

Top Native Plants for Central Florida

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Fact Sheet
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Florida native plants have many benefits and are recommended by UF/IFAS Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ program for incorporation into every home landscape. They are adapted to Florida's unique conditions and are part of a healthy, diverse environment. They provide food and habitat for Florida's wildlife. Native plants are low maintenance and help to reduce water, fertilizer and pesticide use. The native plants listed below are recommended for Central Florida.

Coontie

Coontie (*Zamia integrifolia*) is a cycad, it's the only cycad native to Florida. It does well in a variety of soil types and can grow in sun or shade. Coontie is also drought tolerant, salt tolerant, and cold hardy. Sometimes you can find it in the palm section of the big box stores and people will call it other names such as coontie palm or coontie fern. It's a tough plant it will be one of the top selections on the bulletproof native plant list we are creating.



Sunshine Mimosa

Sunshine mimosa (*Mimosa strigillosa*) is a native mowable groundcover with pink powderpuff flowers. It's a larval host plant for the little sulphur butterfly. It can be used as an alternative lawn but may go dormant in the winter. It's good for easements where it is contained. It's drought-tolerant and likes sun. Be careful it spreads and may need a barrier. Some people hate it for that reason.



Firebush

Firebush (*Hamelia patens*) is a native evergreen shrub that is drought tolerant, grows in sun or shade, and flowers year-round. The true native species has larger leaves and longer flowers and grows taller to 12 – 15'. More popular are cultivars of the native, called a "nativar". They breed firebush to be shorter, with colored leaves, and smaller flowers. Some say that pollinators prefer the true native firebush, whereas the dwarf ones do not provide as much food (pollen and nectar) for wildlife. The firebush shrub gets large and does well in the back of a pollinator garden.



Red Salvia, Tropical Sage

Red salvia (*Salvia coccinea*) has to be one of the easiest plants to grow. It's great for shade gardens as butterflies and hummingbirds love it. Red salvia grows easily from seed so once you have it, it will pop up in random spots of your yard. It can be listed as a perennial or self-seeding annual.



Black Eyed Susan

Black eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*) is an easy to grow annual that reseeds easily. It makes a beautiful display of color when in bloom. They thrive in hot and dry sites and will reseed year after year. This is another native that may move around in the garden a little so its best if you have a designated garden area to contain it.



Beach Dune Sunflower

Beach sunflower (*Helianthus debilis*) is a drought and salt tolerant long-lived annual. Its native habitat is in coastal areas and beach dunes but does fine inland too. It has yellow flowers that bloom year-round and attract butterflies. Plant in full sun and in well drained sandy soil. Trim occasionally to shape the plant. It can grow quite large for a wildflower.



Coral honeysuckle

Want hummingbirds? Coral honeysuckle is the vine to plant. It has long pink tubular flowers. (*Lonicera sempervirens*) that provide nectar for butterflies and hummingbirds. This is a perennial and doesn't grow too fast. Plant in partial shade or full sun and train on a trellis.



Milkweed

Want butterflies? Milkweed is the #1 plant for that! Encourage people to go native with the swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*) this one is suitable for most home landscapes. Plant in full sun or partial shade and make sure the homeowners are aware that caterpillars may eat it and those will become butterflies. Note that it does dormant in the winter and regrow in the spring. It is a perennial that lives for many years.



Learn More: Check out horticulture classes offered by UF/IFAS Extension Orange County at www.ocextension.eventbrite.com and read about Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ at <https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/>.