



# A Quick Transformation of Turf into Natives and Other Notes

Presented by Janet Bowers

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**RECAP-** My January 2019 SNPS talk was on swapping a swimming pool for natives. This was a more evolving effort that I did mostly by myself over months and years. I started moving bricks from near the house to the pathways and planted a few plants to start .



I put pine straw down at the beginning to cover the dirt and help with weeds.

I experimented with a couple ways to make a 'wetland' area. 1. I dug out a couple low areas and 2. I put pots in 9 gallon tubs.



My goal was to plant natives and create habitat for bugs, birds, snakes, and whatever else could make a home in my yard. I included butterfly host plants and bird food plants.

I was surprised that the **native pink swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*)** acted as a nectar plant and a host plant for butterflies. I planted some of my plants in the mini wetland and put others in the tubs. The ones in the tub seem to be happier, I think because they stay consistently wet. **July and August are peak months.**



The monarch caterpillars like to eat the flowers.



Tiger swallowtail on milkweed



Milkweed seeds ready to disperse

## June 2020 – A New Meadow

As the name of this talk implies, I wanted a quick transformation of some turf into a Native meadow. To do this, I needed help and I hired Troy Springer of Springer Environmental to do the work. (I have done the cardboard method, old carpet method, roundup method, manual digging method but I did not want to wait for my meadow.)

**Day 1** – area was mowed, Troy and I discussed how much and basic area to remove, sod cutter removed the turf. Some of the turf was taken away.



**Day 2** – the rest of the turf was taken away, Troy and I discussed the plant list and he flagged the spots for each type of plant. (Plants were acquired)



**Day 3** – plants were planted, watered and the pine straw was installed

A mini-meadow in 3 days! A lovely, gently curving bed (about 45 feet long x 24 feet wide) now connects an existing bed to a narrow snaking strip around some trees. The difference is amazing! Not much flowering at this point but a base is establishing for more refinement in the future. Thirty purple love grass, some muhly grass and a few lopsided Indian grass are the foundation for the 'meadow'. Four dwarf Fakahatchee grasses were added by the existing pecan tree. Green palmettos and Darrow's blueberries are sprinkled throughout. It might be possible to do it yourself with enough manual labor help.



**Ongoing** – I watered when needed, removed weeds, added some more plants (Even in the ‘rainy season’ be prepared with a watering plan to establish new plants, I spent a lot of non-raining days watering 100 plants.)

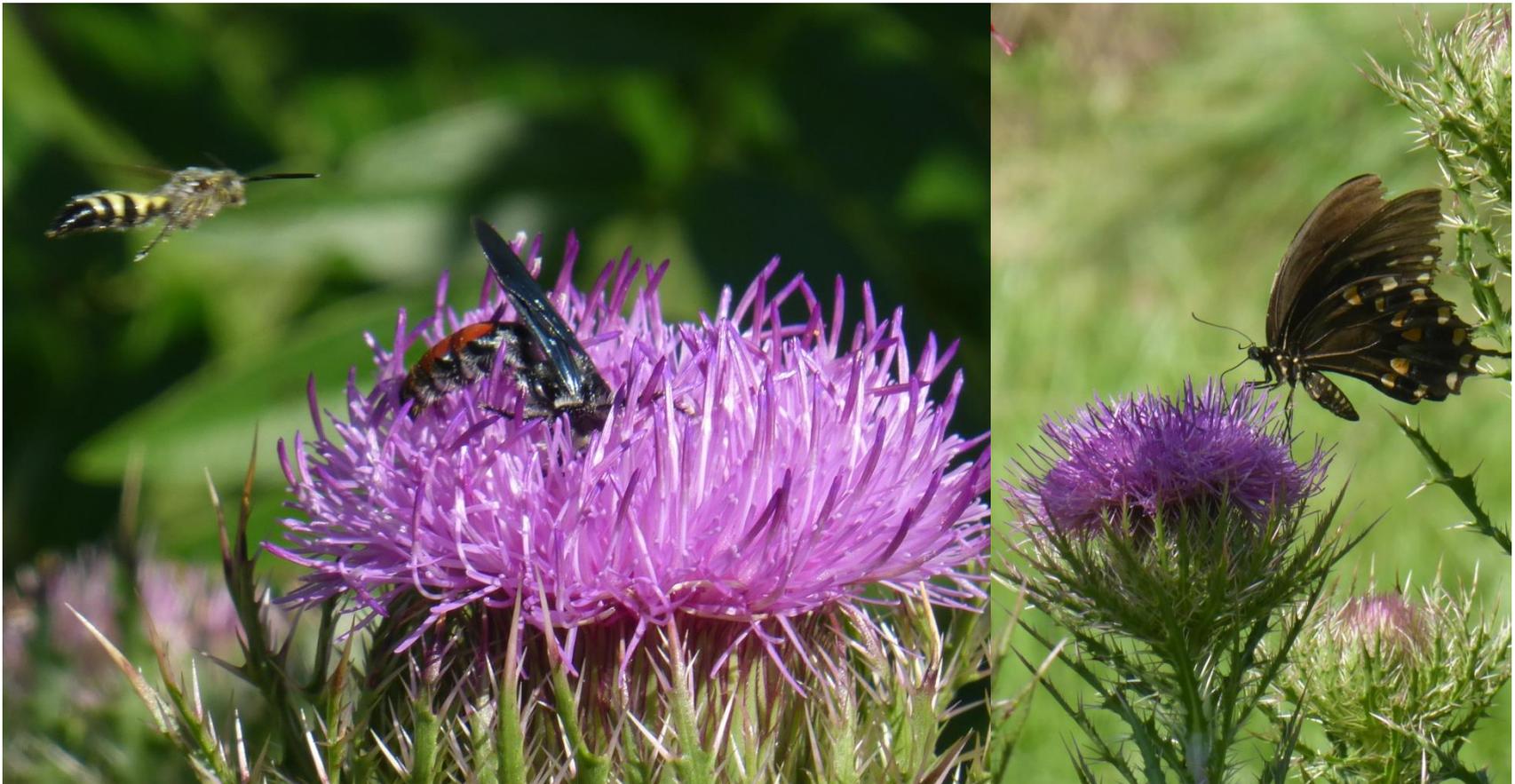


The minute the joepyweed bloomed (about 6 weeks after planting), there were pollinators on it.



## Some thoughts –

- ❖ It is easier to establish plants without flowers, the plant can focus on roots and leaves first before flowers. Smaller size potted plants adapt quicker.
- ❖ Pollinators are attracted to groups of color, I like to plant in odd numbers of the same plant (3,5,7, etc)
- ❖ Some plants like thistles are big attractors without having a huge group of them





- ❖ I added some plants I had in pots – milkweed, salvia, porterweed. I bought some blooming plants (black-eyed susan, *Solidago odorata*) to supplement. I also added rayless sunflower and elephant’s foot– the basal leaves cover some ground even when the flowers aren’t there.

9 weeks after install, several people came to visit and enjoyed the butterflies, blooms and bugs! Some pictures from John Lampkin-

*New Monarch*



*Whirl-a-bout  
skipper on  
thistle*

*Queen  
caterpillar on  
swamp  
milkweed*



Some pictures from Nanette -

*Gardeners are sometimes afraid  
thistles will pop up everywhere but  
they are great butterfly attractors  
and I think they are lovely (Janet)*

*Delaware skipper on Bidens alba*



- ❖ At 10 weeks, this is such an interesting area of my yard, and I am very happy that I spent the time and money to do it. (Seeding a new bed in the fall is a less expensive way to do it since there would be less cost for plants.)
- ❖ As the year goes on I want to be sure I have flowers for bees in all possible seasons (a hard freeze would make this more difficult)
- ❖ I also want to have as much plant material covering the ground as possible to limit non-desired weeds, this area may be mowed once a year but will be undisturbed most of the time. Dead material will be left for wildlife use.

*Dragonflies abound*



*A bee resting  
on ironweed*



I'm on my way to having a Homegrown National Park in my backyard, supporting the wildlife web of life where I can. I think I am close to 60% native biomass, aiming for 70+%

August 4 2020





**Flowers that reseed** – I love pop-up flowers!  
**Annuals** include - blackeyed susan, *Salvia coccinea*, dotted horsemint, blue curls, coreopsis & cutleaf coneflower. Scorpiontail is a **perennial** that reseeds.

(The meadow is too new to report on the new plants – stay tuned.....)



- ❖ **Butterfly host plants** that I purposefully planted – corky stem passion vine, wild lime, milkweeds (*A. incarnata and perennis*)
- ❖ **Groundcovers that I like** – Porterweed (tall for a groundcover but it can cover a lot!), Frogfruit, Browne's savory (smells wonderful - I planted it along the pathway by my wetland), Coffee will reseed and cover a shady area (also a tall groundcover, it can be 6 ft+, like porterweed it will die back with a freeze)
- ❖ **Plants that pop up and I mostly tolerate** – spiderwort, small amount of *Bidens alba*, Elderberry (I have a big one that creates some shade, flowers and makes berries for mocking birds), toadflax, pepperweed (seasonal, butterfly host), rouge plant

## Final Thoughts

Native gardening has improved exponentially in the past 5 years- more information is readily available and the plant selection has increased. If you are in a hurry, you can have a large area of turf converted in a few days. If you want to do it yourself there is a lot of information on the internet to get started. You can visit examples like Bok Tower Garden to see it in person or check out local native nurseries to experience natives and take some home immediately. A plan suitable to your yard is your best bet, success is more likely if you plant 'the Right plant in the Right place'.



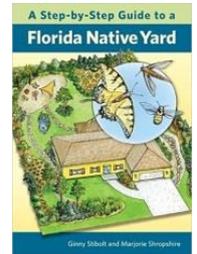
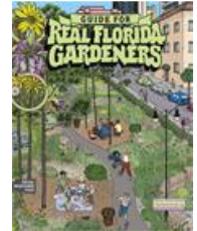
Next year, I will update you on how the love grass is settling in and any reseeding success.

I'm can't wait for a Meadow Expansion so more life will flock to my yard as turf is replaced with wildlife habitat!



# Some Tips to Do It Yourself-

- **Get the FNPS Native Landscaping brochure**
- **Go to the FNPS website** and look at all the resources there
- **Check out some local gardens** – our Lettuce Lake garden, Bok Tower native areas or go to an open house at Troy Springer’s yard
- **Check out local nurseries** – Sweet Bay and Green Isle Gardens have expanded their landscaping, you can see how plants look in different areas and get recommendations on what to plant, The Nectary is open in Lakeland
- **Plantrealflorida.org** has other nurseries and professionals that work with natives, **FANN** also publishes the ‘Real Florida Gardener’ magazine
- **If you are a SNPS member**, we have books you can checkout from our library
- **Buy a book like Ginny Stibolt’s A Step by Step Guide to a FL Native Yard**
- **Attend the FNPS conference in May**, there are lots of good speakers, workshops and fieldtrips to see native landscaping



Be open to what happens even if it doesn't seem like what you had in your head.  
You will learn something and might have a good story to share.

*Enjoy the Journey!*

## Plant List – 2020 Meadow



Common name	Scientific name	Comments	Flowers	Seeds
Blackeye susan	<i>Rudbeckia hirta</i>	Pollinators, cut flowers, reseeds, annual	Y	Y
Tropical sage	<i>Salvia coccinea</i>	Pollinators, hummingbirds, annual, red flwr	Y	Y
Scorpion tail	<i>Heliotropium angiospermum</i>	Volunteer, perennial, can be aggressive	Y	Y
Elephant foot	<i>Elephantopus elatus</i>	Interesting flowers, pollinators	Y	Y
Partridge pea	<i>Chamaecrista fasciculata</i>	Bees love it, annual, reseeds	Y	Y
Porterweed	<i>Stachytarpheta jamaicensis</i>	Taller groundcover, freezes back to ground	Y	Y
Silkgrass	<i>Pityopsis graminifolia</i>	Yellow flower in fall	Y	?
Joepyeweed	<i>Eutrochium purpureum</i>	Pollinator magnet, pink flower	Y	?
Spanish daisy	<i>Helenium aramum</i>	Pollinator attractor, annual, yellow flower	Y	Y
Iron weed	<i>Vernonia gigantea</i>	Purple flower, pollinators	Y	Y
Blazing star	<i>Liatris spicata</i>	Purple flower, pollinators, can be floppy	Y	Y
Rayless sunflower	<i>Helianthus radula</i>	Basal leaves only before flower spike, Interesting brown bloom	Y	
Chapman's goldenrod	<i>Solidago odora</i> var. <i>chapmanii</i>	Yellow flowers, anise odor	Y	Y
Lakeside sunflower	<i>Helianthus carnosus</i>	Yellow flowers	Y	?
Swamp milkweed	<i>Asclepias incarnata</i>	Monarch and Queen host plant, also nectar plant, flowers smell spicy like cinnamon	Y	Y
Palmetto	<i>Serenoa repens</i>	Green and silver, good evergreen shrub	Y	Y
Darrow's blueberry	<i>Vaccinium darrowii</i>	Different colors of foliage- purples and greens	Y	
Dwarf Fakahatchee grass	<i>Tripsacum floridanum</i>	Evergreen, interesting bloom	Y	
Purple Love grass	<i>Eragrostis spectabilis</i>	Purple haze in the fall	Y	Y
Muhly grass	<i>Muhlenbergia capillaris</i>	Lovely purple haze in fall, evergreen	Y	
Lopsided indian grass	<i>Sorghastrum secundum</i>	Glistening seed heads in the fall	Y	
River oats	<i>Chasmanthium latifolium</i>	Dried seed heads	Y	
Toothache grass	<i>Ctenium aromaticum</i>	Dried seed heads are twisty	Y	

Monarch  
caterpillar



Cellphone  
picture of one  
of many  
dragonflies –  
blue, red,  
gold.....



Barred sulphur caterpillar  
on senna privet.

I often wander out into  
the yard several times a  
day, often different things  
are happening.

Looking closer is a  
wonderful way to spend  
time.





Even if flowers aren't blooming,  
the bugs are wonderful to  
observe





More bugs!





THE  
NECTARY

*Building a Community, one Native at a time .....*