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Natural Communities: MESIC HAMMOCK

by Linda Conway Duever



Mesic Hammocks are the romantic, moss-draped forests of live oak and magnolia that give old-fashioned southern charm to the landscapes of the Gainesville-Ocala region. Similar patches of forest are found scattered around most of the rest of the state, but the classic

examples and most extensive stands grow in this "hammock belt".

Formally termed Upland Mixed Forest by the Florida Natural Areas Inventory, mesic hammock grows on moderately moist uplands with relatively rich sandy soil. The soil is frequently high in clay and/or organic content and is

often shallowly underlain by limestone. The "gumbo loblolly forest" around Silver Springs which FNAI considers a plant community variation of Upland Mixed Forest, is a loblolly pine and hardwood forest growing on a peculiar shelly marl soil.

The most common mesic hammock trees are live oak (*Quercus virginiana*), cabbage palm (*Sabal palmetto*), laurel oak (*Quercus laurifolia*), magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*), water oak (*Quercus nigra*), pignut hickory (*Carya glabra*), ironwood (*Carpinus caroliniana*), sugarberry (*Celtis laevigata*), sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*), red bay (*Persea borbonia*), and southern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*).

Lilac-pink redbuds (*Cercis canadensis*) and white flowering dogwoods (*Cornus florida*) light up the forest shadows in springtime. Feathery dark evergreen spruce pines (*Pinus glabra*) and patterns of dappled shade from the big rounded light green leaves of basswood (*Tilia americana*) and swamp chestnut oak (*Quercus michauxii*) add charm to the more diverse hammocks. Southern red oak (*Quercus falcate*), post oak (*Quercus stellata*), and mockernut hickory (*Carya tomentosa*) are prominent in hammocks derived from overgrown Upland Pine Forest.

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