

Native Plants Provide Landscape for Wildlife

by JOE SCHAEFER
IFAS Urban Wildlife Extension Specialist

WHILE you are deciding how to create the best beauty and balance with your plantings this spring, don't forget to add a little flavor for the butterflies, birds and other wild neighbors that you enjoy. You can make your yard a popular dining and nesting place by selecting trees, shrubs, and flowers that wildlife naturally use for food and shelter.

Joe Schaefer, urban wildlife specialist at the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, said, "Florida's native animals have evolved in habitats with native plants. If you recreate a portion of these natural areas, wildlife will use it more than if you provide something unfamiliar and of little benefit to

them," Schaefer said. "Try to blend in your yard with its natural surroundings. Take a look at your neighborhood and see how it compares with a natural area nearby. Is the number and distribution of pines or oaks similar? If so, concentrate on providing other plants which occur in the natural area but are lacking in your neighborhood. And arrange them in clumps or as single specimens according to the way they are spaced in the wild."

Schaefer said native plants have few problems with local insects, diseases and temperatures, so growing these species usually requires little care so long as they are matched to your soil and light conditions.

"You don't have to create a jungle," said the IFAS professor. A well manicured lawn can still be a welcome mat for wildlife visitors that will provide hours of entertainment. Most yards attractive to native animals also are appealing to people."

Schaefer said, "These environments stimulate our creativity and imagination. For example, children playing on a swing set are limited in what they can do. But there are countless adventures and discoveries in a yard full of wildlife nesting and feeding opportunities."

For details, he recommends "Planting a Refuge for Wildlife," free from your local county IFAS Extension or Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission offices. ■

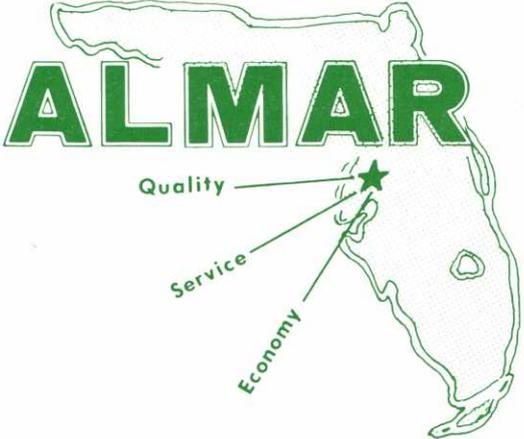


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