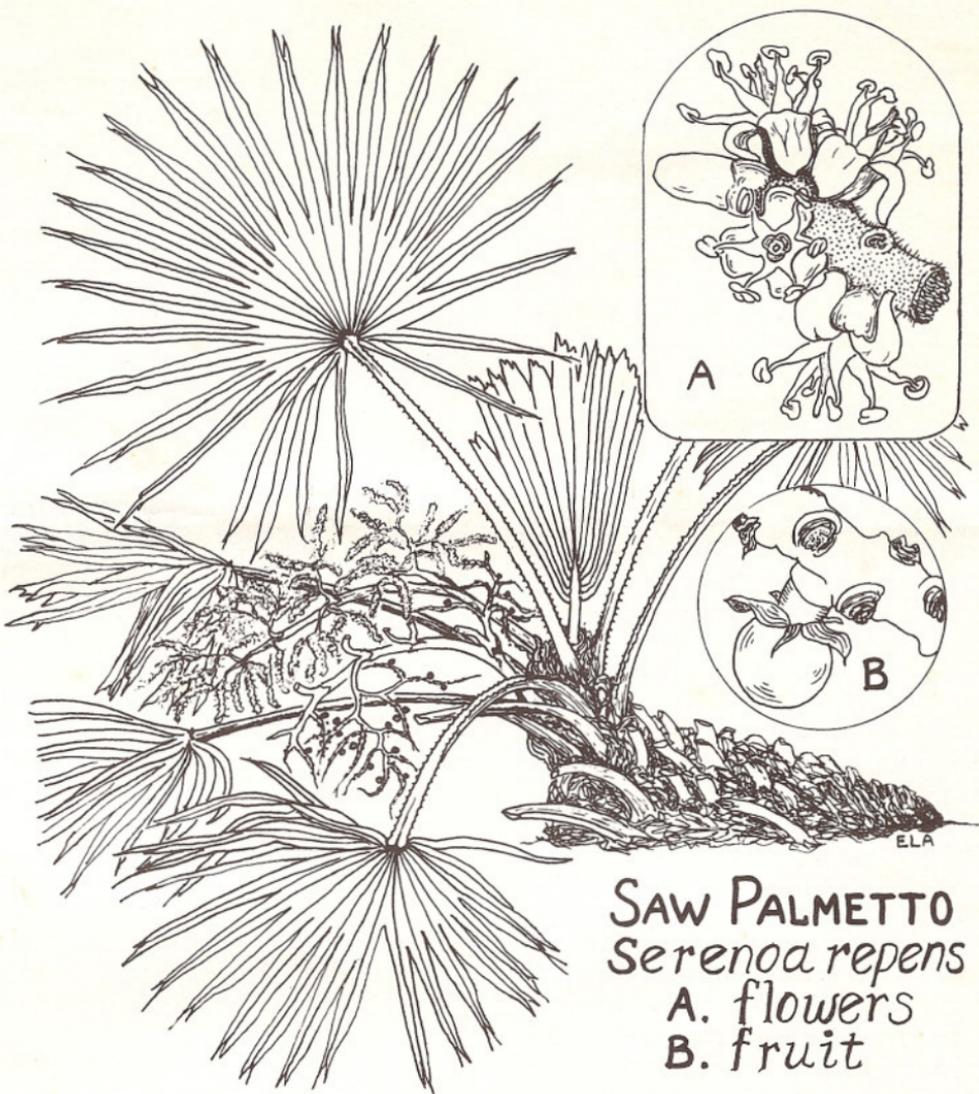


SAW PALMETTO: Emblem of the FNPS



SAW PALMETTO
Serenoa repens
 A. flowers
 B. fruit

Drawing by Edith Alexander

by Dave Wilson

Serenoa repens is a beautiful miniature accent tree which has not been appreciated much, probably due to its abundance. Saw palmetto has fan-shaped green leaves on a fine-toothed stem which shoots forth from a dark brown fibrous trunk. The fronds are smaller and more circular than the Sabal palm and lack the central midrib. Normally the trunks creep along the ground, so that the height of the plant is the length of the leaf. Rarely specimens are found with erect trunks.

Both Sabal palm and saw palmetto are depicted on the Florida State seal.

During this time of the year (spring), delicately fragrant, flowing showers of dainty light yellow or white flowers appear on plume-like multi-branched

stalks that sprout from the trunk. The bees which pollinate palmetto make delicious rich palmetto honey.

Miniature plum-like black fruits then form, providing food for wildlife. The Indians ate them and used them for medicinal purposes. Saw palmetto also yields a "cabbage" heart, smaller than the Sabal palm, but taking it kills the tree.

Unfortunately the saw palmetto is difficult to transplant and takes up to six weeks to germinate from seed, so this is one species that really should be preserved near the pines it grows under whenever a new building is constructed. Once established, it is resistant to fire, drought, and cold.

Saw palmetto, preserved on site, or grown from seed, will provide a haven for native wildlife in your yard. They feel at home there...and you will, too.