

NATIVE PLANT NEWS

BELUTHAHATCHEE CHAPTER



Florida Native Plant Society's Newest Chapter Formed - Beluthahatchee

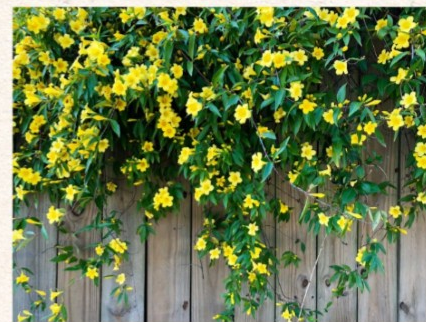
With so much growth in St. Johns County, now more than ever the mission of the Florida Native Plant Society resonates with many citizens. The Florida Native Plant Society's mission is to champion Florida's native plants and their habitats. The Beluthahatchee Chapter will sponsor activities such as educational speakers, hands-on gardening activities, field trips and outreach events to further this mission. We will strive to have activities throughout St. Johns County. We started with a small group of volunteers and anticipate growing slowly. If you know of someone who would be interested in joining, please help spread the word.

Beluthahatchee Chapter has a wonderful opportunity to partner with Beluthahatchee Park in NW St. Johns County in furthering the goal of rewilding the park with Florida native plants. We are also fortunate to have a very active sister chapter in Jacksonville, Ixia, that is eager to partner with us as we grow and learn. Please email us and ask to be put on our email distribution list so you get updates on future fun events. Also, follow us on Facebook. If you are interested in a leadership role, please let us know. Even just donating an hour a month can help grow our chapter into a vibrant collective of native plant enthusiasts!

| NATIVE PLANT FOR MARCH

Carolina Jessamine

Blooming in late winter this native vine supports butterflies, hummingbirds and bees. For long bursts of color on an evergreen vine, this is a great choice for arbors or groundcover.



*Gelsemium
sempervirens*



Logo Contest: We launched the chapter with the logo to the right. We will be holding a contest to develop and vote on final logo. Details coming soon!



February Event Report

Pruning Natives

February weather spanned from freezing weather to highs in the 80's demonstrating the difficulty in deciding when to prune plants in North Florida! Kelly Tesiero led the way as volunteers brought their favorite pruning tools and helped prune the plants in the garden. The first thing we learned is it's too early to prune in February and a safer date is St. Patrick's Day (or St. Pruner's Day) here in NE Florida. Pruning encourages new growth, so we want to make sure those freeze days are done for the year. Kelly shared the details on how to prune shrubs and other plants and then volunteers did a good weed clean up in the garden.

The existing garden at Beluthahatchee park is not all native plants, it was planted as a Florida Friendly demonstration garden. We are exploring opportunities to increase Florida native plants in the garden.



Mark your Calendar!

12 March - St. Augustine Audubon Native Garden Tour and Seed Giveaway: 9:00-11:00 am

21 March - Gourd Island Field Trip: 9:00 am meet-up at parking lot

28 March - Monthly Meeting: 10:00 am
SJC Library, South East Branch
6670 US 1 South



Membership

We are starting off with 16 members! We hope to grow each month. Invite your native plant friends and family to join! fnps.org/join

Business Members

- The Elegant Garden, LLC, landscape design, workshops
- Southern Horticulture Landscape and Garden Center

Stay in Touch

* beluthahatchee.fnpschapters.org

✉ beluthahatchee@fnps.org

f facebook.com/groups/1258384122763801



* Scan and join us!

FNPS CORE VALUES SPOTLIGHT - LEARNING

MARCH FIELD TRIP

LEARNING - Expanding our collective knowledge of native plants, landscapes, and habitats in Florida.

There is no better way to expand knowledge than a field trip! The Ixia Chapter from Jacksonville is teaming up with us to host a joint field trip March 21st at Gourd Island Conservation Area. We will meet up at 9:00 am at the parking area at 10182 Russell

Sampson Road. The field trip will last about 2.5-3 hours and we will hike the floodplain trail in search of Blue Flag Iris and the upland pine flatwoods for blooming Pinxter Azaleas. We expect to see a lot of butterflies enjoying the spring blooms. Please join us and expand our collective knowledge and enjoy Florida's native beauty. Wear sturdy shoes and bring water.



Invasive Species Feature Article

Why Native Lantana Matters in Florida Landscapes

Native Florida lantana species, especially *Lantana depressa* (Pineland lantana) and *Lantana involucrata* (Button Sage), are exceptional, hardy perennials well suited to Zone 9 landscapes. These plants thrive in full sun and sandy, well-drained soils, tolerate drought and salt exposure, attract a wide range of pollinators, and bloom for much of the year. During hard freezes they may die back to the ground, but they reliably resprout when temperatures rise.

Florida's native lantana play a vital role in supporting the state's biodiversity. Although native lantana is often confused with the widely sold ornamental lantana (*Lantana camara*), which is sometimes misleadingly marketed as "Florida-friendly", the ecological value of these two plants is dramatically different. While both produce colorful blooms, their long-term impacts on Florida's ecosystems could not be more opposed.

Native lantanas evolved alongside Florida's pollinators, resulting in nectar chemistry, bloom timing and plant structure that closely match the needs of local wildlife. This close evolutionary relationship makes native lantana a dependable food source and habitat component for many species. It supports the Atala butterfly, a Florida native whose recovery relies heavily on access to native nectar plants. Gulf fritillary and Zebra longwing butterflies are also frequent visitors as they prefer the nectar profile of native lantana. In addition, native solitary bees, including sweat bees and leafcutter bees, depend on region-specific nectar sources like native lantana for consistent nutrition. Small birds such as Mockingbirds and Cardinals feed on the berries as well, doing so without the ecological risks associated with invasive species.



Photo by: Roger Hammer, Dade Chapter FNPS

Lantana depressa



Photo by: John Bradford, Martin County Chapter FNPS

Lantana involucrata

By supporting pollinators and birds alike, native lantana helps maintain healthy food webs and strengthens local ecosystems.

In contrast, *Lantana camara*, designated a Category 1 invasive weed, continues to be found in many nurseries. This species spreads aggressively, forms dense thickets, hybridizes with native lantana, and displaces native plant communities. As it overtakes natural and landscaped areas, it reduces habitat quality by crowding out native wildflowers and groundcovers. Although pollinators visit *Lantana camara*, it does not provide the same seasonal reliability or ecological benefits of native lantana, leading to disruptions in established pollinator networks. Its ability to hybridize with *Lantana depressa* also causes genetic dilution, threatening the survival of Florida's native lantana as a distinct species. Over time, these combined effects weaken ecosystem resilience and diminish overall biodiversity.

Choosing native lantana makes a meaningful difference. Planting native species directly supports healthier and more resilient pollinator populations, increases plant and wildlife diversity in home landscapes, protects Florida's rare and threatened native flora, and helps restore natural ecological balance. Even a single yard planted with native lantana contributes to a broader statewide effort to preserve Florida's natural heritage, demonstrating how individual landscaping choices can have lasting environmental impact.



Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants | University of Florida, IFAS

Lantana camara

Lantana strigocamara

Both names refer to the invasive species, *L. camara* is general species, *L. strigocamara* is a hybrid commonly sold in nurseries.

Note flower colors can vary for these species.