

# Native Plants of the Wildlife Drive



J.N. *Ding* Darling  
National Wildlife Refuge



**Please note: harvesting or eating plants, flowers, or fruits growing on refuge property is illegal.**

Native plants are protected by federal law. Information on edibility and human use is included for educational purposes only.

Outside the refuge, never eat parts of any wild plant unless you are **100%** confident of the identification.

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\*Larval host data indicates how many species of moths or butterflies feed on the plant as caterpillars.

## Aloe Yucca, *Yucca aloifolia*

Look for this visually striking plant growing along the side of the wildlife drive. Also known as Spanish Bayonet, this Yucca species is known for its sharp, dagger-like leaves.

Wildlife use: fruit eaten by mammals and flowers enjoyed by pollinators.

Human use: soap and shampoo made from roots, rope and string made from leaves, edible fruits present from October-December.

Larval host to **17** species of moths or butterflies.





## Black Mangrove, *Avicennia germinans*

One of the most common trees along the drive, Black Mangrove is most easily recognized by its root system. Look for finger-like projections, known as *pneumatophores*, extending upwards from the soil in wet areas.

Wildlife use: ecosystem engineer species providing extensive shelter and feeding areas for birds, mammals, and aquatic life, and acting as the base of the food web.

Human use: provides stability to the shoreline, acts as hurricane buffer, collects detritus washed in by tides.

Larval host to 6 species of moths or butterflies.



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## Bushy Bluestem, *Andropogon glomeratus*

This warm-season grass reaches heights of 2 to 4 feet and blooms from September to October. Bushy bluestem has low drought tolerance and can be found growing in moist to damp areas along the drive.

Wildlife use: excellent cover for wildlife, seeds eaten by birds and mammals.

Human use: historically, gathered into a broom for sweeping.

Larval host to **17** species of moths or butterflies.



## Buttonsage, *Lantana involucrata*

A flowering shrub of the Verbena family, buttonsage is drought-tolerant and common along the wildlife drive. Long-blooming plant in summer.

Wildlife use: cover for birds and mammals, flowers attractive to pollinators.

Human use: no extensive use by humans.

Larval host to **14** species of moths or butterflies.





## Cabbage Palm, *Sabal palmetto*

This highly salt-tolerant species is the most common palm along the wildlife drive. This species flowers in July and August and produces blue to black berries (not coconuts!) in the autumn.

Wildlife use: berries are food for small mammals and birds, extensive shelter for wildlife.

Human use: historically, used by Native Americans for building dwellings, paddles, arrows, staffs, and more.

Larval host to **10** species of moths or butterflies.



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## Cucumberleaf Sunflower, *Helianthus debilis*

A short sunflower species common in sunny areas along the wildlife drive. These plants bloom year-round in warm climates.

Wildlife use: seeds are an important food source for birds and flowers are attractive to pollinators.

Human use: flowers used for yellow dye, often planted intentionally on beaches to provide stability and prevent erosion.

Larval host to **58** species of moths or butterflies.



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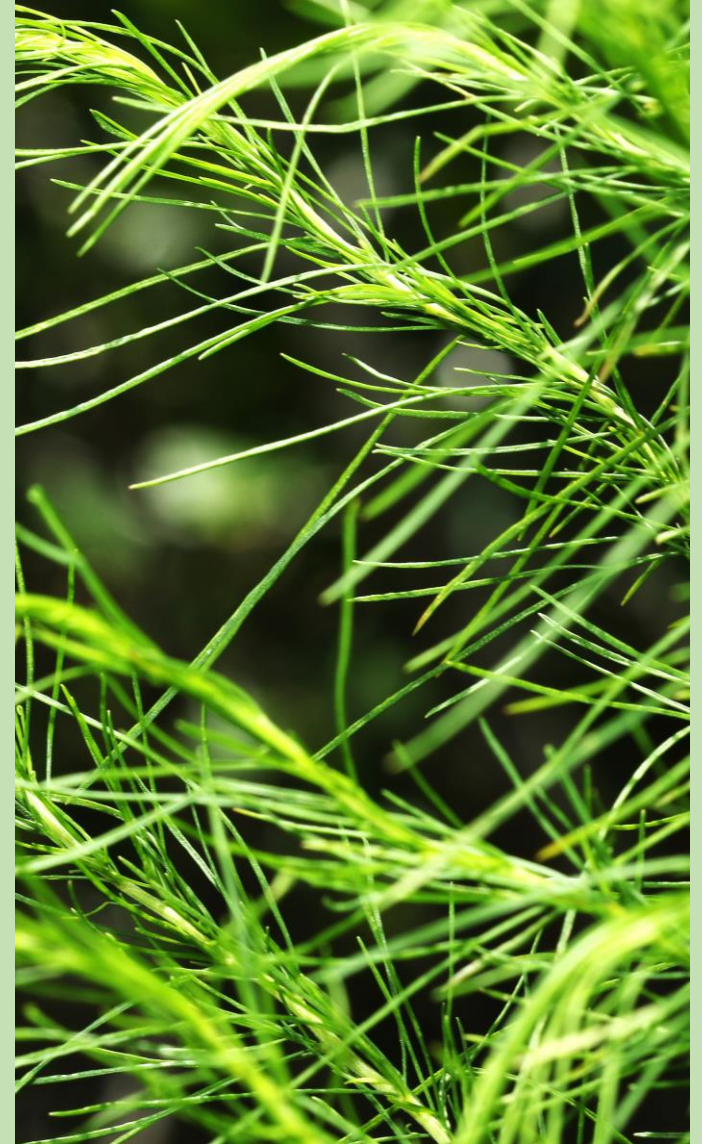
## Dogfennel, *Eupatorium capillifolium*

A tall perennial plant often reaching over 6 feet in height. This species grows well in moist areas and is common along the wildlife drive. Unlike fennel used in cooking, **dogfennel is not edible and is poisonous to humans if consumed.**

Wildlife use: attractive to pollinators.

Human use: as an insecticide and fungicide.

Larval host to **31** species of moths or butterflies.





## Frostweed, *Verbesina virginica*

Also known as white crownbeard, this native species can be recognized by its pointed, lobed leaves, winged stem, and frosty white flowers. Look for it in shady areas of the wildlife drive.

Wildlife use: attractive to pollinators.

Human use: no extensive human use.

Larval host to **20** species of moths or butterflies.





## Giant Goldenrod, *Solidago gigantea*

True to its name, giant goldenrod often reaches over 7 feet in height. This fall-flowering plant is frequented by a number of specialist pollinators. This plant can be found on areas of the drive with moist soils.

Wildlife use: attractive to pollinators and important larval host for many moths and butterflies.

Human use: no extensive human use.

Larval host to **82** species of moths or butterflies.



## Gumbo-Limbo, *Bursera simaruba*

Sometimes jokingly referred to as the “tourist tree” because of its red and peeling bark, the gumbo-limbo is a small-to-medium sized tree native to southern Florida.

Wildlife use: berries are a food source for migratory birds.

Human use: manufacture of musical instruments, as firewood, and the resin is used as glue, varnish, or incense.

Larval host data unavailable.





## Lime Prickly-Ash, *Zanthoxylum fagara*

While not a true citrus plant, this species, also known as wild lime, is still closely related to true limes. Look for it growing in sunny areas of the wildlife drive.

Wildlife use: shelter for birds and small mammals .

Human use: leaves and bark can be dried and ground to use as a spice, or crushed to make a bitter condiment.

Larval host to giant swallowtail and others.



Young giant swallowtail caterpillar, camouflaged as bird dropping^

## Moonflower, *Ipomoea alba*

One of the moonflower's most recognizable features are its large white blossoms – but they only bloom at night! On the wildlife drive, look instead for the large flower buds and heart-shaped leaves of this threatened species.

Wildlife use: attractive to nocturnal pollinators.

Human use: common in gardens.

Larval host to at least **3** species of moths or butterflies.





## Nickernut, *Caesalpinia bonduc*

The fernlike, compound leaves of the nickernut are a common sight along the wildlife drive. These leaves conceal thorn-covered branches and seed pods that give the plant its name.

Wildlife use: shelter for birds and small mammals.

Human use: seeds used for board games and jewelry in the Caribbean.

Larval host to **12** species of moths or butterflies.



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## Nodding Spurge, *Euphorbia nutans*

Look carefully for this small, fern-like plant growing on the sides of the wildlife drive. It can be distinguished from similar species by its purplish red stem.

Wildlife use: flowers attractive to pollinators.

Human use: no extensive human use.

Larval host to **15** species of moths or butterflies.



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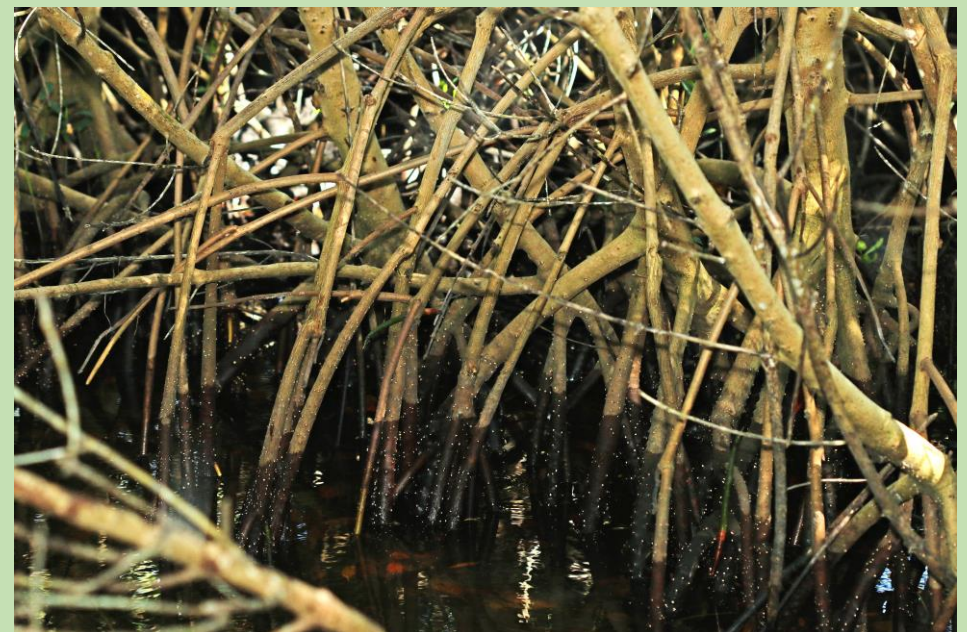
## Red Mangrove, *Rhizophora mangle*

The most common and easily observed tree species along wildlife drive, the importance of red mangroves can't be overstated. The productivity of mangrove forests is second only to that of tropical rainforests.

Wildlife use: ecosystem engineer species providing extensive shelter and feeding areas for birds, mammals, and aquatic life, and acting as the base of the food web.

Human use: provides stability to the shoreline, acts as hurricane buffer, collects detritus washed in by tides.

Larval host to **11** species of moths or butterflies.



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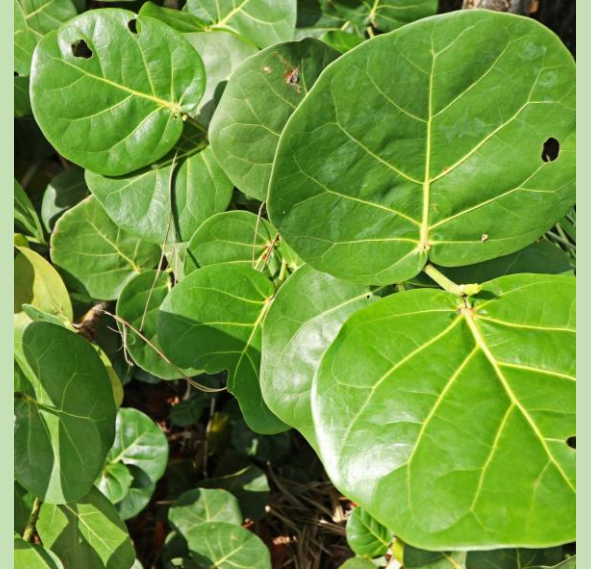
## Seagrape, *Coccoloba uvifera*

A common tropical beach plant in southern Florida and the Caribbean, seagrape is easily identified by its fruits and broad, round leaves.

Wildlife use: cover for birds and mammals, food source from edible fruit.

Human use: fruit is often made into jam.

Larval host to **15** species of moths or butterflies.





## Sensitive Partridge Pea, *Chamaecrista nictitans*

Growing no taller than 20 inches, sensitive partridge pea is a true groundcover plant. On the wildlife drive in dry areas, keep an eye out for its small but attractive yellow flowers and seed pods.

Wildlife use: attractive to pollinators, food source for birds.

Human use: occasionally as a cover crop.

Larval host to **14** species of moths or butterflies.



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## Shiny-leaved Wild Coffee, *Psychotria nervosa*

The shiny leaves and gorgeous red fruits of shiny-leaved wild coffee make it a standout plant on the wildlife drive. This species prefers shady areas.

Wildlife use: fruit is a food source for birds and mammals.

Human use: despite its name, it **does not** make a great coffee substitute. Used by the Calusa Native Americans to brew a psychotropic beverage.

Larval host to **8** species of moths or butterflies.





## Virginia Creeper, *Parthenocissus quinquefolia*

A common vine of great wildlife value along the wildlife drive. This species is often confused with poison ivy, but its leaves are in groups of 5 rather than 3.

Wildlife use: food and shelter for birds and mammals.

Human use: no extensive human use.

Larval host to **27** species of moths or butterflies.



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Wax Myrtle,  
*Myrica cerifera*

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This fragrant evergreen shrub is common in coastal environments. Look for it in sandy areas along the wildlife drive.

Wildlife use: food and shelter for wildlife.

Human use: candle-making, medicinal tea.

Larval host data unavailable.





# Acknowledgements

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[www.dingdarlingsociety.org](http://www.dingdarlingsociety.org)

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