



## SOME TREES AND SHRUBS NATIVE TO SOUTH FLORIDA

Provided by the Dade Chapter Florida Native Plant Society



**This list is recommended for use by Miami-Dade County residents.** Some species listed here are not appropriate for other areas of South Florida, and additional species not listed can be grown in other areas. These plants should require no addition of water once established, if planted in an appropriate area. These are only some of the native plants available at native nurseries and special sales by various organizations. A few can be found at neighborhood nurseries.

**Wind-resistance** depends on many factors related to the tree's location, severity of wind, and how well-established the tree is. Thus, generalizations for hurricane strength winds are hard to make and, with a few exceptions, wind-resistance is not considered here. However, the starred (\*) trees generally held up well in Hurricane Andrew in 1992.

**Recommended range** is the natural range of a plant. It is best to plant within the natural range of a species because: (1) the plant may die or not thrive outside that range; (2) some natives are becoming invasive where they have been planted outside their range and can potentially change the character of the natural forest communities which they invade; (3) different varieties, native to different areas of south Florida and having different growth characteristics, can hybridize, possibly eliminating the local varieties. You may need to seek additional advice before selecting a plant of limited range.

**TREES.** *Most of these are hammock plants but can grow on the rock ridge and on fill. The sizes of trees mentioned is very general since the growth rate and ultimate size depend on the planting location and growing conditions.*

bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*). Very large, fast-growing tree in acid, moist to wet, organic soils, but produces very little growth in the dry, alkaline soils found in much of urban Dade County.

black ironwood (*Krugiodendron ferreum*). Medium tree, moderately slow-growing. Beautiful, glossy dark green leaves. Dense in sun, open in shade. Cuban May beetles may eat leaves, but new ones grow quickly.

\* cabbage palm (*Sabal palmetto*). Our state tree. Mature height 20-30 feet or more. Very durable in a wide variety of conditions. Attractive in clusters. Because of *very* slow growth they are, unfortunately, usually collected from the wild - consider propagating them yourself and enjoying their youth.

crabwood (*Gymnanthes lucida*). Medium sized tree of Keys and hammocks south of the Miami River. Moderate growth rate. Endures salt and drought, thrives in most well-drained soils.

Dahoon holly (*Ilex cassine*). Medium-small tree. Red berries on female trees attract birds (dioecious - a nearby male tree is needed). Does best with good, acidic, moist soil, but tolerates a variety of conditions.

green buttonwood (*Conocarpus erectus*). Large tree with moderately-fast growth. Tolerates wide variety of conditions. Recommended range: coastal areas.

\* gumbo limbo (*Bursera simaruba*). Large, fast-growing tree; tolerates wide variety of conditions. Loses leaves briefly in winter. Interesting red, peeling bark. Best to plant seedlings. [Branches will root in the ground, but they tend not to develop good root systems and have inferior wind resistance.]

Jamaica dogwood (*Piscidia piscipula*). Large, fast-growing, sprawling tree of the Keys and coastal hammocks south of the Miami River. Pink flowers (showy on some trees, not on others) when the tree is briefly bare in late winter. Can be brittle. Takes about 7 years from seed to bloom. Recommended range: coastal areas.

\* live oak (*Quercus virginiana*). Large, wide canopy, sturdy, moderately-fast growth, tolerates wide variety of conditions. Good for all areas of Dade.

mahogany (*Swietenia mahagoni*). Large, broad tree of upper Keys and limited areas of Everglades, but grows well throughout S. Florida, especially in limestone soils. Leaves may be eaten by Cuban May beetles. Semi-deciduous. Recommended range: upper Keys.

paradise tree (*Simarouba glauca*). Large, beautiful tree with shiny, compound leaves, reddish new growth, olive-sized fruit. Cold sensitive, so plant in protected area. Fruits on females are food for larger birds and small mammals. Essentially dioecious -- a male plant is generally needed nearby for a female to produce fruit.

pigeon plum (*Coccoloba diversifolia*). Medium tree, columnar, dense. Related to sea grape. Fruits on females are food for larger birds and small mammals. Essentially dioecious -- a male plant is generally needed nearby for a female to produce fruit. May take a period of watering to become established.

satin leaf (*Chrysophyllum oliviforme*). Medium tree; moderate growth rate. Leaves are bronze and fuzzy on the underside, and make a striking appearance. The fruit is sticky - don't plant over a walkway or parking area. Slow to become established, but a large planting hole and mulching will help. May need more water than other trees to become established.

slash pine, "Dade County pine" (*Pinus eliottii* var. *densa*). Tall tree but slow-growing. Can be difficult to grow. Plant in areas which were originally pineland. Don't intermingle with other types of trees. Use pine needles to mulch.

wax myrtle, "bayberry" (*Myrica cerifera*). Shrub/small tree/medium tree; moderately fast growth. Prefers moist conditions. Suckers from roots. Birds eat the small, gray berries. Leaves can be used for seasoning.

West Indian cherry (*Prunus myrtifolia*). Tall tree; glossy leaves smell like cherries. Small white flowers, black fruit. Cold sensitive. Prefers limestone. Recommended range: south of Miami River.

wild tamarind (*Lysiloma latisiliquum*). Very large, wide, fast-growing, open tree; compound leaves with tiny leaflets. Can be too large for standard residential lots. Tends to lose branches to wind instead of uprooting. Surface roots can be prominent. Leaf drop in winter is triggered by cold. Good bird perch and food source - migrating warblers feed on gnats at the blossoms. Recommended range: south of Black Creek Canal.

willow bastic (*Sideroxylon salicifolium*). Tall, narrow tree of hammock margins, moderate-fast growth, attractive foliage. Birds eat berries. Takes poor conditions, sun, partial shade. Good for tall barrier. May occasionally be defoliated by insects.

Stoppers and other members of the Myrtle family: shrubs to small trees, slow or moderate in growth rate. Ideal for home gardens, under power lines, near buildings. Small fragrant flowers; birds eat berries. Cold-hardy. Take full sun to full shade, but grow taller and lose lower leaves with less sun. Good buffer (planted close together) or accent plants.

myrtle-of-the-river (*Calypttranthes zuzygium*). Has open spaces between layers of branches. Large blue berries. Prefers mulching or organic matter in soil. Native in Dade to Everglades and Biscayne National Parks. Recommended range: upper Key Largo.

Simpson stopper (*Myrcianthes fragrans*). Hardy in a wide variety of conditions. Dense, smaller in sun; more lank in shade. Branches and trunk twist and turn. Pretty red berries and peeling bark. Shears well, salt tolerant.

Spanish stopper (*Eugenia foetida*). Tolerates very poor soil. Columnar, good for narrow space (as small as 2' wide).

spicewood (*Calypttranthes pallens*). Compact, dense, especially good for barriers. Prefers mulching or organic matter in soil. Recommended range: south of the Miami River.

white stopper (*Eugenia axillaris*). "Woodsy" odor when wet.

### **Other trees generally too large to use on standard residential lots but appropriate for larger spaces:**

\* strangler fig (*Ficus aurea*). One of the best survivors of Hurricane Andrew. Wide; multiple trunks.

short-leaf fig (*Ficus citrifolia*) is also a large tree with rapid growth, but is smaller and more well-behaved than the strangler fig. Its small figs are attractive to birds and the leaves are a larval food for the ruddy daggerwing butterfly.

mastic (*Sideroxylon foetidissimum*). Very tall, takes wide variety of conditions, but the strong fragrance of the flowers and fruit disagreeable to some people.

### **SOME LARGE SHRUBS TO USE AS SMALL TREES:**

cocoplum (*Chrysobalanus icaco*). Dense, sprawling shrub/small tree with edible fruit. Found in moist (not wet) places in the wild. It does best in cultivation with sun and rich soil but apparently has a wide range of tolerances. There are red-tipped and green-tipped forms. A coastal form is a low shrub and grows well in dry soils.

firebush (*Hamelia patens*). Tall shrub of hammock edges, fast-growing, can be pruned to keep in shape. Red-orange tubular flowers year-round make it a premier nectaring plant for butterflies and hummingbirds, and birds also eat the berries. Its soft leaves are cold and wind sensitive, but it recovers quickly.

Jamaica caper (*Capparis cynophallophora*). Very attractive large shrub, maximum height about 15 feet. Keeps its conical shape in sun and needs no pruning. Profuse, fragrant "spider" flowers in early summer; shiny leaves. Best in full sun. Cold hardy. Very durable once established (may need some acid fertilizer at first). Recommended range: coastal areas.

marlberry (*Ardisia escallonioides*). Tall, narrow shrub of hammocks. Takes wide variety of soils, moisture and light, including shade. Birds eat the berries. Cold sensitive. IMPORTANT: a common, non-native *Ardisia* is highly invasive; plant ONLY the native *Ardisia*.

myrsine (*Rapanea punctata*). Tall shrub. Grows in wide variety of conditions. Sometimes breaks in strong winds but regrows from suckers. Good barrier.

#### **OTHER SHRUBS:**

American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*). Sprawling, soft-leaved shrub of hammock edges, pinelands - almost herbaceous. Lavender flowers and dark purple berries clump along the stem; berries hold on stems for dried arrangements. Prune severely and allow to re-sprout to keep it at its best. Can take some shade. Bird and butterfly attractor.

coral bean (*Erythrina herbacea*). Sparse, sprawling small tree, moderate growth. Cold hardy, endures harsh, dry conditions. Colorful blossom in winter and spring attracts hummingbirds. Because of irregular growth and leaf drop in winter, plant this in back of other plants where the blossoms can peek out. Seeds are poisonous.

necklace pod (*Sophora tomentosa var truncata*). Shrub of dunes and coastal areas. Likes full sun, well-drained soil. Yellow flowers attract hummingbirds. Minimize pruning to maximize blossoms. Seeds are poisonous. Recommended range: coastal areas. A non-native variety with hairy leaves (*var. occidentalis*) has been distributed for many years as a native, but a native variety with smooth leaves is present in some natural areas.

privet cassia (*Senna ligustrina*). Found in hammock edges. Takes partial shade to full sun. Larval food and nectar plant for sulphur butterflies. Bright yellow flowers. Taller, more slender than the pineland species, Bahama cassia.

shiny leaf wild coffee (*Psychotria nervosa*), and soft-leaf wild coffee (*Psychotria sulzneri*). Hammock plants with small flowers, red fruits. Good bird and butterfly plants. Best in filtered sun or shade and soil with organic matter. Plant under trees with other shrubs; use mulch. Shiny-leaf wild coffee can grow to a small tree.

sweet acacia (*Acacia farnesiana*). Shrub to small tree, similar to the smaller pineland acacia. Thorny; yellow "puff-ball" flowers. Recommended range: coastal areas.

**PINELAND PLANTS.** These thrive on dryness; need full sun and well-drained soil. Some may not like fill. Good wind-resistance in pinelands, but when planted in more soil (as in gardens) some may have lush growth and be more prone to wind damage. Except for sabal palms and slash pines, pineland species are short plants, making them suitable for small areas and under power lines. Use pine needles to mulch.

Slash pine and sabal palm - see TREES section above.

saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*). Palm that grows like an understory shrub. Growth of young plants is very slow, but they eventually form wide clumps. Trunk sprawls along ground on old plants, only growing erect in shade or in absence of fire.

silver palm (*Coccothrinax argentata*). Short-trunked understory plant in pinelands. Extremely slow growth. Less than 5' tall for a long time. Leaf has a silver underside. Also grows in Keys, where it is taller (10'). Takes light freeze. Very drought tolerant. Damage to bud can be fatal.

locust berry (*Byrsonima lucida*). Wide, open shrub. Pretty "bouquet" of pink/white flowers, dark fruits. Somewhat cold-sensitive. Recommended range: south of Miami River.

longstalked stopper (*Psidium longipes*). Low-growing, spreading shrub. Flowers are like on other stoppers. Red fruits. Recommended range: south of Miami River.

West Indian lilac (*Tetrazygia bicolor*). Shrub to small tree. Interesting leaf texture. Pretty white and yellow flower. Small, edible, blue fruit. Can be difficult to establish; doesn't like acid sands. Cold sensitive. Recommended range: south of Black Creek Canal.

white indigo berry (*Randia aculeata*). Shrub with unpredictable shape, occasionally with small spines. White flowers and berries. Good nectar plant for butterflies.

pineland acacia (*Acacia pinetorum*). Thorny shrub to small tree. Yellow "puff-ball" flowers. Recommended range: south of Miami River.

Florida gama grass (*Tripsacum floridanum*). Clumping grass. Short (less than 3'). Flower interesting but not showy. Cut back and let it grow back if it gets old-looking. The taller Eastern gama grass ("Fakahatchee grass") is not a pineland plant and does best with better soil and more moisture.

coontie (*Zamia integrifolia*). Cycad, related to palms, looks like fern. Use as groundcover or low shrub. Sun is best; can take shade. Grows well in very dry areas. Cold hardy. Long-lived. Larval food for the atala butterfly. Male and female plants produce a central cone. Mass planting not recommended because of scale insect.

Bahama cassia (*Senna mexicana var. chapmanii*). Short shrub with yellow flowers. Larval food and nectar plant for sulphur butterflies. Needs full sun and does best in poor growing conditions. Recommended range: south of Miami River. (Also see Privet cassia.)

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### **WHEN YOU TAKE YOUR PLANTS HOME:**

**Soak the pots thoroughly as soon as you get home**, since they may have missed their daily watering when they left the nursery. Immerse the pot in a bucket or place on a saucer of water if necessary. Water daily if necessary - the soil in pots dries out quickly. Remember that your lawn sprinklers may not deliver enough water to soak the pot - use a hose.

### **PLANNING YOUR LANDSCAPE:**

**Protect cold-sensitive plants** by placing in areas sheltered by a building or other plants.

**Group plants** according to native plant community or water needs.

**Learn about plants and landscaping.** Get information from several sources. **Classes, tours and events** at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, Miami-Dade Co. Parks, MDC Environmental Center, Gifford Arboretum at the University of Miami, Miami-Dade Extension, Tropical Audubon Society and others (many are listed on the Dade Chapter FNPS web site). **Books** on Florida native plants in some bookstores, especially Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, Everglades National Park and other parks, internet booksellers. **Websites:** start with Dade Chapter Florida Native Plant Society and the Institute for Regional Conservation ([www.regionalconservation.org](http://www.regionalconservation.org) – Online resources -- *Natives for Your Neighborhood*). **Attend the Dade Chapter Florida Native Plant Society chapter meetings and annual "Native Plant Day" in March.**

**Visit gardens and natural areas** in local county, city, state and national parks; Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden; UM's Gifford Arboretum; Tropical Audubon Society; and **demonstration plantings** at some nurseries which carry native plants. See if any **schools** in your neighborhood have planted native areas.

**Most importantly, see what is in your neighborhood** -- the native plants, natural forest communities, soil conditions -- before you choose your plants. Try to look at established, fairly mature specimens of the species you are interested in before deciding.

### **PLANTING AND CARING FOR YOUR PLANTS:**

**Dig holes** a little larger than the width of the pot, but not deeper than the pot. Don't amend the soil in the hole.

**Mulch** trees and shrubs of hammocks with tree-service or commercial mulch. For pineland and wildflower plantings, try to mulch lightly with pine needles only (get it from friends with pine trees or buy in bales from a nursery) or do not mulch.

**You will probably need to give your native plants some care** (like any other plant) during their first year, until they are well-established and their root systems have grown enough to sustain them. Watch for signs of stress. Especially during the summer, when the soil dries out a couple days after a heavy rain, you may need to water. Remember that your lawn sprinkler doesn't soak the ground deeply. Fertilizer and pest control for natives are often a matter of personal preference, but native plants in your garden are not in Anatural@ conditions and may sometimes benefit from a minimal amount of supplemental care.

**For more information**, see the Dade Chapter Florida Native Plant Society website [dade.fnpschapters.org](http://dade.fnpschapters.org).