



Wild

about

Wildflowers

a Photo Essay by Skip Lowery

After all, it's where we live, "the land of flowers" – Florida – and when Ponce de Leon named it that in 1513 he was talking about wildflowers, not potted geraniums and rose gardens. It was Spring, Easter season in fact; native vegetation on the sand dunes was regenerating, the land beyond dappled with color. Some say De Leon was in our old neighborhood at the time, having entered America through "Ponce" Inlet.

Maybe. If so, we can only imagine what he saw, and then wonder, as Pete Seeger sang, "Where have all the flowers gone?"

In fact a lot of people have wondered, and are working hard to bring them back – through the Florida Native Plant Society, for example, and in 2001 with the creation of the Florida Wildflower Foundation. FWF uses membership fees, donations, and income from the sale of State Wildflower vehicle tags to restore Florida's wildflowers and to educate the public on their importance. The Foundation recently donated \$100,000 to the University of Florida for native wildflower research, and continues to work with UF and other state organizations on projects like the annual Florida Wildflower Festival in DeLand.

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Such events demonstrate the crucial role of wildflowers in home and civic landscaping. As FWF executive director Lisa Roberts stated in a recent issue of FWF's newsletter, native plants and grasses "...have adapted to Florida's weather and soil conditions; they are easier to grow and sustain than many exotic plant species." Roberts' hope is that more widespread use of native plants will help relieve the drain on Florida's dwindling water supply.

She also notes how wildflowers can play a role in Florida tourism: "Fall wildflowers can be our Fall leaves," she explains. One goal of state and local wildflower organizations, therefore, is to convince county and city governments to change the practice of mowing down native plants on roadsides and to seed highway medians with native vegetation. Because eco-tourism is particularly gaining in popularity, wildflowers can add an aesthetic draw to bike trails and scenic drives like West Volusia's River of Lakes Heritage Corridor.

Who knows, if efforts like the above take effect, Ponce De Leon's Florida may once again live up to its name.

Those interested in knowing more about the aesthetic and practical value of Florida's native wildflowers can contact FWF online at:
www.floridawildflowerfoundation.org and
www.floridawildflowerfoundation.blogspot.com

