

**Public Invited to Feb. 3  
Workshop about Native Plants  
At SFCC DeSoto Campus**

Anyone interested in seeing, feeling, and smelling Florida native plants appropriate for residential and commercial landscapes is invited to a Florida-Friendly Native Plants Workshop and Plant Sale scheduled for 8:30 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 3 at the DeSoto Campus of South Florida Community College. Registration will begin at 8 a.m.

The workshop is free and open to the public. Each participant will be given a gallon-sized native plant, along with refreshments. Sponsors will provide documents including practical information participants can take home and read. In addition, there will be limited door prizes of rain barrels, and coupons offered by a local nursery specializing in native plant material.

This event is offered in partnership with the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program, the Peace River Basin Board of the Southwest Florida Water Management District, SFCC, DeSoto County Parks & Recreation, Pine Lily Nursery, Deluxe Trees & Shrubs, and many others.

Native plant landscapes can be beautiful, conserve water, protect the environment, provide more dependable wildlife habitat and are generally maintenance free, compared to the more familiar species commonly planted in Florida's subtropical regions. Native plants are already adapted to Florida's poor soils, tolerate the state's high winds, heavy rainfalls and dry periods, and don't require the high level of fertilizers and pesticides needed to maintain unadapted species.

Native plants tend to be more maintenance free because they are naturally resistant to plant diseases and pests, are already adapted to Florida's poor soils, tolerate high winds, heavy

rains and extended droughts. If selected correctly for the right landscape, native plants can help create a sustainable environment for both home and commercial areas. They can also provide much-needed habitat for Florida wildlife, including hummingbirds and butterflies – which further enhance the landscape.

Among those scheduled to give presentations are expert commercial growers of Florida-friendly and native plants, who will share their decades of personal experience with adapted plant material that is all around us, yet remains a novel sight in planned landscapes. The SFCC DeSoto SFCC campus has been planted with native plants and serves as an ongoing demonstration site for visitors.

Tom Heitzman of Parrish, co-president of the Association of Florida Native Nurseries and board member of the Florida Native Plant Society, will be leading discussion of the available varieties and use of native plants. Heitzman has been a Florida nurseryman for 25 years and since 1994 has owned and operated Sweet Bay Nursery, a wholesale nursery that also installs native landscapes and creates butterfly gardens.

Also attending will be a representative of the Peace River Basin Board of the Southwest Florida Water Management District, which will provide handbooks and plant lists from the district's Florida Yards and Neighborhoods program.

The day's agenda includes an overview of the principles of creating Florida-Friendly yards, a discussion of how even small neighborhood parcels contribute to watershed health, a review of samples of native landscapes, and the announcement of winners of a writing contest organized by the DeSoto Public Library for local residents addressing why they favor a specific native plant.

Participants will be treated to an interactive presentation showing how Florida-friendly plants can be integrated into a home landscape. Visitors will be invited to buy additional specimens of native plants brought to the workshop by operators of local native plant nurseries, Pine Lily Nursery and Deluxe Trees and Shrubs. Professional growers from both will be on hand to answer questions about the use of specific plants participants may want to try at home.

Randall Hand, owner of Sun State landscaping, will conclude the program by providing participants with information about available careers in landscaping.

The campus demonstration site includes plantings of wild allamanda, greeneyes, salvia coccinea, native porterweed, wiregrass, pineland dropseed, native basil, goldenrod, coontie, pennyroyal, wax myrtle, pineland heliotrope, rusty lyonia, and bluestem. Maps identifying the plants will be available.

For more information about the Feb. 3 workshop, contact the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program at (239) 993-1757, or visit the program's Website at [www;CHNEP.org](http://www.CHNEP.org).

The SFCC Desoto campus is located at 2251 N.E. Turner Ave., Arcadia, two miles north of S.R. 70 and two miles south of U.S. 17.