

[HOME](#)[ABOUT US](#)[WILDFLOWERS](#)[NATIVE PLANTS](#)[VENDORS](#)[NEWS & EDUCATION](#)[RESEARCH](#)[BLOG](#)**Tallahassee Democrat**  
**Tallahassee.com**

Article published Oct 8, 2006

## Local woman wants Florida to be wild about wildflowers

*Gerald Ensley*

You know the saying: As the twig is bent, so grows the tree.  
It applies to wildflowers as well.

At least, that's part of the reason Joanna Booth wound up in the vanguard of the new Florida wildflower industry. She had the example of her father, the late Chuck Salter.

"I definitely draw a parallel with what Dad was doing with the native-plant industry in the 1970s and wildflowers," Booth said. "Upsy Daisy was at the beginning of our being aware of the native plants around us."



Longtime Tallahasseeans will remember Chuck Salter as one of the members of the whimsically named Upsy Daisy Plant Uplift Society. The other two members were from this newspaper: the late editor Editor Malcolm Johnson and a now-retired city editor, Paul Wills.

The three men were enthusiastic botanists who spent weekends tramping around the North Florida woods. In the early 1970s, the trio organized a series of community "digs" to rescue native plants about to be bulldozed away by construction of Interstate 10.

There were a total of 15 digs, which attracted an estimated 40,000 participants - including famed journalist Charles Kuralt, who filmed one of his "On the Road" segments at a dig. More than 100,000 trees and shrubs were hauled away - and thousands of native dogwood, sweetgum and crabapple trees, plus native azalea, rhododendron and chokeberry bushes still thrive in Tallahassee yards three decades later.

"You name it, (the diggers) saved it," said Gary Henry, executive director of the Florida Wildflower Foundation. "The plants are all over town now - and no one would know they were dug up in the woods."

Salter, who died in 2002, followed up on that success. A retired military officer and forester, he turned his pine-tree farm near Madison into a native-tree-and-shrub nursery. Salter pioneered the commercial sales of native plants and became a mentor to businesses that followed, including Tallahassee's popular Native Nurseries. After his death, his oldest child, Booth, took over his Salter Tree and Herb Farm. And recently, she has branched out into a new native-plant industry: wildflowers.

Wildflowers are, well, wildly popular in Florida. The Department of Transportation plants them on highway medians. The Department of Environmental Protection and water-management districts plant them along retention ponds and water banks. Civic and gardening groups landscape public areas with them. Wildflowers protect the soil while providing visual beauty.

But for years, most planted wildflowers in Florida have been imported: They were purchased from other states, such as Texas and California, because Florida had a paucity of commercial wildflower growers.

Importing raised issues. Non-native wildflowers don't prosper as well as native plants and run the risk of becoming invasive predators (see also: kudzu, Chinese tallow trees, Japanese climbing ferns). Importing plants costs more, and some questioned the appropriateness of beautifying with non-native plants when Florida is rife with natural wildflowers.

So Florida officials set out to correct the situation. In 2000, the Florida Legislature approved a Florida Wildflower automobile license plate, the proceeds of which are used for grants to state growers to raise wildflowers commercially. Last year, wildflower tags ranked 22nd in sales among the 104 styles of Florida license plates and raised \$600,000, almost all of it spent on grants.

One of the chief aims of the state initiative is to raise wildflowers for seed. Henry said container wildflowers run about \$3 apiece, while "10 pounds of seed can cover a mile eight feet wide."

Booth is one of the state-encouraged growers. In 2005, she received a \$15,000 grant from the Florida Wildlife Foundation to grow the pastel-colored Phlox pilosa. This year, she received a \$25,000 grant to grow the increasingly rare Phlox nivalis. She also received a \$5,000 grant to plant Phlox pilosa in three public areas in Madison.

Booth is already marketing four or five types of wildflower seeds at several Big Bend locations (see [www.saltertreeandherbfarm.com](http://www.saltertreeandherbfarm.com)), and ultimately hopes to market a dozen types of wildflower seeds.

"Right now we're in a situation of trying to attract more growers, which is a twist," she said. "Normally, people try to create a demand for their product, but now a product is being created to meet a demand that already exists."

Raising wildflowers has rejuvenated Booth, 57, who lost her taste for nursery operations during a seven-year stint in Kentucky raising traditional garden plants. A longtime Tallahassee massage therapist, she reluctantly agreed to take over her father's farm after his death but was determined to take it in new directions.

The wildflower program provided the spark. She revels in the subtle beauty of the wildflowers, the daily battles with wildlife who feast on them - and the opportunity to follow her father in spreading enthusiasm for Florida's native plants.

"This fledgling industry is beginning to take off because of the interest and support of the public for wildflowers," she said. "Wildflowers are beautiful; they just make people feel good."



**JOANNA BOOTH** /Special to the Democrat  
Phlox pilosa is one of the wildflowers that Joanna Booth of Madison earned a state grant to grow.

***SALTER HERB & TREE FARM MADISON, FLORIDA (850) 973-3575 [JOANNA@SALTERTREEANDHERBFARM.COM](mailto:JOANNA@SALTERTREEANDHERBFARM.COM)***

© 2006 Salter Tree & Herb Farm. All contents copyrighted. All rights reserved.