


# Native Plants of the Kissimmee River




Robert Turpin

**Spatterdock, Cow Lily**      *Nuphar luteum*




Spatterdock is a large plant whose leaves are often **floating**. However, **submersed** and **emergent** leaves are common. The heart-shaped leaves are attached to long, stout stems which arise from large, spongy **rhizomes**. The flowers are yellow and "half-opened" at or above the water surface. Flowers are attached to thick round stems that are often 6 feet long. The plant is called Cow Lily because they are known to be eaten by cows.




Alana Edwards

**Smartweed**      *Polygonum sp.*




Smartweed is an **emergent** plant. A distinguishing characteristic of smartweed is its swollen nodes where the leaves meet the stems. The leaves are **lanceolate** and narrow. Stipules on the node form sheaths that surround the stem called **ochreas**. Leaves are alternately attached. The flowers are small and pinkish or white, and grow in terminal **spikes** that are typically several inches long.



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**Pennywort**      *Hydrocotyle sp.*



Pennyworts have long creeping stems that often form dense mats. The stems can grow to many feet long. The circular leaves are typically the size of a half-dollar, but can be much larger or smaller. The leaves are shiny and leathery, and the margins have blunted teeth. Long leaf stalks attach at the leaf centers, umbrella-like. The flowers form delicate white or green **umbels**.

Special thanks to the Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants ([www.ifas.ufl.edu](http://www.ifas.ufl.edu)) for the use of line drawings, text and some photos. Produced by the Florida Center for Environmental Studies at Riverwoods Field Lab. Contact 800/432-2045, x3190 or <http://riverwoods.ces.fau.edu/education/teachers.htm>

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Pickerelweed *Pontederia cordata*

Pickerelweed is a very common **emergent** plant. It typically grows to about 2 or 3 feet tall. Its leaves are large, up to 5 inches wide and are usually twice as long. Leaf shapes are variable, but are usually **lanceolate**. The flowers are violet-blue and arranged on **spikes**.



Alana Edwards

Primrose Willow *Ludwigia* sp.

Water primroses are **emergent** plants. They can grow to 5 or 6 feet tall. Stems are branched and sometimes have long hairs. The leaves are **ovate** to **lanceolate**, and up to 6 inches long. Leaves are covered on both sides by minute soft hairs. *L. leptocarpis*, in the photo (left) differs from the more common species on the river, *L. peruviana* (short, fat ovary, in drawing) and *L. octovalvis* (long, thin ovary with 8 sides) in that it has 5 petals. Both *L. peruviana* and *L. octovalvis* have 4 petals. Flowers on all species of *Ludwigia* are yellow. *L. peruviana* is thought to be an exotic species.



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Duck Potato *Sagittaria lanceolata*

Duck potato is an **emergent** plant with large leaves and conspicuous flowers. It has large, firm, **lanceolate** leaves, which are typically 4 inches wide and up to 2 feet long. The flowers are showy and white, with three petals. They are extended on thick stalks that are often a foot or more above the leaves. Duck potato gets its name from its potato-like, underground **corms** that they sometimes form.



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**Alligator Flag**      *Thalia geniculata*

Alligator Flag is a large, **emergent** plant that grows from a thick rhizome. The large simple leaves are on long stalk and are broadly lance-shaped, with broadly rounded bases. They can be up to 8 inches wide and more than 2 1/2 feet long. Multiple small purple flowers hang from bracts on top of a tall flower stalk. The flowers have 3 petals. Named alligator flag because it is known to grow in alligator holes.



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**Cattails**      *Typha sp.*

Cattails have stems to 9 feet tall. Its leaf blades are strap-like, stiff, and sheathed together at the base to appear "flattened". The **inflorescence** is spike-like, with very densely packed tiny flowers. Cattails get their name from their brown cylindrical flower **spikes** which can be more than 1 foot long. Although they are native plants they are sometimes thought of as a nuisance because they proliferate in areas with high levels of nutrients.



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**Sawgrass**      *Cladium jamaicense*

Sawgrass stems can grow from 4 to 10 feet tall. The leaf blades are large and stiff with small sharp sawteeth along the margins and underside midribs. The **inflorescence** is large, tall and complex, often extending several feet above the leaves. The **spikelets** are light reddish brown.



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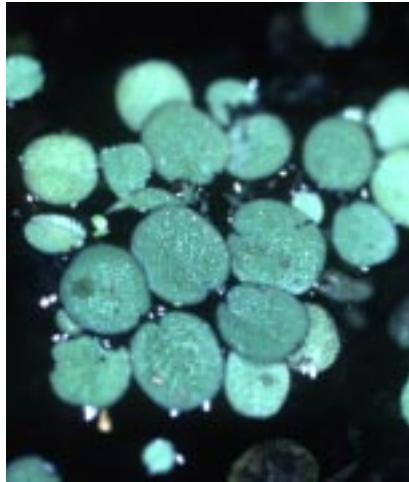


Alana Edwards

**Duckweed**      *Lemna valdiviana*

Duckweed is a floating plant. They often form large floating mats. They are tiny green plants with shoe-shaped leaves, approximately 1/16 to 1/8 inch in size. Each plant has two to several leaves joined at the base. A single root hangs beneath.







Alana Edwards

**Water fern**      *Salvinia minima*

Water ferns are floating ferns. This species is about 3/4 inch in width. It occurs in still waters having high organic content. Water fern has joined oval leaves. Its leaf surfaces are covered with stiff hairs. Water fern has root-like structures which are actually modified fronds.






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**Buttonbush**      *Cephalanthus occidentalis*

Buttonbush is a shrub which can grow up to 3m tall. The elliptic to ovate leaves are deciduous, and are opposite or whorled. Flowers are small, white, ball-like structures on long stalks below the leaves. The fruiting structure is round, brown and usually persists throughout the year.




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**Soft Rush** *Juncus effusus*


One of the most common species of *Juncus*, the native soft rush may be found as a single clump, as a colony of clumps or as a colony of single stems several feet tall, in water or on "dry" ground. Its pale-green stems are erect and two to five feet tall. Stems are cylindrical, and has no leaves. Leafy reddish sheaths wrap the stems at the bottom of the plant. The inflorescence of soft rush appears to be coming out of the side of the stem. The inflorescence is open and branched. Each branch has 30-100 small flowers, each greenish-brown flower on its own stalk. Above the inflorescence is a "continuation" of the pointed stem, this being a stiff, rolled and pointed bract, usually brown or grayish when mature. Soft rush provides food and nesting to birds and other wildlife.



Alana Edwards

**Elderberry** *Sambucus canadensis*


Elderberry is a medium to large shrub, up to 4 m tall. Leaves are opposite and petioles are usually pubescent. Small, white flowers with 5 petals on terminal cymes. Fruit is a fleshy purple-black, berry-like drupe. The fruits are favorites of birds such as robins, mockingbirds and cedar waxwings.



Alana Edwards

**Water-Hemlock** *Cicuta mexicana*

Water-Hemlock is a perennial herb that grows up to 2.5 m tall. Flowers are produced in a flat-topped, terminal or axillary, compound umbels. Strongly resembles Elderberry. The plants is used by the Black Swallowtail butterfly as a larval food source (food for the caterpillars).



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Bald Cypress

*Taxodium disticum*

Bald Cypress is a tall, straight, deciduous tree to about 40 meters in height. Older trees will often exhibit a large buttressed base. The leaves are between 8-20 mm in length and having a feathery appearance. Cypress knees typically protrude from the ground around Cypress trees.



Alana Edwards

Live Oak

*Quercus virginiana*

Live Oaks are spreading evergreen trees which grow to about 20m in height. The bark is rough and has a central trunk which typically divides 2-3cm above the ground into several large branches. The leaves are alternate, leathery, and about 2-15cm long. The Live Oaks near the Kissimmee River are on slightly higher ground and delineate the floodplain, which can be anywhere between 1-2 miles wide.



Alana Edwards

Wax Myrtle

*Myrica serifera*

Wax Myrtle is an evergreen shrub or small tree that can grow up to 12m in height. The leaves are alternate and narrowly oblanceolate, typically toothed toward the apex. Flowers are borne in catkins at the leaf axils. The fruit is a small, waxy, bluish drupe. The berries and aromatic leaves were used for its waxy substances by settlers to make candles. While this plant is a native, it became more common along the Kissimmee River after channelization in the '60's. With the higher water levels associated with the restoration, this plant is now dying back, soon to be replaced by broadleaf marsh plant species.