

# Shakespeare knew something about landscaping

by Marcy Bartlett

When Shakespeare said "Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds," he was describing the mess we had all over Brevard after the last two winters. If only we had all planted the "weeds" that grow wild, we'd still have trees and other good green things. A short walk in a wild place will show you that Florida's native plant communities have not suffered from our current drought or last winter's freezes. Trees, shrubs, flowering herbs, vines, and inconspicuous little ground covers thrive as if they like it here. No one fertilizes or tends them and the stubborn things grow anyway.

And in the process of surviving, these plants help us survive. The root systems of these plants are the primary pathways for water to percolate into our underground supplies. Even though South Brevard drinks surface water, those underground supplies are still critical. Every time we clear, fill, or pave an acre, and every time we plant imported trees or lawn grass, we are destroying native root systems that replenish our water.

Conserving water is one good reason to preserve natives and replant natives. The fact that they require very little attention is another. The South Brevard Chapter of FNPS provides a plant identification course every second Thursday at Erna Nixon Park to enable interested people to learn to identify them. We list here just six that are commonly found on uncleared lots, with a few suggestions on their use in landscaping.

*Ceratiola ericoides*, scrub rosemary. Shrub; very attractive dense form needs no pruning; evergreen with deep green color, inconspicuous flowers, fragrant foliage. Thrives in dry sandy soil. Would be excellent for road medians, but *don't* install sprinkler systems. Mature plants are hard to transplant.

*Yucca filamentosa*, "beargrass". Resembles Spanish bayonet, but the spines are softer and not dangerous. Light-colored evergreen rosette to 18" tall, attractive flower stem to 8' tall, creamy white flowers resemble giant lily-of-the-valley. Grows from

large tuber; hard to transplant, but good survival rate. *Yucca* propagates itself by underground roots, putting up new plants in a straight running line from the parent. Happily shares space with:

*Lupinus diffusus*, lupine. Spikes of blue/purple pea-shaped flowers in spring. Transplant by careful, deep digging of young plants. Biennial, possibly perennial. Dry areas.

*Myrica cerifera*, wax myrtle. The queen of Florida landscape plants. Fragrant, olive-colored evergreen foliage, can grow to 20' and has nice form. It is highly salt tolerant, flood resistant, drought resistant, cold hardy. Grows rapidly when well-tended, but grows anyway when ignored. Easy to transplant even at 8-10 feet tall; can be pruned to formal shape by gardeners who enjoy work; fruit can also be harvested by zealots who make bayberry candles.

*Serenoa repens*, saw palmetto. The signature plant of the Florida Native Plant Society for good reason. Seldom more than 5 to 6 feet tall, salt tolerant, cold hardy. This unsung hero provides bees with its plumes of flowers, its berries are a major food source for birds and little beasts, and in its spare time the palmetto does yeoman duty in water transpiration. Preserving palmettos along with your trees will do a lot toward keeping your building cool. Larger plants can be salvaged using heavy equipment, the same techniques to protect the growing bud that you would use for large palms, plenty of water, and the patience of Job. Young plants can be salvaged by hand (or shovel!); they need plenty of time to re-establish themselves.

*S. repens* var. *glauca*, blue wax palmetto. All of the above about palmetto applies to this variety, a dreamy blue color produced by the waxy coating on the leaves. This plant, in company with scrub rosemary, would give strong color to a landscape planting.

*Befaria racemosa*, tarflower. Shrub, to 6 feet, evergreen, but sparse foliage. Spectacular bloom; massed plantings rival anything you can do with azaleas and with a lot less maintenance. Hard to transplant, but can be left in place or propagated.