

NATIVE PLANT NEWS

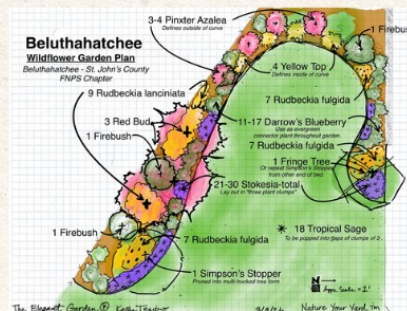
BELUTHAHATCHEE CHAPTER



CHAPTER NEWS - GRANT AWARDED!

We have exciting news to report. The Florida Wildflower Association has selected our submission for an educational wildflower demonstration garden at Beluthahatchee Park. We have been awarded a \$1,500 grant which is to be matched with our volunteer labor to create a Florida native wildflower garden. It will take some time to get the paperwork and information exchange complete to execute the contract associated with this grant. We will provide additional information soon with volunteer garden work days to prepare the area for the plantings. We will likely strive for planting in the fall.

Part of this grant also requires providing educational materials regarding the native wildflowers. We will be advertising this grant award and our work to install the garden in the local papers and on our social media. This is a great opportunity to showcase native plants in St. Johns County.



Plant Mascot Contest: 30 votes are in. If you have not voted, please vote before May 15. Winner will be announced at May meeting. Logo contest will follow!



NATIVE PLANT FOR MAY

Dune Sunflower

Here is a plant that welcomes you to the beach with a sunny disposition! But this little beauty also makes a wonderful addition to your garden. This low-growing plant will gently sprawl with bright yellow blooms and is highly drought tolerant. Obviously it likes sandy soil and lots of sun and doesn't mind some salt in the air! Blooms almost year round until a frost hits. Reseeds easily.



Helianthus debilis (photo FNPS)

| April Event Report

Wetland Preserve Field Trip

The sun was shining and the crew at Wetland Preserve LLC shared an amazing amount of information about the diverse ecosystems and the fabulous species that call this area home. One of the critical components of preserving native habitats in this area and something that Ben and Louann Williams are passionate about supporting is the Ocala to Osceola Wildlife Corridor (O2O) which is a 100 mile long, 1.6 acre landscape of public and private lands that connect the two National Forests. The North Florida Land Trust is working to add additional lands to fill the gaps in this corridor to ensure native landscapes continue to support wildlife that needs a connected corridor to survive, like the Florida black bear. Preservation of natural landscapes are also critical for the survival of imperiled

species like the red-cockaded woodpecker, indigo snake and gopher tortoise as well as the iconic ecosystems that support them, the longleaf pine forests, sandhills and scrub. Several chapter members could not attend this event, so we have arranged for a second field trip October 2, so save the date!



| Mark your Calendar!

- 16 May - Meeting - SJC Public Library, Southeast Branch. 10:30-12:00 am;
Guest Speaker: Ephraim Badea, St. Johns Botanical Garden Outreach



Membership

We have grown to 42 members! That is a 75% increase from last month. Welcome to all new members! Invite your native plant friends and family to join! fnps.org/join

Business Members

- The Elegant Garden, LLC
- Native Plant Consulting
- Southern Horticulture Landscape and Garden Center

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| FNPS CORE VALUES SPOTLIGHT - Community & Inclusivity

MAY MEETING SPEAKER

Community & Inclusivity - Fostering collaboration, education, and enthusiasm for Florida's native ecosystems.

Ephraim Badea, of St. John's Botanical Garden and Nature Preserve, will be the guest speaker at our May meeting. He will be speaking about the transformation of an old vehicle dump into a Botanical Garden.

While the Botanical Garden focuses on the palms of the world, the rear of the property is dedicated as a nature preserve and the garden has expanded to include a native plant exhibition. The Botanical Garden team is actively addressing invasive plants in the preserve area. Join us to learn more about this unique property in St. John's County at our May 16th meeting.



Come learn more at our May meeting! We hope to see you at the Southeast Branch Library at 10:30 am this Saturday, 16 May.

HOA Engagement Works! - Feature Article - by Laura Swartz

Volunteer-Led Beautification Committee Transforms Neighborhood with Native Garden

Many communities face the same challenges—aging landscaping, soil-health loss, rising maintenance costs, and designs that struggle to survive Florida’s climate. One powerful solution is often overlooked: working with your HOA to incorporate native plants and create a long-term beautification plan.

Country Walk (Elkton, FL) has beautiful oak canopy-lined sidewalks flanked by natural areas of pine woods and diverse wetlands, but the planted garden located at the entrance has gone through many changes over the years. After the harsh winter and drought, the entrance garden needed upgrading.

Instead of waiting for change, one neighbor, Shari Daniello, initiated a movement. She explored how native plants—known for their resilience, low maintenance needs, and ecological benefits—could help restore the neighborhood’s beauty while preserving the “Florida look” that the neighborhood loves. What began as a simple idea soon grew into a volunteered effort that brought neighbors together, strengthened community pride, and transformed the entrance into a thriving, Florida-friendly landscape. This garden will provide food and habitat for local wildlife and pollinators, prevent invasive plants from spreading into natural areas and will grow larger each year. The seed can also be used to beautify other areas of the neighborhood.

INTERVIEW with Shari Daniello

What inspired the idea to create a neighborhood beautification committee, and what were the first steps you took to get the HOA on board and to fund it? “We were noticing issues such as an aging entrance, inconsistent landscaping, and declining curb appeal that had potential. So, I attended the monthly HOA meeting and voiced my concern. I voiced the fact that the HOA should think about creating a committee to help maintain the entrance to our neighborhood. It took more than one meeting for the HOA to realize I was serious and sincere. I presented photos of the entrance over the years and its current state. I reminded everyone on the board that curb appeal matters, and it supports property value enhancement. The HOA was all for letting me spearhead a beautification committee.”

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Before

After



HOA Engagement Works! - Feature Article - by Laura Swartz

Volunteer-Led Beautification Committee Transforms Neighborhood with Native Garden *continued from page 003*

How did you select the native plants and what plants were used? “I was new to Florida, so I was unsure about the various plants... we selected plants by focusing on four main goals which include those that naturally thrive in North Florida’s climate, low-maintenance species that were suitable for layering, plants that provide year-round structure and seasonal color, and species that tolerate the community’s lighting conditions, especially part sun and part shade. I took the measurements to Southern Horticulture Plant Nursery, where a woman named Amy assisted in the selection and pricing. I went back to the HOA and presented a design sketch, plan of action, cost estimate and volunteer list. The project was approved and the committee completed the work.”

Some of the plants included in the new design: Simpson's Stopper, Dwarf Yaupon Holly, Florida Anise, Saw Palmetto, Pink Muhly Grass, Native flowering plants including; Black-Eyed Susans, Purple Phlox, Tropical sage, and Bee balm, some plants were saved and transplanted from the previous garden including; Jack Frost shrubs and many drift roses, future plans include to add Coontie and gradually fill in gaps with more native plants as time goes on.

What advice do you have for neighborhoods with an HOA that want to create a custom native garden? “Have a plan of action. Because HOA entrance landscapes must remain attractive and provide a clean, organized appearance year-round.” - Shari Daniello

Our team includes volunteers who donated their time to dig and plant, research, and/or consult with, and included: Shari Daniello (me), John Daniello, Paula Frick, Donna Whetsel, David Doll, Laura Swartz, Debbie Bates, and Rick Bates.



More After Photos