

IMPORTANCE OF NATIVE PLANTS

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What takes the heat, humidity, an overnight freeze and doesn't need special soils? Native plants. Why grow native plants from our region in Florida? They provide shelter and food for wildlife. That includes nectar for butterflies, moths, bees, flies, wasps. And food for many other insects too. In turn, birds and bats depend on insects for survival.

From Audubon.org: **Native plants** are those that occur naturally in a region in which they evolved. They are the ecological basis upon which life depends, including wildlife and people. Using native plants gives us a garden of low maintenance, beauty, a healthy place, a way to help the climate including low water use.

Native plants provide food for wildlife and are often a good bet for the **Florida** gardener. A native variety could work in your landscape, from vines and groundcovers to shrubs, trees, and palms. Some popular natives in Florida include beautyberry, muhly grass, coontie and southern magnolia. Do any of these sound familiar? You've probably seen them in your neighbors' landscapes or have them planted. There are now many selections of your favorite natives.

Ask your local nursery what natives they have for the conditions in your landscape. Remember that natives, like all plants, are more likely to thrive when they're planted in the right place. Use them correctly, and your garden should flourish. Many can serve as good sources of food for wildlife. UF/IFAS. To emphasize:

“Every animal on earth gets its food from plants. Plants are the only organism that can capture the energy from the sun and turn this energy into food. The most important are the insect herbivores that take the energy from plants and pass it to other insects to make food. They are only able to eat particular plants, called specialization. They can only eat the plants they've co-evolved with, which uses defenses like chemicals. The insects have taken a long time to be able to digest those chemicals. So creating a meadow with native plants allows the native insects a food meadow with plants they can digest., these insects can't digest plants from India or Asia, it's not recognizing them. The e.g. of this is the Monarch butterfly that can only digest milkweed. So plant a native garden!! Doug Tallamy 'Bringing Nature Home'. Let's keep our insects and birds and the green native plants, helping nature around us. Gardening is a way of determining what nature will look like tomorrow”. Copyright Pat S Rossi. http://www.wlqf.org/food_webs.html

