

Deerfield Beach Goes Native!

by Nicole Langlois, City of Deerfield Beach

After the 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons, the City of Deerfield Beach was recovering from multiple hurricanes and tropical storms. Many of the invasive non-native plants used in the past had suffered the greatest storm impacts. These circumstances led the city to undertake an environmental, horticultural, and arboricultural education program with the overall goal of informing residents about the environmental benefits of choosing native plants over non-native invasive ones.

In 2006 the City of Deerfield Beach received a Kathy Craddock Burks Education and Outreach Grant from the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council (FLEPPC). The FLEPPC grant was used to reproduce the Citizens for a Better South Florida's bilingual guidebook, "*Go Native!: a pocket guide to choosing Florida natives over commonly found exotics.*" The guidebook employs a fun and colorful layout to highlight 29 plant species and two landscape scenarios in a contrasting "Plant this... instead of this..." format, facilitating the often-difficult task of distinguishing between similar native and exotic species. The guidebook targets the following Category I plants: *Albizia lebeck*, *Bauhinia variegata*, *Eugenia uniflora*, *Lantana camara*, *Nephrolepis cordifolia*, *Schinus terebinthifolius*, and *Tradescantia spathacea*. Category II plants include: *Terminalia catappa*, and *Washingtonia robusta*. Additional targets are overused non-native species that provide little benefit to wildlife: *Ficus benjamina*, *Araucaria heterophylla*, *Ixora coccinea*, *Liriope muscari*, and *Zamia furfuracea*.

The *Go Native!* guidebooks were distributed at all City of Deerfield Beach sponsored events, monthly environmental education seminars (held at the City's International Fishing Pier), and at the Public Works and Environmental Services building. The guidebook complements Broward County's NatureScape program, which encourages the use of native plants in landscaping. One of the primary goals of the NatureScape program is to reduce water usage and improve water quality. Properly located, native plants generally require little supplemental watering once established, conserving water while maintaining a healthy landscape.

Distributed at random with the *Go Native!* guidebook was a brief survey requesting the individual's opinion of the guidebook, their gardening practices, and various other information pertaining to native and non-native invasive plants. Although return rates were very low, survey results were as follows:

- 100% of survey participants found the *Go Native!* guidebook helpful.
- 79% of participants changed their landscaping practices due to the guidebook.
- 14% of participants had 4-6 native plant species included in their landscaping.

- 71% of participants stated they would add Florida native plants to their current landscaping due to the guidebook.
- 100% of participants found the pruning information included in the guidebook helpful.
- 86% of participants wanted more information on tree care.
- 100% of participants stated they would recommend the guidebook to others.

Based on survey results, the *Go Native!* guidebook was effective in educating some residents about the benefits of native landscaping. Recipients were informed of the benefits of selecting environmentally-friendly, native plant species over exotics such as: providing shelter and food for animals, conserving water and saving money, reducing the use of pesticides and fertilizers, establishing a more hurricane-resistant landscape and preserving our sense of place by utilizing plant species that are unique to our region. Many residents are eager to receive more information regarding tree care. Feedback from the surveys showed residents are interested in information on: pruning trees, why topping hurts trees, recognizing tree hazards, and hiring an arborist. The City of Deerfield Beach plans to implement additional educational measures utilizing the information received from the survey results.

Residents were not the only beneficiaries from this grant. The City has built a successful partnership with the Citizens for a Better South Florida, the bilingual *Go Native!* guidebook has helped to establish relationships with the community that the City hopes to expand upon, and the guidebook and survey results have paved the way for ongoing educational programs through seminars and brochures.

The City of Deerfield Beach would like to thank FLEPPC for the opportunity to establish successful relations with the Citizens for a Better South Florida and to reconnect with the residents of Deerfield Beach. Through the funding provided by FLEPPC, the City of Deerfield Beach was able to continue in our commitment to provide environmental education, city-wide beautification, and tree planting and preservation programs.

For more information on the programs mentioned in this report, visit these sites: <http://www.abettersouthflorida.org/GoNative/index.htm> and <http://www.broward.org/naturescape/>

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