

## Notes from "The Edge" by Donna Bingaman

For years 'native landscaping' has been considered a hard sell. But it is becoming more popular as people recognize the benefits of native plants - that they are the foundation for preserving our wildlife, water, recreational areas, and mitigating climate change. The question now is how to get the commercial industry (growers, designers, developers, and landscape professionals) to effectively provide native landscaping as an alternative to "builder grade" landscaping that has a palate of 3 exotic plants that look the same year-round and provide no ecosystem services.

On Saturday, May 14th, members and supporters of the Passionflower chapter were treated to a tour of "The Edge" at Cherry Lake Tree Farm in Groveland. One of the ways Cherrylake is working to promote the use of native plantings in commercial and residential developments is with two native plant demonstration gardens - one "natural" and one "formal" - where they are testing the use, growth, and maintenance requirements of a palate of native species (see the [Cherrylake Plant Survey](#)). They are also working with a developer to install native landscaping in the Sunbridge development in Lake Nona.



To influence homeowners and developers to transition to and embrace natives and sustainable landscaping, the native plantings must be aesthetically pleasing and maintainable. At the Edge, natives are being tested for their hardiness, longevity, maintenance requirements, and how well they "play with others". Combinations of low growing natives such as Sunshine Mimosa, Swamp Twinflower and Frog fruit are monitored for use in place of turf. Several mowing regimes have been tested (mowing height doesn't seem to make a difference - plots all looked about the same three weeks after mowing). Many members were surprised that this large area of plantings (14,000 square feet) is maintained by workers tending the site for only two hours per week. Determining which plants can be grown commercially is also critically important. For example, plants must be able to stay in pots for a period of time and handle the stress of transporting and transplanting. This is only a little of what the group learned.

Many thanks to Mark Russell and Jimmy Rogers, who led the tour and shared a lot of great information about what Cherrylake is doing and has found out. Jimmy suggested a couple of websites where participants can find additional information.

- <https://puyallup.wsu.edu/lcs/>
- <https://florida.plantatlas.usf.edu/>

If you missed this trip, don't fret. Passionflower members will have another chance to visit this site in the fall to get more ideas and see how the plantings have fared through a Florida summer.