

Broward Chapter Florida Native Plant Society

March 2013 News

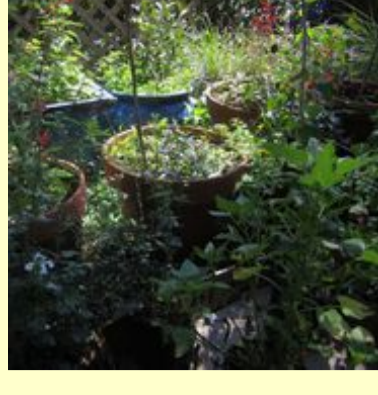
Save these March dates:

This Weds, Mar 13 7pm **Chuck McCartney** on "Florida's Native Bromeliads" one of our favorite speakers

Sat, Mar 30 8:15am local departure for Jonathan Dickinson Park, "Discovering Wildflowers with Chuck McCartney"

Growing Natives: For Brown Thumbs

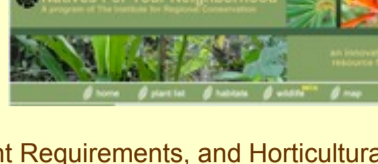
Can't find the native plants you love? Consider growing them. Perhaps you've already killed many. You can grow many native plants by just following **ten gardening basics** below. You'll be able to spot what you're doing wrong, and finally discover your green thumb.



Growing natives is a bit more challenging than the big box plants, so don't despair at your past failures. Some species are difficult. But most are easy to grow using these **ten basic principles**.

1. READ

Visit [Natives for Your Neighborhood](#) now. Enter your zip code, choose Broward or hit "plant list" for most cultivated south Florida natives. Bookmark it. Go back often. Especially note Soils, Light Requirements, and Horticultural Notes. See if a species grows best from seed, cuttings, or otherwise. The Soils note tells you about water requirements. Drought Tolerance is only applicable to full grown, well-established plants; ignore it for propagation. Also visit the FNPS Resources > [Native Plant Communities](#) page so you can begin to think of which natives are appropriate where you live, both historically and for your soil and growing conditions (right plant, right place). Here is a map of [10 Broward historic plant communities](#). Thinking of plant communities is an excellent way to get imaginative ideas for your home landscape themes. The FNPS Resources > [Natives for Landscaping](#) may also have the water, light and soil recommendations for your plant.



2. PLANT STOCK

Nurseries often have a healthy, overgrown "mother" plant (know as "plant stock") to provide seed or cuttings. Use the healthiest plant you have or beg and trade seeds, cuttings and starts with other enthusiasts. Buy your "plant stock" (big healthy plant) from a grower.



If you take any plant part from wild areas, please ensure:

- 1) that the plant is not listed as imperiled, endangered, rare, or protected in the wild, 2) that it is abundant where you are collecting, 3) that you take judiciously to ensure that the source plant continues to thrive, and 4) never collect in any park, restoration area, or public wild land. If in doubt "do no harm". We are first the protectors of native plants.

Visit the Florida Association of Native Nurseries site, <http://www.plantrealflorida.org>. The mecca of south Florida native nurseries is Homestead, so plan on a trip there with friends. Bring plants (even cuttings in a ziplock with moist paper towel and seed in envelopes) to the monthly Chapter speaker meeting, so that everyone can buy starter plants for the species they seek. The plant auction helps support the Chapter, too.

3. FLATS

Many species can be started in good potting soil in a flat (with drainage holes) or an egg carton or pot. Moisten the potting soil lightly and mix it, so that water will absorb into the soil once the flat is planted. Cover seed at a depth 1-2 times their size. Dip cutting bottoms in root hormone powder. Get a hose mist sprayer so you can water the delicate babies and soak them thoroughly. Treat them like infants: never go hungry (dry), light but no harsh sun, drain (no soggy bottoms), and be patient. Don't be angry if they don't live, they are telling you they have species secrets you need to learn. But you will be happily surprised how many species you can grow successfully this way. If they fail, ask someone who grows them successfully for their secrets. The cuttings of a few species may start better in sand, but the challenge is to keep the sand moist throughout the long rooting period. Other tricks are bottom heat, tented cuttings, and leaving the stem attached to the stock plant until it has rooted. Read & experiment.



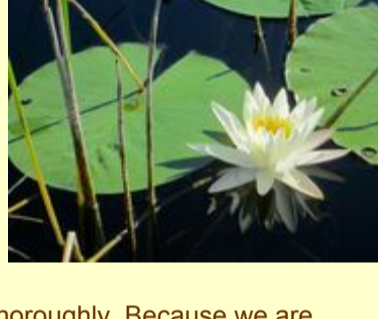
4 POTS

Once your starts become crowded in the flat, pot them up. Some plants propagate from root parts, nodes, or bulbs and can be potted directly. Others can be divided. Epiphytes may prefer to grow in orchid pots or in your trees. Very well-drained (sand) plants may prefer "fast drying" terra cotta. Most will do best in plastic (recycled) or glazed pots with a drain hole. Swamp plants may do well in pots with saucers full of water. The pot controls how fast the plant roots drain and dry.



5 WATER

Water is the key to plant success. You can talk to your plants, but what they want is water. Cultivated plants rarely, if ever want to dry out: not even cactus. In a well drained pot, weekly water makes most cactus thrive. So let weekly watering be your standard. Swamp plants will be the only ones that enjoy sitting in a wet saucer. Let all the others drain thoroughly. Because we are growing native plants that enjoy our climate, and xeric plants to reduce water use, you might think cultivated plants can dry out. No, they die. Some native plants are drought tolerant because they have taken years to establish a root base to support them during the hard times. Native soils, even sand, can have more deep moisture for the plant than you might realize. So unless your plants are two or more years established and drought tolerant, weekly watering is a good standard. Use drip irrigation to conserve water. Get a timer if you are too busy to water weekly or away on vacation. Water at the first sign of wilt and more frequently (or change the pot and soil to hold more moisture) to prevent wilting and stress. If you have a green thumb, you can deviate a bit from weekly watering, but if your thumb is brown, water weekly and at the first sign of wilt. (Yes, there are a few plants that wilt in summer's heat regardless of ample water, and some close their leaves at night.)



6 LIGHT

If your plants are potted, you can experiment a bit with the light. The younger the plant, the less full sun, like infants and children. Morning and/or evening sun is good for delicate plants. READ about the light conditions for your mature plant. Looking in yards and wild places for your plant will help you see how much sun it prefers. Most wildflowers require full sun to bloom. Use the FNPS [Natives for Landscaping](#) to find plants for shaded or other special locations.



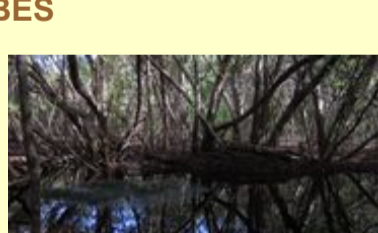
7 SOILS

Most potted plants do best in potting soil (humus), such as is available at the big box. You can "grow" your own compost, of course. This is true even for many plants that grow natively in sand or limestone. You can also experiment with mixes of potting soil and the native substrate such as sand. Once in the ground, the plant may prefer its native soil as recommended in [Natives for Your Neighborhood](#), but you will need to ensure that your plants get watered regularly during the first year or two to establish a drought tolerant root system. Soil with a "humusy top layer" suggests that you should dig a hole bigger than the root ball and surround it with humus. Humus holds water for the roots and suits plants that prefer moist soils. Humus also holds nutrients and provides the more acid condition that some plants enjoy. Again, look around to see what soil your plant thrives in elsewhere. To maintain a humusy top layer, annually dress around the plant with natural leaf mulch or compost. This helps hold some moisture for the plant and provides nutrients.



8 NUTRIENTS & MICROBES

Don't worry about nutrients until your thumb is new-leaf green. Potting soil already contains nutrients, and most plants do fine without added nutrients. Cow manure (very mild smell) is a mild fertilizer available at the big box and can be mixed with compost or leaf mulch. Read up before fertilizing your plants; provide nutrients from compost and leaves; and consider the environmental impact of chemical fertilizers. We don't recommend them. A few species require special microbes or other special soil conditions to thrive. These species secrets might be inferred from the soil it grows in natively or from an expert native plant grower. If you see others growing the plant you love, ask ... or perhaps their secret is dumb luck. Basically, commercial fertilizer makes the plant grow faster and greener (especially nitrogen), but why fast? Natives will grow to their more natural shape without it, and many actually prefer the nutrient poor soils that are common in south Florida.



9 PRUNING

Pruning is plant art. You can prune so artfully that no one will guess mother nature isn't the sculptress. Most native gardeners would do well to prune more in urban gardens and many plants like it. Some scraggly plants can fit into a residential garden more gracefully if pruned. We like an easy approach that respects the plant's natural form and leaves your hand unseen. Some plants should be cut back to the ground occasionally. Fire, bugs, hungry animals, and storms are nature's shears, so don't be too hesitant to put scissors and pruners in your gardening shorts.



10 FAILURE TEACHES

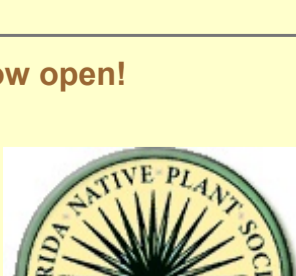
Every great gardener tries many things and fails. The key is observing and making a guess about which among many factors is the cause. Killing plants creates compost for new ones, so don't get too serious and enjoy your native plant garden and all it teaches you. Develop or own style and favorite native plants. READ and seek advice from successful gardeners to learn species secrets. Send your species knowledge (tips that deviate from the principles above) to Richard@Brownscambe.net and we will share it on Coontie.org.



Conference Registration is now open!

Field trips throughout Northeast Florida, a trio of great evening socials, speakers and workshops: the annual FNPS Conference in Jacksonville.

Register early and save money -- and get on that trip you always wanted, reserve a place at the dinner table with old friends or new ones, and look forward to celebrating **La Florida, the land of flowers, this May 16-19, 2013**, in beautiful Jacksonville!
More info: www.fnps.org/conference



REGISTER NOW: <https://www.eventville.com/catalog/eventregistration1.asp?eventid=1010214>
See you soon in Jacksonville!

Join & support our work at Coontie.org "Join"
Protecting & Growing Broward Native Plants