



Serenoa Notes

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The Serenoa Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society

April, 2008

2008 FNPS Annual Conference in Manatee County

Eleven Reasons Why You Should Go:

1. You can sign up for just one day—hear great speakers, meet other native plant enthusiasts and the price includes a great lunch!
2. You will want to come to the plant sale anyway! (Fri. and Sat. only)
3. It is in your backyard—no hotel fees!
4. It is in your backyard—if you have never been to a conference this is the one to go to.
5. Don't be intimidated by the speaker's title of the talk—they are much more relaxed and not so technical as they sound.
6. You have three tracks of speakers to listen to. If you are not happy with the one you picked, leave and go to another one.
7. Many vendors, selling books, art, crafts, jewelry, clothing and more!
8. Silent auction with a lot of great stuff from binoculars to hotel stays. (auction ends 1:30 Sat)
9. Many exhibitors giving away free information and stuff.
10. There is a great children's program, so you do not need to leave your kids!
11. You will learn so much and really exercise your brain!

Conference Field Trips are Filling Up, so if you haven't already registered, please do so ASAP to get a space on that great trip you've been planning. Don't wait till the last minute—trips will be filled and you'll miss out.

Register online easily and immediately at: <https://www.eventville.com/Catalog/EventRegistration1.asp?Eventid=1003337>

Conference brochures were mailed to members a few weeks ago, but if you need to refresh yourself on the many wonderful offerings, you can do so at: http://www.fnps.org/pages/programs/programpg_no_pic.php?keyword=Conference

Monthly meetings at Selby Gardens:

Every third Monday. Doors open at 7:00 p.m, business meeting at 7:30, followed by program. Everyone welcome!

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Atala hairstreak butterfly



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Visit our chapter on the Florida
Native Plant society website:

www.fnps.org

Add your email address to the
FNPS eco-action alert list by send-
ing an email to info@fnps.org

Zamia –Paul Wills

Zamia is a little dinosaur of a native plant which avoided near-eradication in Florida and coastal Georgia by being a food plant for Indians and white pioneers, and went on to a fantastic boom today in landscaping.

Along the way it earned a special place in state history for setting the location of the city of Fort Lauderdale.

Zamia pumila, common name coontie, is Florida's only native cycad, an ancient plant group that traces back 250 million years or more and not related to today's flowering trees and plants. The sago palm is another cycad. Coontie's rubbery, orange seeds grow outside a reddish cone just above ground level. Pollination from male to female is by a weevil.

In nature, all parts are poisonous to people, but it is the host plant for the atala hairstreak butterfly. There is no other native plant even vaguely like coontie; its nearest relatives are in Mexico and Cuba and they are very different. The Mexican cycad is larger, coarser, stiffer and sometimes planted in local landscaping under the name "cardboard palm."

Despite its checkered past, *Z. pumila* survived its earlier destruction to grab the fancy of homeowners because it is low-growing, evergreen and perfect as a transition from low to high landscaping. Large red scale is one of its few threats but this is easily spotted and controlled with sprays. It won't stand wet soil but tolerates salt spray very well.

Tufts of leaves, a little like trunkless palm fronds, grow from a large, starchy bulb-like root which is its underground stem. The poisons are of several kinds, but the Seminoles knew how to grate the flesh and wash it repeatedly to remove the poisons and release the starch. Which went into various foods, one of them the well-known sofkee.

The name coontie is a slight variation of the Seminoles name *konte* for the plant. In botany, besides *Z. pumila*, you might also find it labeled *Z. integrifolia* or *Z. floridana* and even a few others.

It grew thickly in Eastern Florida and a heavy concentration was found in present-day Broward and Dade counties. A commercial plant existed in Miami as late as 1911 to extract the starch as Florida arrowroot for food and medical usages.

Let Dan Austin, in his monumental book, *Florida Ethnobotany*, tell how coontie fixed the location for Fort Lauderdale. In the early 1830s, he said, a white family of several members and slaves established a farm along Fort Lauderdale's present-day Middle River, then called *Coonti Hatchee* by the local tribes. The settlers began harvesting large quantities of the coontie, so valued by the Indians for its abundant, high quality starch. In 1836 the Indians wiped out the farm, killing the mother and three children and freeing the slaves. The father happened to be absent that day. Several other plantations—mostly harvesting *Zamia*—north to St. Augustine, also were destroyed, leading to Florida's Second Seminole War. In 1838, Maj. William Lauderdale and his Tennessee Volunteers marched to the Coonti Hatchee River

and built the fort that was the nucleus of today's Fort Lauderdale.

As long as it was feasible for profit, white settlers in Florida and Georgia continued digging the wild plants until they were nearly eradicated.

But some years ago, landscapers realized its value in beautification and learned the secrets of propagating it from seeds, not a simple task because the seeds are protected by the rubbery coat—also highly poisonous—that is slow to rot away and delaying germination by years. Ways to remove the troublesome coat are known now and native *Zamia* adorn thousands of yards in Florida. It can be bought in most plant nurseries and is particularly popular for modern commercial and governmental buildings.

Plants grown in pots are best for planting rather than digging and transplanting from the wild, for the coontie bulb ranges deep and pretty wide, needing well-drained soil. And be sure to plant it where you'll always want it, for it is virtually impossible to move safely. Heights of different forms can vary from one to four feet, and some good kinds form big clusters that may or may not be what is wanted. So when selecting this very interesting little native, be sure it fits your wishes.



Coontie, *Zamia pumila*

G. ALLEN

Welcome New Members!

Kenneth Armstrong, Sarasota
Shawn Gelestor, Sarasota
Wendy West, Bradenton
Steve Perosky, St. Petersburg
Anita West-Lewis, Bradenton

Join now! Come to the meetings and field trips! Learn about conservation, restoration of native habitat, and landscaping with native plants.

Florida Native Plant Society Membership benefits: *Serenoa Notes* quarterly newsletter • Member discounts at events
• 1 year subscription to *The Palmetto*, a quarterly magazine • *Sabal Minor* bi-monthly newsletter

FNPS Membership Enrollment

Serenoa Chapter Newsletter

Name _____ E-mail _____ Phone (day) _____

Street _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Membership number, if renewing _____ Life: \$ 1000 Donor: \$ 250 Business: \$ 100

Supporting: \$ 100 Contributing: \$ 75 Nonprofit: \$ 50 Family: \$ 50 Individual/Renewal: \$ 35

Individual/New or Gift Membership: \$ 25 Full-time student: \$ 15 Library: \$ 15

Payment: Check/MO Visa MC Discover

Check/Money Order # _____ Please do not mail cash. Make checks payable to: FNPS

Credit Card # _____ - _____ - _____ - _____ Exp Date _____ 3-digit CV code on back _____

Name on card _____

Billing address & zip code if different from above _____

Credit card payments can be faxed to 815-361-9166, or mail this form to: FNPS P.O. Box 278 Melbourne, FL 32902-0000

Events Calendar

Monthly general meetings at Selby Gardens: Every third Monday, Sept. through May at 7:00 P.M.; speaker begins at 7:30. Selby Botanical Gardens Activity Center, 811 South Palm Avenue, Sarasota. Everyone welcome!

Carpool Meeting Points: BRADENTON: Twelve Oaks Plaza, Bank of America building, on SR 70, ¼ mile west of I-75.
SARASOTA: Durango's Steakhouse, in the mall on the NE corner of Fruitville Road & Honore Avenue.

Classes: UF/IFAS Sarasota and Manatee County Extension offers a variety of classes that may be of interest to you. Check out the Sarasota website <http://sarasota.extension.ufl.edu> or call 941-861-9900 or the Manatee website <http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu/calendar.shtml>

See below for PLANT SALES!

April 19 Earth Day Celebration Felts' Audubon Preserve, Manatee County, 9 A.M. to 3 P.M., 4600 24th Ave E., Palmetto. Manatee Audubon will host Earth. Serenoa Chapter will be selling native plants! There will be exhibits from many environmental groups, children's activities and guided walks. The preserve has a bird blind and last year's highlight was a Painted Bunting. <http://www.manateeaudubon.org> VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

20 Earth Day Celebration Oscar Scherer State Park, Sarasota County, 10 A.M. to 5 P.M., 1823 S. Tamiami Tr., Osprey. Sarasota County's Earth Day Festival. Many environmental exhibits, guided walks, children's activities, live music, food, ice cream and a place for the kids to swim. Come join the fun. <http://www.floridastateparks.org/oscarscherer/default.cfm>

May 15-18 FNPS Annual Conference, Manatee County Convention (aka Civic) Center, One Haben Blvd, Palmetto. Hosted by Serenoa, Mangrove, Pinellas and Suncoast Chapters. SPEAKERS, FIELD TRIPS, NATURE ARTS & CRAFTS, BOOK SALES. Also NATIVE PLANT SALES—over ten native plant vendors. Plant sales 8 A.M. to 6 P.M., Friday and Saturday ONLY. Open to the public.

May 19 General Meeting FNPS Annual Conference Wrap-up 7 P.M. Bring wine as committee members and volunteers will be so happy the conference is over (*just kidding*).

June 8 World Ocean Day Family Festival—Monte Marine Lab. 11 A.M. to 2 P.M. www.mote.org



**The Serenoa Chapter
of the Florida Native
Plant Society**

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www.fnps.org