant, insect and disease resistant, and require no fertilizers or pesticides, which means less contamination to the aquifer.

With many areas restricting water usage for maintaining landscapes, the use of native plants is a smart solution. Florida is losing greenspace at an alarming rate due to development crowding out the habitats and natural spaces that wildlife and native plant species need for survival. Everything we do to preserve those habitats will help maintain and protect the natural beauty of Florida and its living creatures for us and future generations to enjoy. ♪

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