

# Why Put Native Plants Back into Yards

Birds have been using Florida "native" plants for thousands of years. The word **native** comes from an ancient word that means born. Birds and native plants from the same place started to live together and adapted to one another. Birds depend on native plants for food, shelter and nests. Florida's native plants are best for the birds that live here and for birds that have always migrated here during the winter for thousands of years.

Non-native plants are often seen in **landscapes** of our towns, cities and backyards. They are chosen for colorful features so they are called **exotic ornamentals**. Many native plants are seen as weeds and are replaced by foreign plants with showy flowers or non-native lawn grass that must be watered, treated for unwanted insects, and must be mowed. Some of these foreign plants are **invasive** plants that spread fast and take over neighboring landscapes. Invasive plants can quickly replace native plants by outcompeting for the same resources. In addition, some exotic ornamentals may need to be treated with **pesticides** or **fertilizers**. They often need extra water to survive in the dry season of Florida. When we bring these plants from other habitats, it upsets our native **ecology**. Many soil critters like worms and pill bugs do not like the roots of exotics. These exotic ornamental plants do not attract the native insects that birds know. Insects and birds do not know how to use the strange berries, fruits and tough thick grass. Birds need the right insects and caterpillars to feed their chicks and themselves. They need to know how to avoid poisonous ones. Birds learn from their parents where to look for the right insects. Insects like butterflies prefer their favorite native plants to lay eggs. These plants host the caterpillars that hatch from the eggs and eat particular leaves of native plants for nourishment. Native plants host spiders, beetles, grubs and moths that birds recognize and normally eat. Birds also have learned to forage in soil or in tree bark for grubs or worms found in native sandy Florida soils. If birds forage in the tightly woven sod lawns, they can get tangled or worse - poisoned by pesticides or **herbicides** which are used on lawns to kill weeds.

Finally, the most important reason to put native plants back into schoolyards and backyards is for **sustainable** purposes. Our underground water must be protected from harmful chemicals used in treated landscapes. During the rainy season, fertilizers wash away from lawns and load nutrients into our streams that flow into the Gulf. Excess nutrients can feed red tide events that kill our fish. Native plants are best to sustain life by maintaining a balanced ecology and by meeting long term needs for children of the future.

Use your own words to define important vocabulary words  
Use the glossary inside the front cover of the booklet for hints

Native \_\_\_\_\_  
Landscapes \_\_\_\_\_  
Exotic ornamentals \_\_\_\_\_  
Invasive \_\_\_\_\_  
Pesticide \_\_\_\_\_  
Fertilizer \_\_\_\_\_  
Ecology \_\_\_\_\_  
Herbicides \_\_\_\_\_  
Sustainable \_\_\_\_\_



Suck up this knowledge like  
I drink nectar with my  
long tongue!

**Bonus: Use the underlined letters in the words to finish the sentence below.**

Florida \_\_\_\_\_ plants  
\_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_ idea  
for a sustainable future.

Spread it around like  
wallpaper