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Rain of Gold

By Sarah Hurd, SRCMGV

After moving to northwest Florida two years ago, I was determined to bring as much nature and color to our bland new landscape as I could. I thought gardening in Florida would be easy since Florida offers long, sunny growing seasons. I had not expected torrential rain or quite so much sand in the lawn. After a couple poor choices later, I joined the Master Gardener program and learned about “Florida Friendly Landscape”. It helped me understand the saying, “the right plant, in the right place.” My original plantings were getting too wet with too much sun in the garden bed.



Credit: gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu

I wanted something that would tolerate full sun, sandy soil and soften the harshness of our concrete patio. One day while shopping at a local big box store, I stumbled across *Galphimia gracilis*, more commonly known as **thryallis** or “rain of gold”. You will fall in love with its light fragrance, bright cheerful clustered floral display and its shiny, bright green foliage.

Being suited to full sun and sandy soil made it perfect. Its prolific bright yellow blooms attract pollinators such as bees, butterflies,



and hummingbirds. The only pests you may encounter with thryallis are caterpillars and mites. And since thryallis is also deer-resistant, it is ideal for areas of the landscape that are prone to wildlife feeding.

Thryallis enjoys a long blooming season. It will grow in part shade but the blooming will not be as stunning as plants grown in full sun, which is at least 6 hours per day. Thryallis will provide any garden or patio with color and texture through the fall and winter months.

We found thryallis to be the perfect shrub to create a low hedge surrounding the patio. It also creates a stunning backdrop for a perennial garden. With proper trimming, this low-maintenance evergreen shrub will brighten any patio or deck and can be pruned to support its appearance as hedging or as beautiful topiaries. Thryallis is also ideal in containers. When combined with other flowers or grasses, it creates a striking display.



Photo Credit: Sarah Hurd

Thryallis does best in Zones 9-11 and will die back when temperatures reach 25 degrees in north-west Florida. With care and winterizing, this hearty shrub will return in the spring offering a cheerful display bringing your garden to life again. One thing to note is that the stems of thryallis are brittle making it a poor choice for any landscape where children play, near walkways or windy locations.

Thryallis can be propagated through seeds or fresh cuttings. Try your luck by placing summer cuttings in moist vermiculite, allowing the leaves to touch. Keep the container wrapped in plastic (I place mine in a bread bag) and keep it in a shaded location. Mist throughout the day to ensure the vermiculite stays moist but not wet. Rooting will happen in approximately three months.

If you prefer using seeds, collect the "fruit" while still green. These small green fruits each hold three seeds. Separate and let dry thoroughly. Next spring, they will need to soak for 24 hours before being planted in a mixture of soil and either sand or vermiculite. Cover with a light layer of soil and water. When the plantings are a foot tall, they should begin to bloom.



Photo Credit: Sarah Hurd

Through November, ours was still blooming and I do not recall a week that we have not enjoyed the colorful display of this shrub and the beautiful pollinators it brought to our yard. If you have not tried thryallis, this may be the time to include it in your spring garden planning.

References:

[Thryallis - Gardening Solutions - University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences \(ufl.edu\)](https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/)

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/>

www.DallasArboretumPlantTrials.org

www.extension.msstate.edu

Plants of a Useful Nature

Pamela Murfey, SRCMGV



Cypress swamp
Photo Credit: Ellie Mascara

Plants can be as aesthetically pleasing in the wild as they can be in our gardens. Very interesting is the subject of Ethnobotany, the study of the vast world of plants and the cultures who used them in their daily lives. Indigenous people of Florida were no exception. The diversity of plant communities found in Florida provided them with many resources including food, medicine, construction materials, tools, and transportation.

My favorite place for exploring natural beauty and wildlife is the Cypress swamps of south Florida. Swamps are often portrayed as a dark and dangerous place infested with giant alligators, poisonous snakes, creepy crawling bugs, and swamp monsters like Florida's Skunk-Ape! In reality there is a diversity of plants including the majestic, towering Bald Cypress with its network of knees, branches draped in Spanish moss, bromeliads adorning their trunks, orchids tucked away, and home to many animals including the Pileated Woodpecker, Barred Owl, Bobcat, and Florida Panther. For

the Miccosukee, Seminoles, pioneers, and other indigenous tribes these habitats were a lifeline.

Some of the plants most valued include the Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*) and Cinnamon Fern (*Osmunda cinnamomea*). Both plants provided medicine for treating a variety of ailments, including coughs, fevers, and sore throats. The root is astringent, diuretic, tonic, and vulnerary.

One of the most common modes of transportation was the dugout canoe. Bald Cypress was exceptional for making a canoe. After cutting down a tree, it took one full moon cycle to burn the interior and scrape the carbonized wood. Before the channelized canal system in south Florida, people could paddle from Palm Beach County to the Everglades. Lumber and furniture from cypress is very popular because of its anti-fungal properties. The wood is heavy and strong and resistant to shrinkage, rotting and termites. The resin in the cones was used to topically treat burns and sores.

Bromeliads of the pineapple family use the support of the cypress tree trunk. Their air-borne seeds do not travel far, often landing on the same trunk. The most common is Spanish Moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*) an epiphyte, was used for weaving horse blankets, stuffing mattresses and car upholstery, and as clothing in the Timucuan culture in SE Florida. A lady could find a new dress simply by pulling some fresh Spanish moss off the tree! American Indians and soldiers of the American Civil War used the moss as bandaging material. The proteolytic enzyme Bromelain is thought to break down dead tissue and fibrin to enhance the rate of healing.

Plants have always been a part of cultures. You can learn about many plants found in Florida and their uses by various cultures in the book, **Florida Ethnobotany by Daniel F. Austin**

Resource — [Cypress - UF/IFAS Extension: Solutions for Your Life \(ufl.edu\)](https://www.ufl.edu/extension/programs/cypress/)

Shampoo in your Garden

Ellie Mascara, SRCMGV



Pinecone ginger

Photo: Ellie Mascara

Did you know that you can grow shampoo in your garden? It may seem strange, but it's true. Not only can it be used as a shampoo, but it can also be used as a lotion for your skin. In some regions of the world, it's also used for medicinal purposes. This multi-useful plant is known as pinecone ginger (*Zingiber zerumbet*). The name is very appropriate since it produces bright red "flowers" that are about six inches long and are shaped like pinecones. The flowers are actually a cone-like bracted inflorescence that is spirally arranged like a pinecone. If you squeeze this coned flower, it will release a thick creamy lanolin-like substance which has several uses.

This plant is very easy to grow in hardiness zones 8 - 12. It will flourish in an area that has diffused light for half of the day. It will grow to maturity in approximately ten months and will produce flowers throughout the summer and early fall. At maturity it will be four to six feet tall. This plant grows well in a moist, humid environment. It grows well in slightly acidic, rich soil. Pinecone ginger can be grown in a container or placed

directly in the ground. In some areas it is considered invasive and is controlled by placing it in a container. It will do well in a warm, humid area.

The pinecone ginger originated in Asia and was introduced to Hawaii where it was naturalized. It is one of a few tropical plants that will survive in our hardiness zone. It is best to cut back on water during the winter months since it will be dormant during cooler weather.

Although you may not choose to use it as a shampoo, you still may enjoy it for its unusual characteristics.

In my garden, it has always been a plant that visitors are curious about. Many times they leave with a baby pinecone ginger in hand.



Yellow coned pinecone ginger

Photo: Rafael Ben-Ari

Where can I find more information?

The UF/IFAS Extension Solutions for Your Life website and Gardening Solutions website offer online material, including pre-recorded webinars and videos, that can be accessed at your convenience.

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/lawn-and-garden/>

<https://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/>

In addition, we have our Master Gardener webinar page and our Gardening in the Panhandle web archives full of educational content.

<https://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/mastergardener/volunteers/education/webinars.html>

<http://nwdistrict.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/>

For a listing of local offices visit

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/find-your-local-office/>

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<https://www.facebook.com/GardeningInThePanhandle/>

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