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Native plant sale at Audubon House

Mike Winikoff Aug 29, 2019

Audubon volunteers show one of the greenhouses they built at their Oslo Road headquarters to get start oak trees and native plants.

Staff photo by Mike Winikoff

VERO BEACH - Pelican Island Audubon Society wants residents to start planting native plants instead of exotics. To aid in that transformation, PIAS has opened a native plant nursery. A wide selection of plants is on sale now, at very reasonable prices.

According to Jeffrey Norcini, former professor of Environmental Horticulture, UF/IFAS North Florida Research and Education Center, "native" describes a plant species that has naturally existed in an area for an extended period of time. "Native species are generally considered those that occurred in an area before European contact, and not as a result of direct or indirect human influence."

That is the definition included in Florida statute 5B-40.00, Preservation of Native Flora of Florida. The Florida Native Plant Society adds "it includes those species understood as indigenous, occurring in natural associations in habitats that existed prior to significant human impacts and alterations of the landscape."

While there is widespread agreement on some species, the scientific evidence for others is limited, so it is not always easy to tell with certainty if a plant is native.

There are many reasons for individuals and communities to plant native plants.

"The growing demand for native plants largely has been a reaction to the nationwide onslaught of invasive, nonnative plants that have displaced and continue to displace species that have existed here for centuries," Prof. Norcini said. "To help alleviate this onslaught, local, state, and federal agencies are more and more commonly requiring the use of native plants. Preserving local, state, and national heritage has been another factor driving the market for native plants."

According to The Institute for Regional Conservation in Delray Beach, the Treasure Coast through south Florida is one of the most biologically diverse regions in North America, home to about 1,400 species of native plants, and one of the few places in the United States where temperate, tropical, and subtropical plants intermingle.

“The native plants that inhabit these ecosystems are extraordinarily diverse, from giant oaks to colorful bromeliads, golden prairie grasses to endemic wildflowers, and lacy ferns to coastal sunflowers,” the IRC says. “But alarming changes have taken place within South Florida. Many of the unique natural habitats are virtually gone, or are fast disappearing. Habitat destruction, plant poaching, hydrological modification, fire suppression, and other human activities have significantly impaired South Florida's ecosystems.”

“By planting native species, you will not only create a low-maintenance landscape to enjoy, but you will also contribute to the conservation and restoration” of Florida's environment.

The IRC says that by planting native plants, you can create larger, more connected plant populations that help ensure the future of the species by increasing their ability to migrate in response to changes in climate and sea-level; provide food and shelter for birds, butterflies, and other native wildlife; provide stopover habitat for migrating wildlife; reduce consumption of energy and toxic chemicals; reduce landscape maintenance needs and water consumption; and cool houses and other structures.

The Pelican Island Audubon Society sale includes about 20 species of different sizes. Available one-gallon pots for \$5 or \$6 include Blue Curl, an excellent butterfly attractor; Blue-Eyed Grass, a great nectar source for butterflies, and Coreopsis, a native bee attractor.

If looking for lawn replacement ground cover, consider planting Sunshine Mimosa, host to the Little Sulphur Butterfly.

For \$12, a three gallon pot of Beauty Berry will lead to berries for migratory birds in the fall; Muhly Grass will create seeds for small songbirds and help with soil stabilization for erosion problems; Firebush can serve as an excellent butterfly and hummingbird attractor, or Florida Privet to provide shrubs for nesting birds and berries in summer.

For \$15, get a three gallon pot of Dahoon Holly, which will provide berries for birds in winter; or Lantana, a butterfly attractor that yields berries for birds year round.

Other native plants available from PAIS are Elephant's Foot; Horsemint; Jamaican Caper; Brown's Savory; Privet Cassia; Rosin Flower; Tropical Salvia; Yellowtop; Wild Coffee; and Wild Lime.

The Institute for Regional Conservation in Delray Beach has a website where you can enter your zip code to see a list of plants that are native to your community. Visit www.regionalconservation.org/beta/nfyn/default.asp and enter your zip code or county.

To see examples of how native plants can work in your landscape, UFL recommends visiting Environmental Learning Center, 255 Live Oak Dr., Vero Beach, (772) 589-5050; Heathcote Botanical Gardens, 210 Savannah Road, Fort Pierce, (772) 464-4672; or IRREC Teaching Garden, Indian River Research and Education Center, University of Florida, 2199 S. Rock Road, Fort Pierce, (772) 468-3922.

Native plants are on sale now at Audubon House, 195 9th Street SE (Oslo Road), Vero Beach. Hours are Mon.-Fri., 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Cash, check, or credit cards accepted.

For more information, email piaudubon@yahoo.com, call (772) 567-3520, or visit www.PelicanIslandAudubon.org.

Mike Winikoff

Indian River County Reporter

Writer