

Wildflowers add more than ‘wow!’



Native wild flowers are perfect for Florida landscapes because they thrive in local conditions.

BY ANN M. O'PHELAN |
Published: April 3, 2013
Highlands Today
Central Florida's Agri-Leader

Happening upon a field of colorful wildflowers can be a magnificent sight. Not to mention, it's the perfect opportunity for that Kodak moment.

As wonderous as wildflowers are — with their yellows, oranges, reds, purples, pinks, and blue hues — their purpose on the planet goes much further than just pleasing the eye.

“The most important role of our native wildflowers is that they provide habitat for the pollinators that put 30 percent of the food on our tables. Through this task, they play a huge role in supporting our multi-billion-dollar agricultural industry,” said Lisa Roberts, executive director, Florida Wildflower Foundation (FWF).

Florida's agricultural industry is a big industry indeed. In fact, in 2009, Florida ranked seventh in the nation in all crops with cash receipts of \$6 billion, and 13th in total cash receipts.

Besides helping Florida' agriculture, the state's second largest industry, wildflowers also help reduce water and air pollution, provide habitat for a variety of wildlife species and beautify communities. When planted on roadsides, they also help control erosion, decrease mowing and add beauty to the drive.

The Florida Wildflower Foundation's mission is to enrich lives with Florida native wildflowers through education, planting and research projects, some of which can be found nearby.

"We have demonstration gardens at the Central Florida Zoo & Botanical Garden in Sanford, and at the Harry P. Leu Gardens in Orlando," said Roberts, who also mentioned that they have sponsored wildflower planting and management on Florida's Turnpike. The foundation also offers La Florida, "Land of Flowers," community grants, Seeds for Schools grants, and Learn-to-Plant count grants, for roadside flowers.

Because wildflowers support crop pollinators it is imperative to conserve them. While wildflowers used to be more plentiful, due to the loss of natural lands, the populations are diminishing.

"Preserving roadside wildflowers and growing them in our landscapes are simple things we can do that will pay big dividends," said Roberts.

The Florida Wildflower Foundation plays a huge role in helping wildflowers continue to please our senses and in helping maintain habitat for pollinators, and you can assist the foundation in a few ways: By purchasing a license plate (http://flawildflowers.org/buy_it_here.php), making a donation, or becoming a member (starting at \$15).

While you may have long-thought wildflowers were just for the wild, they make the perfect addition to many landscapes, or gardens, for many reasons; they are colorful, easy-to-care for, and require little maintenance.

"Because they've adapted over thousands of years to Florida's unique climate, they can require less water in landscapes – depending on the plant and site chosen," said Roberts, who further explained that typically wildflowers require little or no fertilizer and herbicides.

Right now, blooming in Central Florida are: Blanket Flowers (from the sunflower family—1-3 feet tall with brilliantly colored oranges, yellows and reds), Beach Sunflowers (2-4 feet tall with bright yellow flowers that look like small sunflowers), Tropical Sage (up to 3 feet tall with bright red, two-lipped flowers), Sunshine Mimosa (low growing groundcover with pinkish globular heads), and Lyre-Leafed Sage (16-24 inches tall with blue or violet tubular flowers). You can find out what is blooming in different counties throughout Florida by visiting: <http://flawildflowers.org/bloom.php>

If you are looking to add wildflowers to your landscape, or garden, try visiting the Florida Association of Native Nurseries' website for a county-specific list of available plants:

<http://www.plantrealflorida.org/county/highlands>. There are also a variety of wildflowers species offered by native plant nurseries, along with seeds. Seeds can also be purchased at: www.floridawildflowers.com. You can find out about how to make your wildflowers bloom best by visiting: <http://flawildflowers.org/planting.php>