

# Exceptional Natives For Dune And Scrub Areas

by Steven M. Riefler

As a native nurseryman, the author believes that it is incumbent upon him to research native plants of horticultural value, particularly those for use in areas in which common cultivars are wholly inadequate. Dune and scrub areas, with their associated deep sands, make up one type of problem site, with respect to ornamental plantings. Certain native species, often compact and evergreen plants, have unique utility on these sites. Here are several for discussion. With the exception of the hickory, all of these are evergreen. All are woody perennials. They cover the whole range from groundcover to moderate-sized trees. All are hardy throughout Florida. All except *Conradina glabra* are components of either the scrub or the dune floras. Most can be propagated reasonably easily from either seed or cuttings.

*Chrysobalanus oblongifolius*: This is the gopher-apple (not to be confused with *Licania michauxii*, also called "gopher-apple").

*Bumelia rufotomentosa*: This is rusty bumelia, native to both turkey oak and high scrub areas. This is a somewhat stoloniferous, coppery groundcover. Height to about 12 inches. Leaves round, smaller than a dime.

*Conradina glabra*: This is Apalachicola rosemary, from the turkey oak-pine forests of Liberty County. This forms a dense sub-shrub to about 14 inches. Leaves are linear, green, about one-half inch long, and markedly aromatic. Mentioned here primarily for color contrast with *C. canescens*. Extremely sensitive to excess water on leaves.

*Conradina canescens*: This shrubby mint of gulf coastal dunes has blue to gray leaves. Height to about two feet. Flowers are small, lavender-white, very conspicuous in spring, due to numbers.

*Calaminthus coccinea*: A true beauty, this is our only native calaminthus with scarlet flowers (1 1/2 inches or so). Component of the scrub flora. Leaves ovate, generally less than one-half inch. This tidy shrub, up to about three feet, is reported to respond well to a bit of fertilizer and shearing.

Central Florida forms of this species have a flower about 1 1/2 inches long and carry about twice the volume of blossoms than does the

same species from elsewhere (see J.K. Small's **Southeastern Flora of the United States**).

*Vaccinium darrowii*: From scrub and turkey oak-pine forests, this is an evergreen blueberry with one-half inch glaucous leaves, and a dense crown. Height about four feet. The fruit is not particularly meritorious. Will tolerate some shade.

*Chrysoma (Solidago) pauciflosculosa*: This is a woody composite that is abundant within thirty miles or so of the coast in northwest Florida. Leaves are gray-green, somewhat lanceolate, about two inches long. Flowers are yellow, very conspicuous in early fall. The broad crown of up to about 3-4 feet can become leggy, but will respond to shearing.

*Garberia fruticosa*: From the Ocala scrub, this is another woody composite similar in appearance and habit to the chrysoma. Flowers rose-lavender, fall.

*Serenoa repens*: The palmetto of the southeast, this coarse, tropical-appearing shrub is also about the toughest. Coastal forms are genetically adapted to the heat of the dunes and produce a wax that gives the plant a blue or even whitish cast. Green and glaucous forms can be used for color contrast. Wax-bearing variants freeze more easily than green northern forms. When transplanting serenoa, remove all leaves.

*Ceratiola ericoides*: Rosemary. This is a dense shrub with green needle-like foliage. Height and spread to about six feet. It is most obstreperous, resisting attempts both of transplant and propagation. Mature plants often die for no apparent reason. Shade intolerant. Useful for the highest, most sterile sands.

*Lyonia fruticosa*: This shrub from the Ocala scrub, much like *L. ferruginea*, is particularly valuable for its rusty leaves. Height to about ten feet. It will take some shearing and some shade. The color is unattainable by any common cultivars. Grow as you would an azalea. Sensitive to excess water on leaves.

*Bumelia tenax*: This is a small tree, very much like a pyracantha. This plant bears edible black fruit. The leaves are tomentose beneath. It does not fall victim either to fireblight nor moth larvae. The hair on the undersides of the leaves varies in color, depending on geographical

origin. Plants from Gainesville have silvery hair, those from the scrub, brown hair, and those from coastal dunes have gold. Sensitive to excess humidity.

*Ilex opaca* var. *arenicola*: This is a true scrub variant of the American holly. Its habit is fastigiate. The leaves are a bit smaller than typical holly.

*Persea humilis*: Of all the trees in this list, this one should be planted in a spot where the wind will lay back the boughs to expose the lustrous coppery undersides of the leaves. Height to about 25 feet. Propagate from seed. As with most scrub species, seedlings grow very slowly. Reportedly roots well with heat.

*Carya floridana*: This is a scrub variant of the pignut hickory. The nuts are small. The leaves are markedly bronzy, but not lepidote. Height to about 30 feet.

*Quercus geminata*: This is the scrub live oak. Mature trees are not quite as large as the lowland live oak. Leaves convex, deep green, revolute. Growth very slow.

*Pinus clausa*: Sand pine. This would be a fine pine for ornamental use; however, it is rarely planted except for pulp. The trunk tends to become crooked, but the needles have a fine texture. Seedlings available from the state.

I have also done some work on a fine "needle" bearing hypericum common to both scrub and dune areas, even adaptable to occasional flooding in ditches: *Hypericum retusa* (?) — about 18" wide, 12" high, deep green, fine texture. Propagates with ease, good for sandy borders.

I am accumulating information on herbaceous perennials for scrub and dune areas as well. Some difficult plants, like rosemary, root rather easily. Others, like calaminthus and *Lyonia fruticosa* are moisture sensitive and obstreperous.

## GLOSSARY

cultivars — plants improved or developed by horticultural techniques.

stoloniferous — a plant with trailing shoots that often form new plants.

glaucous — covered with whitish waxy "bloom" that can be wiped off.

lanceolate — lance-shaped.

tomentose — woolly; with soft, matted hairs.

fastigiate — with clustered, parallel, erect branches.

lepidote — with small, scruffy scales.

revolute — rolled backward, as the edges of some leaves.