

Protecting Plants



Naples Botanical Garden's 90-acre Preserve harbors more than 400 native Southwest Florida species and includes six unique Southwest Florida ecosystems. This on-site conservation land is a rarity among botanical gardens. Here, it serves as a living laboratory, a refuge for plants and wildlife, and an opportunity for guests to experience Florida's wilderness without venturing deep into the wild.



Land Management

Protecting native plants begins with a well-managed habitat. In 2023, Garden conservationists launched a prescribed fire regimen, reintroducing this critical element to our natural areas. Many Southwest Florida ecosystems depend on fire for everything from removing dead organic matter to managing the spread of invasive species to prompting the growth of new plants. Using boots-on-the-ground scrutiny and drone technology, the team monitors for invasive plants such as shoe-button ardisia (*Ardisia elliptica*), Brazilian peppertree (*Schinus terebinthifolius*), and Caesarweed (*Urena lobata*) and prevents them from overrunning Florida natives.

Noteworthy Natives

The Garden's natural areas contain rare coastal scrub habitat, where state-endangered species such as Curtiss' milkweed (*Asclepias curtissii*) flourish. This elevated ecosystem was once prevalent in South Florida but mostly has been lost to development. Milkweed is a favorite food for wildlife during its blooming season. Netted pawpaw (*Asimina reticulata*) grows throughout the Preserve. This plant is a "crop wild relative," or botanical cousin to the cultivated pawpaw fruit (*Asimina triloba*). Increasingly, scientists cross cultivated crops with their wild-growing relatives to increase the plants' tolerance to drought, pests, temperature extremes, and other stressors.

Other notable native plants include the giant airplant (*Tillandsia utriculata*), which is state endangered because of an invasive insect. The Preserve also supports populations of yellow milkwort (*Polygala rugelii*), a species that can only be found in our state. It is not conserved in any back-up collection outside of its habitat but faces mounting pressure from changing weather patterns and saltwater intrusion.

Wildlife Habitat

A healthy ecosystem also supports the numerous animals, reptiles, pollinators, and birds that call the Garden home. Gopher tortises, considered threatened in Florida, routinely dig burrows in the Preserve. Birders have recorded 215 avian species. Our trail cameras document mammals such as deer and bobcats and occasionally glimpse an endangered Florida panther.



Asimina reticulata



Asclepias curtissii



Pileated woodpecker



Gopher tortoise