

Website lists best plants for your zip code



FPG/submitted photo
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Choose native plants to benefit the environment while saving money

Native landscaping can be as simple as planting a single shrub or as involved as recreating an indigenous habitat. Small or large scale, the benefits reach beyond a city yard.

Native landscaping strengthens the greater South Florida ecosystem by providing food and shelter for birds and butterflies. In the face of rising sea levels and climate change, natives boost migration outcomes for wildlife while reducing demands on natural resources.

"Native species are adapted to the precise climate, soils and other growing conditions unique to a given area," said George Gann, chief conservationist at the Institute for Regional Conservation.

Homeowners are among the biggest winners.

"The benefits to the homeowner include saving money by using fewer pesticides and fertilizers and conserving water. Native plants require less maintenance, increase wildlife viewing and are more resilient to hurricanes," Gann said.

Anyone can choose native plants for their yard with the information found in "Natives for Your Neighborhood." The institute's free online tool lists all types of greenery, organized by zip codes. Locating one plant to fill a gap or creating an authentic habitat is just a keystroke away.

"It's designed so a person with no background on native plants can find useful information and lead to further research," Gann said.

A search by zip code pulls up scores of possibilities. Many on the list have notations to distinguish plants that are readily available from hard-to-find choices. An advanced search option gives light preference, soil, form, drought tolerance, fruit, wildlife attractant and flowering choices.

A wildlife search shows butterflies and the plants that attract them. A habitat search explores large-scale gardening. It's useful for ecological restoration projects.

For a regional website, "Natives for Your Neighborhood" is popular with 10,000 page views per week. But it's underutilized in [Palm Beach County](#), since the institute moved to Delray Beach from Miami two years ago.

"We have four times as many users in Miami-Dade," Gann said. He's also working to bridge the gap between the consumer and supplier.

Jeff Nurge, owner of Native Choice Nursery in Boynton Beach, said he sees customers who have a desire to bring nature into their yard or be environmentally friendly.

"Nothing attracts butterflies better than native plants," said Nurge, also a guest columnist for Forum Publishing Group.

At his nursery, he'll advise novices on the right species for their space. He also takes requests for lesser-known plants and often makes a match when a wholesaler has a rare find.

Gann invites nurseries and landscapers to can join the site's "Find Native Plants" listing.

"I hope to expand the list so no matter where you are in South Florida, you can go to the website and find native plants in your area and vendors that have the plants for sale," Gann said.

Visit RegionalConservation.org/beta/nfyn.

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