



Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc.

CONSERVE NATIVE PLANTS

Position Statement

Adopted January 12, 2012

Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc. is committed to ensuring the resiliency and long-term viability of native plants, especially rare and imperiled species.

Florida is a biologically diverse and ecologically complex state, with great interregional and seasonal variability. Transitioning from temperate to subtropical, seven major ecosystems are habitat to 82 distinct natural plant communities. Plant communities—canopy, sub-canopy, understory, shrub and groundcover layers—are a cornerstone of biological diversity. Over millennia, native flora have specialized and co-evolved with the local soils, precipitation patterns, humidity, temperatures, freezes, prevailing winds, tropical storms, fire regimes, floods, droughts, fungi, microbes, pollinators and wildlife. Native plants are ideally suited to thrive in the ecological niches in which they grow and reproduce naturally. Some native species have adapted to grow in a large number of plant communities and have rather broad ranges. Live oak (*Quercus virginiana*) grows throughout our state and northward to Virginia, while our rarest cold-sensitive bromeliads (*Guzmania monostachia*, *Catopsis nutans* and *Catopsis floribunda*) are restricted to humid habitats in the southernmost region of the state where other species provide needed canopy. Many rare plants are highly localized, growing only in very specific microhabitats; and some are, endemic, known only to occur in Florida and nowhere else in the world. Our unique assemblage of indigenous plants include the world's greatest concentration of insectivorous pitcher plant species (*Sarracenia*), more than one-half of the orchid species found in North America and the largest collection of fern species in the continental United States.

Many of our native plant species are in decline, primarily due to loss of habitat, taking and the introduction of invasive species. Native plant communities are threatened by extensive habitat fragmentation and degradation. Few natural areas in Florida remain undisturbed. Plant species unique to a locality can be bulldozed, grazed or plowed to extinction. Ninety-five percent of our pine rocklands habitats have been destroyed. Surviving plant species, such as Red Stopper (*Eugenia rhombea*) and Small's Milkpea (*Galactia smallii*), now grow only in conservation areas. Florida scrub habitat, once very common, is fast disappearing. Some scrub species such as Highlands Scrub St. Johns Wort (*Hypericum cumulicola*), Scrub Eryngium (*Eryngium cuneifolium*), and Sweet-scented Pigeonwings (*Clitoria fragrans*) now occur naturally only in preserves. Additionally, illegal collection in the wild has diminished populations of orchids, bromeliads, carnivorous plants and some cacti. The Ghost Orchid (*Dendrophylax lindenii*) and the Fuzzy Wuzzy air-plant (*Tillandsia pruinosa*) were collected almost to extinction by poachers. Invasive species can also be devastating to native flora. An exotic weevil has imperiled our native bromeliads, and once the invasive aquatic plant Hydrilla (*Hydrilla verticillata*) is established in a body of water, it can completely alter the entire ecosystem.

Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc. recognizes that our native plant communities are indispensable to our rich natural biodiversity. To ensure the resiliency and long-term viability of native plants, Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc. supports the following goals:

To Conserve Native Plants

- Strengthen the federal Endangered Species Act to extend greater regulatory protection to plant species
- Update the Florida Regulated Plant Index continuously to identify threatened, endangered or commercially exploited species
- Broaden the Preservation of Native Flora of Florida statute to provide for a more comprehensive protection of rare plants species
- Retain representation on the Endangered Plant Advisory Council to actively advocate for effective conservation of imperiled plant species
- Increase funding for rare plant research and conservation efforts

To Protect Plant Habitat

- Support the Threatened and Endangered Plant Conservation Grants Program, which provides funding for conservation research and habitat restoration for state-listed species not covered by the federal Endangered Species Act
- Advance understanding of ecosystem needs by expanding surveying, sampling, monitoring and peer reviewed research to better determine conservation measures and requirements necessary to the survival of native plants
- Educate landowners, land managers and landscape professionals to the advantages of planting or landscaping with nursery-propagated indigenous plants

Charter Member of National Garden Clubs, Inc.

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