



# Native Plants of the Indigo Trail

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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.

## Black Mangrove, *Avicennia germinans*

One of the more common trees towards the beginning of the trail, Black Mangrove is most easily recognized by its root system. Look for finger-like projections, known as *pneumatophores*, extending upwards from the soil.

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.



**\*It is illegal to remove any plants or other items from federal lands.**



## Cabbage Palm, *Sabal palmetto*

This highly salt-tolerant species is the most common palm along the Indigo Trail. 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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Colicwood,  
*Myrsine cubana*

Keep an eye out for the blueish black berries and shiny foliage of this highly salt tolerant species.

Wildlife use: shelter for birds, mammals, and reptiles.

Human use: as a hedge or border plant.

Larval host to at least **1** species of moths or butterflies.



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## Common Ragweed, *Ambrosia artemisiifolia*

Look for the fine, compound leaves of this plant in well-lit areas along the Indigo Trail.

Wildlife use: attractive to pollinators, foliage provides food for many types of insects.

Human use: used in phytoremediation to remove heavy metals such as lead from polluted soils.

Larval host data unavailable.



## Erect Prickly Pear, *Opuntia stricta*

As its name implies, the erect prickly pear grows with a rigid, upright posture. This is the dominant species of *Opuntia* in the southeastern USA.

Wildlife use: fruits and seeds consumed by wildlife, flowers attractive to pollinators.

Human use: no extensive human use.

Larval host to **13** species of moths or butterflies.





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Florida Mayten,  
*Tricerna phyllanthoides*

One of the rarer plants in Florida, look for small specimens of this species growing by the boardwalk at the beginning of the trail and larger plants further along in the gravel areas.

Wildlife use: provides shelter for birds and mammals.

Human use: no extensive human use.

Larval host data unavailable.



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## Florida Strangler Fig, *Ficus aurea*

Florida strangler fig seeds germinate as epiphytes (on the host tree). Palms are most often used as the host, and are rarely ever killed by the fig.

Wildlife use: pollinated exclusively by the Florida fig wasp, edible fruits, and shelter for birds and mammals.

Human use: occasionally as an ornamental plant.

Larval host to **29** species of moths or butterflies.



## Florida Swampprivet, *Forestiera segregata*

This species grows in large bunches along sunny parts of the trail. Look for dense vegetation but with small leaves.

Wildlife use: provides extensive shelter for birds and mammals, fruit eaten by many birds.

Human use: as a hedge.

Larval host to at least **1** species of moth.





## Forked Bluecurls, *Trichostema dichotomum*

Look for this small flowering plant of the mint family growing in dry, sandy areas along the side of the trail in partial shade.

Wildlife use: flowers attractive to a number of pollinators including bees, butterflies, and beetles.

Human use: no extensive human use.

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



## Giant Leather Fern, *Acrostichum danaeifolium*

The largest tropical fern in the region, sometimes reaching over 10 feet in height. This salt-tolerant species is easily recognized by its feather-like fronds.

Wildlife use: shelter for birds, mammals, etc.

Human use: occasionally as a hedge, sometimes planted to prevent gators from sunning in certain areas.

Larval host to **2** species of moths or butterflies.



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## Golden Polypody Fern, *Phlebodium aureum*

This epiphytic fern grows prominently on the trunks of cabbage palms along the Indigo Trail.

Wildlife use: may provide shelter for anole eggs.

Human use: as an ornamental plant and in herbal medicine.

Larval host data unavailable.



## Green Buttonwood, *Conocarpus erectus*

Also known as button mangrove, this species excretes salt from glands located on the underside of the leaves.

Wildlife use: extensive shelter and feeding areas for birds, mammals, and reptiles, flowers attractive to pollinators.

Human use: provides stability to the shoreline, acts as hurricane buffer, collects detritus washed in by tides. Often used as firewood and to smoke mullet and other fish.

Larval host to **7** species of moths or butterflies.



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## Painted Leaf, *Euphorbia cyathophora*

Also known as dwarf poinsettia, this small plant can be easily recognized by the bright red bases of its uppermost leaves.

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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## Poison Ivy, *Toxicodendron radicans*

This vine species is well known for causing dermatitis amongst those who are allergic, with only around 15% of people being resistant to severe reactions. Look for shiny leaves of three that may either be roughly lobed or smooth at the edges.

Wildlife use: edible berries, flowers attract pollinators.

Human use: no extensive human use.

Larval host data unavailable.



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## Red Mangrove, *Rhizophora mangle*

Among the most common and easily observed trees along the Indigo Trail, 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.





## Saltwort, *Batis maritima*

This halophyte (a plant adapted for salty conditions) forms colonies in salt marshes and mangrove swamps, where it is often the first plant to reoccupy an area cleared by a hurricane.

Wildlife use: edible foliage and seeds.

Human use: no extensive human use.

Larval host to **3** 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.



## Shoestring Fern, *Vittaria lineata*

Look for this grass-like epiphytic fern growing on the trunks of cabbage palms along the Indigo Trail.

Wildlife use: shelter for insects and small reptiles and amphibians.

Human use: historically used in Native American traditional medicine.

Larval host data unavailable.



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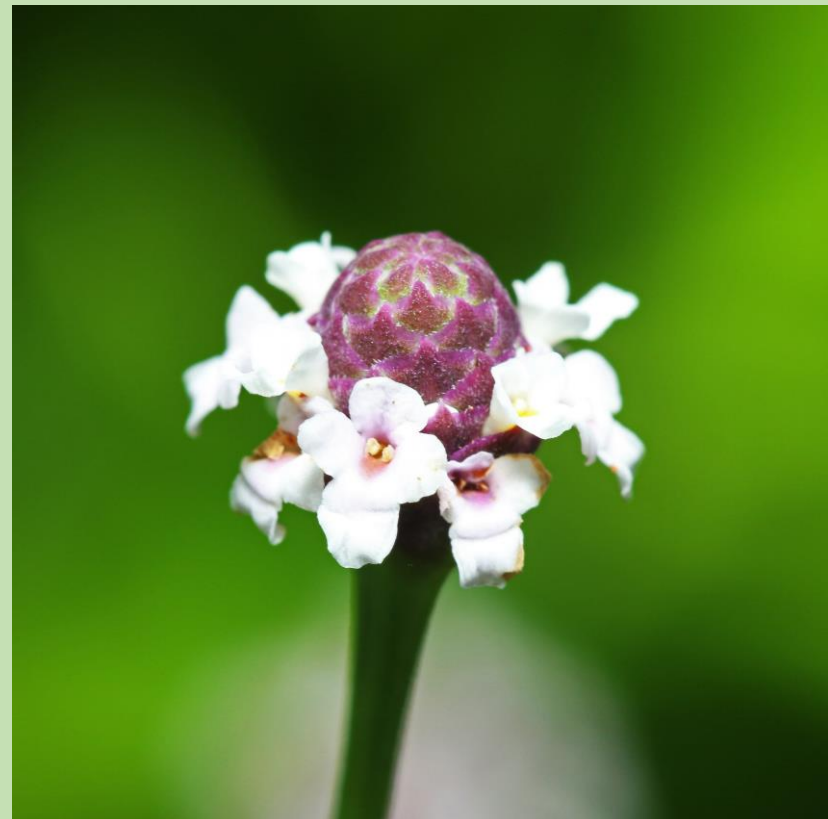
## Turkey Tangle Frogfruit, *Phyla nodiflora*

This low-growing native is evergreen in Florida due to the warm year-round temperatures.

Wildlife use: flowers attractive to pollinators.

Human use: as a groundcover plant in gardens.

Larval host data unavailable.



## White Mangrove, *Laguncularia racemosa*

White mangrove is most easily recognized by its flattened, numerous fruiting structures, and is most easily observed from the educational boardwalk on the trail.

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 **4** species of moths or butterflies.





# Acknowledgements

Many thanks to

- J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge
- The “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society – Friends of the Refuge
- The USDA
- National Wildlife Federation Native Plant Finder for larval host data
- Wildflower.org
- The Florida Museum
- Florida Plant Atlas
- Photographs and presentation prepared by Patrick Carney

The "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society (DDWS) supports the important work at the refuge through education.



This project was made possible by the Elaine Jacobson Education Fund at the DDWS.

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

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