You always hear me say how lucky we are and how wonderful you are because we have the best membership in the state. Well, we are also very fortunate to have some of the most wonderful local native nurseries in Florida. There are counties, big counties, with no native nurseries.

One of the problems about spreading the word about native plants is that finding native plants is difficult. The big box stores are so easy for the public. We know we cannot compete with plant factories but if native plants become more accessible people will buy them.

We can do that by supporting and encouraging our local native nurseries. There may be more great local nurseries but these folks supply our plant sales and support FNPS.

Cypress Acres Nursery, owned by David Barnard is our oldest native nursery. David provides us with flowering one gallon plants which he grows from seed. Many butterfly attracting and unusual plants are in his inventory. David is always looking for something different for us. Cypress Acres Nursery is located at 8632 Ehren Cut Off, Land O’ Lakes. Call: 813-406-3313.

Karen’s Wildflowers, is owned by Karen Watrous, who is also our newsletter editor. She has a lovely nursery with lots of choices for your garden. And ask for a tour of her garden. It is an inspiration. Karen’s vision is to offer plants that provide year-round food sources for pollinators. Karen’s Wildflowers is located at 21930 Carson Dr., Land O’ Lakes. Call: 813-528-2368 or email karen_watrous@yahoo.com. A small selection of Karen’s plants can also be found at Whistle Stop Gardens in Lutz.

Rainbow’s End Native Plants belongs to Gregg Jones. Gregg works full time as an ecological engineer specializing in water conservation, (or something complicated like that). He grows native shrubs, trees and flowering plants that are deer resistant and very simple to care for as well as create beautiful landscapes. Gregg enjoys giving tours of his property to showcase his natives. Rainbow’s End Native Plants is located at 8643 Morning Dove Place, Wesley Chapel. Call 813-991-4808 or email renativeplants@gmail.com

Our newest find is The Family Tree Farm and Nursery. Mike and Debbie Bratz own this nursery specializing in nut and fruit trees. 

(Continued on Page 2)
Meetings/Programs

Edible and Medicinal Uses of Native Plants
Speaker: Emily Ruff
May 9

Enjoy an evening learning about the edible and medicinal plants growing all around us in Central Florida with herbalist Emily Ruff. Get to know the plants in our ecosystem and explore their ethnobotanical uses. This is a hands-on experience where tasting, smelling and feeling is encouraged.

Speaker Bio: Emily Ruff is the Executive Director of the Florida School of Holistic Living. Her love of gardening and botany began in childhood digging in Florida’s soils with her grandfather, a sustenance farmer, and her father, a botany professor. Emily studied Ethnobotany, Philosophy and Women’s Studies at the University of Central Florida. She founded the Florida Herbal Conference and has served as president of the Herb Society of Central Florida. Emily lectures and teaches throughout Florida to many organizations, festivals and schools.

All About Fungi
Speaker: Arian Farid
June 13

Despite being extremely important organisms, fungi remain overlooked by most. In this talk, there will be a brief overview of the diversity of kingdom fungi, how they function, and their ecological roles in relation to plants. Arian will also showcase some common Florida species along the way.

Speaker Bio: Arian holds a BS in Environmental Science and Policy from USF, and is enrolled in his Master's degree in the Department of Cell Biology, Microbiology and Molecular Biology at the University of South Florida. Arian is currently interested in the systematics and biogeography of fleshy fungi in Florida. He has previously conducted field work and data entry for the USF Herbarium.

To suggest a program contact Pat Kelly at (352) 588-0266 or patriciak03@gmail.com

New Volunteer Coordinator

Jean Nixon is our new volunteer coordinator. Jean’s email is gignixon@gmail.com.

Volunteer hours consist of any work you do for FNPS, such as organizing or working events, baking, preparing material, speaking or teaching others about native plants, planting, weeding or designing with native plants. Participating in board meetings and state level meetings is volunteering.

Attending counts as well. If you attend the monthly meeting, you need to check off your name on the attendance sheet, and if you make cookies and attend you are a volunteer and an attendee.

Meetings provide attendees with ½ hour meeting attendance and 1 hour education time. Please keep that in mind.
Your drive time to and from events and meetings also count as time.

I want to thank Mary Ellen Gotto for organizing the volunteer coordinator position and getting us moving in the right direction. You got us on the map on the state level because of your diligence. Thank you Mary Ellen.

And thank you Jean for taking on the extremely important task of Volunteer Coordinator.

End of Spring Sale!

Sat June 17th
9AM-2PM

Dave Barnard - Cypress Acres Nursery
8632 Ehren Cutoff - Land O’ Lakes

New phone number: (813) 406-3313

(Message cont’d from Page 1)

all their plants are native, but Mike does have a nice variety of native shrubs and trees. He will soon start growing Parsley Hawthorn and open to suggestions to grow other native trees or shrubs with food value. Mike will sell WHOLESALE to Nature Coast Chapter members! They are located in Dade City. Call 561-644-5748 or email Firebratz@comcast.net

All of these folks have websites, so check them out and SUPPORT OUR LOCAL NURSERIES.

I would also like to mention that we have a member whose strong, strapping son has an after-school and weekend business to help you plant your small trees and gardens as well as handle other gardening jobs. Call Sam Spade, Joe Gross’s son, at 813-391-2376. Voice or text.

Jonnie Spitler
Field Trips

FRIDAY & SATURDAY, MAY 12—13

Florida Panhandle Wildflowers
St. Marks Wildlife Refuge & Rt 65 Wildflower Drive through the Apalachicola National Forest

Wakulla Inn & Suites (a Best Western motel)
3292 Coastal Highway 98
Crawfordville, Florida 32327

For reservations call (850) 926-3737 (hotel direct #). Four rooms, each with two queen size beds, have been reserved in the name of Nature Coast Native Plant Society. Free breakfast and free cancellation until 2 days before the 12th. Cost: $85.95 plus tax.

For both these locations, we will have guides. On Friday at St. Marks Wildlife Refuge we will visit with Refuge Ranger Scott Davis. He has developed a long term plan to support the monarch butterfly in the Big Bend of Florida by sourcing local ecotypes of milkweed species to provide an ongoing viable seed source for the refuge. He also distributes as many seedlings as possible to other conservation lands. In addition to a visit to the milkweed nursery Scott has volunteered to show us around St. Marks. A bonus for this visit: The refuge is actively involved in the recovery of the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker. To find out more visit:
https://www.fws.gov/nwrs/threecolumn.aspx?id=2147588789

We will then proceed to Wakulla Inn for dinner and our overnight stay.

(May Field Trip continued)

Saturday morning a local wildflower expert, Elenor Dietrich, will act as our guide into the Apalachicola National Forest to look for those iconic panhandle wildflowers – the carnivorous pitcher plants. For more info see this site:
http://blog.wfsu.org/blog-coastal-health/?p=8125

If you plan on attending this wonderful opportunity to see some of Florida's unique wildflowers please RSVP trip leader Gail Parsons by email at gailpar1@verizon.net so that you can be kept up to date on any changes that may occur.

JUNE FIELD TRIP
Date & Time to be announced

Green Isle Gardens Native Plant Nursery
11303 SR 33
Groveland, FL 34736

The nursery has eight acres under production and features more than 150 species of native plants. Go to website for plant list http://www.greenislegardens.com/

Nature Coast Chapter will have a outreach table and plants for sale!

Plan to spend a few hours...enjoy the festivities AND volunteer at the table.

Volunteers needed for a shift between 8-3. Sign up at the next meeting or contact Julie Wert aripekajule@verizon.net (727) 863-1363

Come out for a fun day of activities & education to celebrate our Mother Earth!

Earth Day
April 22, 2017

Crews Lake Wilderness Park
16739 Crews Lake Drive
Spring Hill

The Nature Coastline
The Demonstration Garden at the Community Center is underway!

The Parks Department finished the irrigation and the Garden Committee has been planting some fun plants to educate the public.

Signage will be very important. **If anyone has ideas about interesting signage, contact Annie Johnson or Jonnie Spitler.**

Submit your photos or articles for the next newsletter! Send to karen_watrous@yahoo.com by June 1.
It’s time to register for the FNPS 37th Annual State Conference to be held May 18-21
Westgate River Resort
River Ranch, Florida
Check it out on FNPS.org.

MEXICAN PETUNIAS – the plants from hell by Annie Johnson

I was in South Africa for the holiday visiting a travel friend of 30 years. We were in Swaziland visiting a complex of village stores, Swazi Candles, where the proceeds from the sales of crafts are returned to the villages. In the middle of beautiful Swaziland, in the middle of the complex, was a huge patch of Mexican petunias. Actually, going through South Africa, I kept panicking. Every plant was an invasive! Then I remembered, in Africa, those plants were not invasive but natives there.

Anyone ever tried to remove these plants from their gardens? It takes about 4 years of perseverance to dig them out, and you have to dig to hell to get the roots. If someone says the plants are not invasive, they lie. My neighbor, ½ mile down the road, has the closest patch in our community. The plants have moved into the woods. Karen [Watrous] and Terry [Donovan] were visiting my place a few months ago. Behind the mulch pile, a truckload of tree trimmings, they “guilted” me by finding a 5 foot patch of Mexican petunias.* It took 3 days to dig it out. I am waiting for it to come back.

Ruellia simplex/tweedian/angustifolia (formerly Ruellia brittoniana) is a member of the acanthus family and a native to Mexico, Caribbean, and South America. It is a Class 1 invasive on the FLEPPC (Florida Exotic Pest and Plant Council) list. The “sterile” plants sold at big box stores and nurseries will evolve back to producing seeds so “sterile” is a misnomer. No bugs, pollinators or butterflies can use the plants for food.

Good alter-natives to use are Ruellia caroliniensis (native petunia), Stachytarpheta jamaicensis (blue porterweed – get the prostrate native ones. The upright porterweed is a non-native and can be invasive), Tradescantia ohiensis (spiderwort), Echinacea purpurea (purple coneflower), Dyschoriste oblongifolia (twin flower), or Dyschoriste humistrata (hammock twinflower). All of these natives are available at our plant sales and at our local native plant growers.

*Note from the editor: THAT’S RIGHT!

Friends in the Native Plant Society

Native plants are not special plants; what they do is special. “La Florida”, the land of flowers, was named by Hernando De Soto 500 years ago. Now, most gardens and landscapes consist of exotic and/or invasive plants. This recreates the images projected by magazines, big box stores and the nursery industries. But watch those ‘pretty’ gardens. Nothing moves. There are no lizards, no bugs, no pollinators, no caterpillars, maybe a few butterflies, a few birds searching for food. Gardens with native plants provide shelter, larval food and nectar for a myriad of wildlife. Native plant gardens are alive, moving, active.

People in the native plant societies are special. From every sort of background, they come together for a cause – to restore the world to what it should be, a better place. They provide food and homes for displaced critters. They care. We care. We are good hearted people who like plants. We share our good hearts with others, which makes life fun. Learning about the plants is fun and stimulating. Learning how plants grow, what critters they help, and the scientific names keeps our brains active. Gardening keeps our bodies active. Having friends keeps our hearts active. How special is that? AJ

Friends in the Native Plant Society
WHAT YOU MISSED

FEBRUARY MEETING
Marianne Korosy
Florida Scrub-Jays: Nowhere Else in the World

- Florida scrub jays (Aphelocoma coerulescens) are Florida’s only endemic bird.
- Their habitat is limited to xeric oak scrub. It is rapidly disappearing due to industries, agriculture, and developments.
- Scrub jays feed mostly on grasshoppers and caterpillars during the summer.
- They cache thousands of acorns and can remember where each one is hidden for food for the winter.
- They can be quite tame, perching on people’s hats, heads and hands.
- Speaker Marianne Korosy has worked with Audubon to monitor and protect scrub jays’ and their habitats.
- One large habitat, Oscar Scherer State Preserve south of Sarasota, has dwindled to the point that it is unable to support a community of scrub jays. (We went there for a field trip during a conference a few years ago.)
- The best places to observe scrub jays are Ocala National Forest, Lake Wales Ridge [Bok Tower], and Archbold Biological Station. Take acorns as peanuts rot when buried.

MARCH MEETING
Lisa Roberts
Florida Wildflower Foundation

- Lisa Roberts became the executive director in 2008 of the Florida Wildflower Foundation, which started in 2001. The foundation has blossomed with her perseverance. Their mission statement is “nurturing the awareness and understanding of Florida wildflowers”.
- One third of FWF’s budget goes to research. They have grants for school gardens and promote roadside wildflower plantings.
- Roadside initiatives are being implemented in many Florida counties to stop mowing during wildflower season. The seeding season doesn’t look as tidy but will allow the wildflowers to reseed for the next season. Not mowing will save the DOT and counties millions of dollars. Wildflowers are perfect for roadsides as they love disturbed areas.
- The roadside wildflowers have promoted wildflower tourism. There are 4 routes around Florida with accompanying FWF maps: the panhandle area, Corkscrew Swamp near the Everglades, and 6 counties routes in Central Florida.
- FWF has many pamphlets and information sheets to educate visitors and citizens to care about Florida native wildflowers.
- Wildflowers provide food, larval & nectar, for pollinators, and provide beauty for the beholders. “May all your weeds be wildflowers.”
- The Foundation’s website is www.flawildflowers.org. (www.floridawildflowers.com is a wildflower seed cooperative.)
- We can help by getting Pasco County to pass a roadside initiative. If anyone can suggest roadways to halt mowing to promote growing wildflowers’ seeds, please contact me. I am looking into how to have Pasco become another Florida county to promote growing Florida wildflowers in its roadsides. AJ
LOWBUSH BLUEBERRIES:
DARROW’S AND SHINY

By Peggy A. Gretchen
FNPS Member
Pasco Master Gardener

BOTANICAL NAME:
1.) Vaccinium darrowii
2.) Vaccinium myrsinites

COMMON NAME:
1.) Darrow’s Blueberry
2.) Shiny Blueberry

Both are also called Dwarf or Evergreen Blueberry.

FAMILY: Ericaceae (Heath)

TYPE OF PLANT: Native evergreen small woody shrubs, densely foliated with rounded crowns and reddish-brown bark. Usual Height: 1 – 3 ft., depending on age and growing conditions. Width: 1 – 3 ft. May spread to form small colonies by underground stems.

HOW TO IDENTIFY

LEAVES: Very small, alternate, ovate to elliptic to lanceolate. V. darrowii has dull, silvery blue-green leaves. V. myrsinites has shiny green leaves with stalked reddish glands below (need magnification to observe), unlike V. darrowii, where glands are absent on the underside of the leaves.

FLOWERS: Large numbers make for a showy display. Flowers are small, white, 5 lobed urn-shaped, in clusters. Sometimes flowers are pinkish. V. myrsinites has red bracts on the flowers, unlike V. darrowii. Flowering Time: Early Spring.

FRUIT: V. darrowii has ¼ in. glaucous (having a powdery whitish coating), rounded, dark blue berries when mature. V. myrsinites has ¼ in. shiny dark blue-black berries without the glaucous coating. Both are edible and sweet! They ripen in late spring to early summer. Eaten by birds and other wildlife, as well as people, if they can find them first. Solitary plants produce less fruit. Need at least two genetically unrelated plants for maximum fruit production (allows for cross-pollination).

HABITAT: Lowbush blueberries are common in sandhills and flatwoods. Also found in scrub and dry prairies.

DISTRIBUTION: North Florida to South-Central Florida. Hardiness Zones: 7 – 10A.

LANDSCAPE USE / WILDLIFE BENEFIT: Lowbush blueberries are both ornamental and provide food value for wildlife and humans alike. These attractive evergreen small shrubs may be used interchangeably or together. Best when planted in groups. Use in low hedges, borders, as groundcover, in groups around deciduous trees or palms, or mixed with grasses and wildflowers, and in naturalistic landscapes. They will even thrive in containers. The large number of flowers provide nectar for hummingbirds and butterflies. The fruits provide food for many birds and other wildlife.

CULTIVATION:

SOIL: Prefers sandy, well-drained, acidic. Does not tolerate alkaline soils, so keep away from foundations, driveways, or any area containing limestone or concrete.

LIGHT: Full sun – partial sun (A.M. or P.M.).

WATER: Prefers moist and well-drained conditions. Drought-tolerant once established.

Do not overwater!

MISCELLANEOUS: Prune only during the winter, or you will lose your berries! Prune old growth yearly to maximize fruit production. Minimize root disturbance when planting. Do not fertilize after establishment. Not salt-tolerant. Moderate growth rate.

PROPAGATION: By seed (can be difficult to germinate), softwood cuttings, and division of colonies.

AVAILABILITY: Commonly available at Florida Native Nurseries. See www.plantrealflorida.org!

REFERENCES:
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Chapter website: pasconativeplants.org
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twitter.com/NatureCoastFNPS
FNPS website: http://www.fnps.org/

Shiny blueberry
Vaccinium myrsinites

Darrow’s blueberry
Vaccinium darrowii