

Plant Care Guide

Following these simple instructions should help you keep your wildlife haven flowering and flourishing for many years to come.

Location

- Choosing the right location for your plants is critical
- Match the location with the plant's light requirement
- In Central Florida, the hottest sun of the day is during the summer, starting from around 2 pm through 5 pm

Planting

- Dig a hole twice as wide as the pot where the plant is in, yet no deeper than the height of the root ball (*not the pot height*).
- Cut tightly wound roots to prevent the roots from circling, place the plant in the hole, and fill the hole with water.
- Native plants do not need soil additives, such as fertilizer or compost
- After the water has soaked in, make sure the plant is level with the surrounding soil. In wet locations, plant a little higher (*1/2" to 1" above the surrounding area*).
- Fill the hole with soil, press soil around the plant to remove air pockets.
 - For larger plants (*15-gallon pots and larger*), pour water around the perimeter with a garden hose
- Make a one to three-inch water ring around the perimeter of the root ball, a smaller ring for smaller plants, a larger ring for larger plants and trees. Fill the ring with water.

Mulching

- Flowering perennial plants and groundcovers need less mulch, one inch deep
- Larger plants and trees need two to three inches of mulch
- Save cypress swamps: use pine straw or oak leaf litter for mulching. These have all the nutrients native plants need.

Watering

- Newly planted plants need more water and attention until they are established.
- Water needs differ depending on the type of plant, the weather, and the season.
- At a minimum, water well every other day for the first month. The soil must be kept moist until the plant is established.
- Water three times a week for the second to the fourth month.
- Water twice a week for the next 2 months.
- Once a week for smaller plants after 6 months should be sufficient.
- No need to water when it rains more than an inch.
- During the first year, water larger trees and shrubs at least twice a week especially during spring months when it is hot and dry.
- Larger plants require supplemental watering during hot and dry periods for the first three years.

Fertilizing

- Native plants do not require fertilizer if planted in the right place.
- To encourage faster growth, fertilize lightly.
- If you choose to fertilize, use a slow-release organic fertilizer or use your compost.

Follow-up

- Walkthrough your garden at least once a week to assess your plants' condition and to recognize what healthy plants look like over time.
- Native plants have flowering cycles which correspond to the needs of native wildlife, birds and pollinators, and times when they are dormant.

Pruning

Most popular native plants:

- Spring & Summer Wildflowers -
 - Salvias (*Tropical Sage*, *Lyreleaf Sage*, *Blue Sage*), *Coreopsis* (*Tickseed*), Stokes Aster, Calamint, Rosinflower, Dune Sunflower, False Rosemary – trim back old flower stalks several times a year to provide fuller plants.
 - Gaillardia and Black-Eyed Susan – trim back several times a year for fuller plants, these are short-lived perennials so look for new seedlings around mother plants so as not to weed them out.
- Fall Wildflowers –
 - *Liatris*, Ironweed, Silverleaf Aster, Beebalm, Goldenrods, and Palifoxia – prune the plant back in mid-June to promote denser flowering in the fall and to control the height.
- Shrubs –
 - *Ilex vomitoria*, *Walters viburnum*, Florida Privet, Wild Coffee, Firebush, Beauty Berry, and Oakleaf Hydrangea – prune to shape as required.
- Vines –
 - Coral Honeysuckle, Corkystem Passionvine, Passionvine, Carolina Jessamine, Blue Sky Cluster Vine, and Cross Vine – trim back as and when needed.
 - Coral Honeysuckle, Carolina Jessamine, and Cross Vine do not die back in a freeze.
- Grasses –
 - Fakahatchee, Dwarf Fakahatchee, Muhly, Lopsided Indian – these can be cut back in late January, early February to about 3 inches from the ground, this will promote new growth and remove old thatch.
- Ground covers –
 - Sunshine Mimosa, Frogfruit, Swamp Twinflower, Creeping Sage, Lyreleaf Sage – these can be cut back with a mower set on high if needed.

Best Practice

- Weeding
 - This is crucial for the first two years to deplete the weed seed bank from the garden.
- Edging
 - Areas that are on the edges of the property where neighbors turf can creep back in, need to be edged biweekly to prevent the turf from growing into your ground covers.
 - Note that some lawns' grass has root systems as deep as eight inches (8") from the surface. This may require a different approach such as creating a trench or installing a root barrier. These are common.
- Freezing Temperature
 - Some Florida native shrubs and perennials will burn to the ground, yet the plants are not dead.
 - Unless the winter is finished and another freeze is not expected, do not cut the plant back. Leave it alone to prevent further freeze damage. It has been documented that in Central Florida temperatures have dropped below freezing in February, and even in March.
 - New shoots should grow from the ground when the plant is ready. This is when you can cut back the dead branches or stems.