

The Sparkler

The Sparkleberry Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society

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President's Message: *Carol Sullivan*

For our program at the September meeting, Brian Cobble, Senior Forester for Suwannee County identified some of the problems that have plagued our area trees this year. Although most of the beetles attacking the pines, the caterpillars eating the oak leaves, and the wasps causing the unsightly galls on the oaks naturally occur here, they have been extremely active this year. The Laurel Wilt Disease caused by the Ambrosia Beetle, an imported invasive insect, that has spread through most of the state is now spreading quickly through Suwannee County killing all the Bay trees in its path. (Avocado trees are a member of the Laurel Family and are affected by the disease.) In addition, this year there's a new threat to the pines from the Cinara Aphid that is believed to have arrived in shipments of Christmas trees from other states. Our plants and insects have evolved together over many years and have been able to co-exist in their natural habitats with little trouble. When species from other areas are introduced here, they frequently are without the natural enemies or environmental stresses that control them, many times resulting in severe damage to our native species. The Florida Forestry Service provides assistance to landowners in identifying infestations and can recommend controls in some cases. Be aware of your surroundings.

The FNPS.org website is an excellent source of information which is constantly being updated. One of the favorite spots is "Landscaping with Natives", found under the "Resources" menu. There's information about the plants, how to grow them, descriptions and photos. You can select plants for your area or for specific features, browse the entire list or search a specific species. It's a new addition and is nowhere near complete, but there is a lot to see and more plants are constantly being added. There's also a calendar of many varied events, links to all the Chapters in Florida, where you can see their newsletters and other happenings, and there are featured articles on a variety of subjects. It's always changing, always interesting and always worth your time.

See you on the 9th.

Carol

Sparkleberry Chapter meetings are held the 2nd Tuesday of each month at Hatch Park, 403 SE Craven St., Branford. Meetings start at 6:30 PM.

Please join us for our next meeting on October 9, 2012



Sparkleberry Webmaster Mae Brandt says check out the **Sparkleberry webpage**. You can reach it at <http://sparkleberry.fnpschapters.org>. Mae says it's a "work in progress". Please visit the site and let Mae know what you think!

We also have a **Facebook** page, to be used as a communication spot for members between meetings. Visit www.facebook.com, search for Sparkleberry, and become a friend and/or fan.

Calendar of Events:

October 4 & 5: Native Plant Sale hosted by the Paynes Prairie Chapter of FNPS at Morningside Nature Center, Gainesville. Friday from 4:30p-7p for FNPS members only, Saturday from 8a-12n, for all the public.

October 5: Four Rivers Audubon “Alli Walk” at Alligator Lake in Lake City. Meet in the parking lot at 8a. Bird walk, plant ID, new friends.

10/9/12 Monthly Meeting: 6:30 pm, Hatch Park, Branford

Megan Wetherington, Senior Engineer with the Suwannee River Water Management District will be our speaker. Her presentation, Hydrologic Conditions in the Suwannee River Basin, will include information on the current hydrological conditions, with a roundup of the drought recovery after the tropical storms and some information about water quality.

October 11: Forest Stewardship Field Day: Tree/Plant Identification. Morningside Nature Center, Gainesville. 9a – 3p. Registration required.

October 13 & 14: Kanapaha Gardens Fall Plant Sale and Orchid Show, Gainesville. 9a – 5p.

October 13: Butterfly Fest at the Florida Museum of Natural History, Gainesville. 10a – 5p.

October 20: Wildflower walk at Ichetucknee Springs State Park with Sam Cole who will identify many of our fall blooming plants and trees. 9am – noon. Meet at the South Entrance.

October 27: 8th Annual Lubee Bat Festival, Gainesville. 10a – 5p.

November 13: Monthly Meeting 6:30 pm., Hatch Park, Branford

Sparkleberry Chapter second Annual Meeting and election of new officers. There will also be a hands-on workshop led by Betsy Martin making baskets from the fronds of Saw Palmetto (*Serona Repens*). If you read the latest Palmetto, the basket was featured on the cover. Palmetto fronds provided.

Ask a Native Plant Gardener: Betsy Martin

Q: My swamp hibiscus grew and bloomed profusely all summer. It now has seed pods, but is looking very spotty, with yellowing and falling leaves. Should I fertilize it, or is this the way it is supposed to be?

A: My experience with this plant is that once they do bloom and set seed they appear to be done for the season and start losing their leaves, get spotty etc, but they have come back the next year. They do die back to the ground over the winter. I would not put any fertilizer on it now; this is the time of year they need to start getting ready for dormancy.



Feature Article: *Debbie Phillips*

Follow Up Information from Our May Program: THE THREAT OF WILDFIRE IS REAL! CAN YOU PROTECT YOURSELF?

We received a follow-up e-mail from our May speaker, Mr. Kurt Wisner, Mitigation Specialist/Public Information Officer from the Suwannee Forestry Center. Kurt wrote that he really enjoyed meeting everyone and that we had a good, receptive group, which certainly made the presentation a lot more fun.

During the meeting, several people had asked about inspection checklists and guides. Kurt attached two documents: 1. The FL scoresheet.doc which the Florida Forest Service uses for community assessments, and 2. The FW-Guide-Landscp-Construction.pdf which is a brochure that gives homeowners ideas for getting their property into shape. If you are interested in any of these documents, please contact Debbie Phillips at jeep5149@aol.com and she can forward them to you in an e-mail.

Kurt also provided a link to their website for information on landscaping recommendations, including the identification of some plants to avoid because of their high flammability.

http://www.floridaforestservice.com/wildfire/firewise_landscaping.html

For those members who were interested in having their properties assessed for potential mitigation work, they should contact the Forest Area Supervisor for Suwannee County, Mr. John Raulerson. His office number is 386-208-1458. According to Kurt, John said that he would be glad to work with anyone who wanted them to come out to their property.

By contacting the Florida Forest Service directly at their web site: www.floridaforestservice.com, you can access a wide range of information and programs available to home and land owners statewide. The site also provides a Calendar of Events and information and resources on training and educational programs.

If you have any other questions or concerns, Kurt can be contacted at his office: 386-758-5706, cell: 386-623-4281 or by e-mail: kurt.wisner@freshfromflorida.com.

To Be Considered: *Valerie Thomas*

In our September meeting, the Executive Committee considered the idea of discontinuing Sparkleberry Chapter meetings and the Sparkler Newsletter for the summer months of June, July and August. On the “Pro” side of the concept were the thoughts that volunteers might be more likely to offer their services if they were to serve only nine months of the year versus twelve. Many people take off to other locations, or travel during the summer, and the summer months were typically those with the fewest in attendance at meetings. Also, by taking a hiatus from activities associated with the Chapter, when returning to those activities in the fall, members would come back recharged and ready to participate once again. On the “Con” side of the argument was the fear that members would be lost with a break in meetings and the outreach that the newsletter provides. You may have other “Pros” and “Cons” that you can think of. What is your opinion on this idea? Please talk to one of the Executive Committee members about what you think. We’ll be voting on this topic at our October meeting.

Roadside Bloomers

Blazing Star, *Liatris* - Spikes of purple/blue flowers, about 18 species occur in the state, several in Suwannee.

Summer Farewell, *Dalea pinnata* - white flowers cluster at tops of 2' stems, dry open fields in central and north Florida

Watch for the grasses that are beginning to bloom, such as the Purple Lovegrass, *Eragostis spectabilis*, and Muhly Grass, *Muhlenbergia capillaris*.

Goldenrod, *Solidago spp.* - 22 species are found in Florida, most of them occur in our area, yellow flowers at tops of stems from 2' to 5' tall.



Point to Ponder:

What is a weed? A plant whose virtues have never been discovered.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

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"The purpose of the Florida Native Plant Society is the preservation, conservation and restoration of native plants and native plant communities of Florida."