2008 Plants of the Year

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For January 31, 2007
Tallahassee Democrat

The Florida Nursery Growers and Landscape Association (FNGLA) recently announced their 2008 selections for Florida Plants of the Year. The Florida Plants of the Year program is designed to promote the use of superior and proven Florida plants.

The almond bush, *Aloysia virgata*, is a small tree or large shrub reaching about 12 feet high and 14 feet wide.

This sweetly fragrant, vigorous, drought-tolerant, upright-growing tree/shrub from South America produces finger-like spiked clusters of small white almond-scented flowers. With an extended bloom period, this shrub is a good nectar source. The branches are slightly weeping. To keep this tree/shrub looking its best, prune between bloom cycles for bushier and denser growth. In our zone 8, this plant dies down with a freeze and regrows as a 3 to 4 foot shrub.

Blue ginger, *Dichorisandra thrysiflora*, is a perennial that can reach 8 feet tall and 3 feet wide.

Deep purplish-blue blooms grow on 6 inch spikes in summer and fall. Tropical glossy green foliage with stiff succulent stems spread slowly underground creating a dense mass with a tremendous show of blooms. While commonly referred to as blue ginger, “ginger” is a misnomer as the *Dichorisandra* is actually related to the wandering jew. Growing well in part to full shade with moist, well-drained soil, mealy bugs are its only significant pest issue.
*Mimosa strigillosa* is a ground cover with a mature height of 6 to 9 inches and a spread of 3 to 5 feet.

This reliable and vigorous low-grower is native and drought tolerant growing in moist or dry soils. It produces pink ball-shaped flowers in warmer seasons which attract butterflies and provide butterfly larva with food. The foliage is delicate-looking with small compound leaves which draw back when touched, yet are durable enough to walk on, park on, drive on and even mow. In sun or shade, it grows best when well watered and grows well intermingled with sod. With virtually no major insect or disease problems, this ground cover is a winner.

The sand live oak, *Quercus geminata*, typically reaches about 20 to 30 feet tall with a 15 to 20 feet spread. Similar to southern live oak but smaller in stature, this salt and drought tolerant, Florida native tree has an irregular growth habit and spreading canopy. Some forms are tree-like and some may form a thicket. The dark green cupped leaves are distinctly boat shaped with whitish gray on the undersides. The acorns are sought by wildlife. The sand live oak has proven severe storm durability making it an ideal tree for Florida’s sometimes stormy weather.

The dwarf palmetto, *Sabal minor*, is a shrubby palm with a mature height and spread of 4 to 6 feet. *Sabal minor* is one of the most durable cold tolerant palms in the world. This Southeast native is a small, drought-tolerant palm with fan-shaped fronds. The foliage is green to blue-green and long stalks of white flowers produce small black fruits enjoyed by wildlife. It grows in very moist to dry soils in shade or in sun. The dwarf palmetto usually appears trunk-less due to its subterranean trunk and adds a great native touch when a smaller scaled plant is needed.
For their indoor plant selection, FNGLA chose *Stromanthe sanguinea* ‘Triostar’. ‘Triostar’ is a striking upright foliage plant that is grown mainly for its beautiful coloration. The oblong leaves are thick and glossy and variegated with white, green, and reddish-pink coloring. ‘Triostar’ is very eye-catching and thrives as an indoor plant as well as having outdoor shade applications throughout Florida. In North Florida, ‘Triostar’ should be used as an annual. Caterpillars and slugs may pose an issue as well as leaf-burn in full sun.

High resolution images of the 2008 Florida Plants of the Year are available online at http://ftp.fngla.org/2008FloridaPlantsoftheYear/.