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Wildflower auto tag sales pay for butterfly gardens, science projects

BY GEORGIA TASKER
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Bright red spikes of salvia flowers swayed in the winter breeze next to blue-flowering porterweed. Yellowtops, with flattish clusters of flowers, were forming a little colony, while the black-eyed Susans and the red-yellow Indian blankets formed sweeps of color in the wildflower beds at Broward College's north campus in Coconut Creek.

Several beds, with their charming handmade signs, "Florida Native Wildflowers Planted Here," are now found around the grounds, thanks to a grant from the sale of wildflower auto tags, willing students and a growing environmental consciousness.

Those Florida wildflower auto license tags have been working harder than bees at blossoms. They are financing low-maintenance, butterfly-attracting gardens around the state and boosting science education by adding another \$100,000 to a research endowment established at the University of Florida.

Broward College has just finished an 18-month wildflower project on its three campuses with a \$25,000 grant that produced gardens, science projects, a wildflower art contest and an interactive website. Elementary school butterfly gardens and a wildflower teaching meadow at the University of Florida also are the result of car tag sales.

Tags went on sale in 2000, and the Florida Wildflower Foundation began funding gardens and research in 2004. So far, the \$15 car tags have earned \$2 million to advance the wildflower cause, said Lisa Roberts, executive director. In the last two years, the foundation has funded 30 planting projects.

At Broward College North, the curriculum for arts and sciences has been tied into the five wildflower "pods" on the Coconut Creek campus. At the Davie main campus, students created an interactive Web page



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Want to plant a wildflower garden in South Florida?

Lisa Roberts, executive director of the Florida Wildflower Foundation, said the following species are recommended for this region:

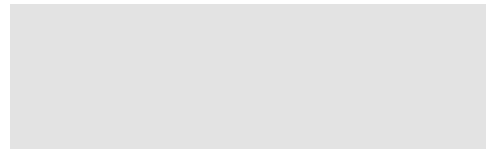
- Tickseed (*Coreopsis leavenworthii* or *Coreopsis lanceolata*)
- Firebush (*Hamelia patens*)
- White lantana (*Lantana involucrata*) and pine land lantana (*Lantana depressa*)
- Blanketflower (*Gaillardia pulchella*)
- Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*)
- Beach sunflower (*Helianthus debilis* subspecies *debilis*)

Seed packets and mixes are available from the Florida Wildflower Seed and Plant Growers Association (<http://floridawildflowers.com>). Or go to the Association of Florida Native Nurseries at www.afnn.org/.

For more information, including wildflower selection and planting: www.floridawildflowerfoundation.org.

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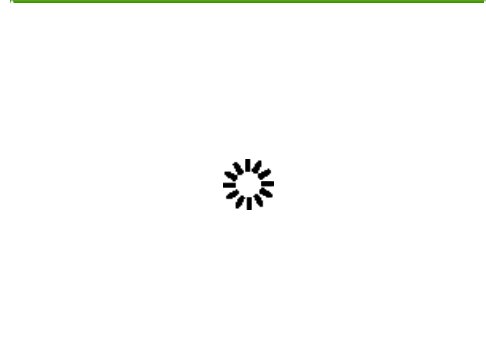
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To receive a packet of tickseed, *Coreopsis lanceolata* seeds, send a business-size, self-addressed, stamped envelope to Lisa Roberts, Florida Wildflower Foundation, P.O. Box 941066, Maitland, Fla. 32794-6164.

To watch a video of how to plant wildflowers: www.florida-agriculture.com/videos/scripts/script_native.htm.

Florida wildflowers and butterflies are on display on the Web, thanks to the Florida Museum of Natural History. Go to www.flmnh.ufl.edu/wildflower. Click resources.

-- GEORGIA TASKER

(<http://ucl.broward.edu/Wildflowers/>) showing the location of the wildflower gardens and linking individual flowers to the Florida Museum of Natural History's wildflower and butterfly pages.

"Dr. Peggy Green spearheaded sustainability 20 years ago," said north campus provost Barbara Bryan. "She saw the possibility of a wildflower grant, and worked it into the curriculum."

Green, who is on medical leave, is chairwoman of the college's Environmental Sustainability Committee and a senior professor of environmental science on the north campus. She worked with faculty of the three Broward campuses.

Via e-mail, Green said sustainability "is living in a way that does not jeopardize the prospects of

future generations." It's a critical concept to instill in students, she said, and can inspire projects across many disciplines.

"Another great aspect of the wildflower project is that students can plant and maintain the wildflower beds, and leave a legacy to the campus through their stewardship efforts," she wrote. "It is a way to help connect the curriculum through the beauty of nature."

At the north campus, home to 11,000 students, Green and the physical plant staff sited and dug the flower beds, which students then planted. Students in environmental studies watched the plants for growth and interaction with insects -- especially butterflies -- and recorded their observations in journals. More than 60 students were involved in planting and maintaining 28 species of Florida wildflowers on the campuses.

The wildflower project nicely dovetailed with other environmental efforts on the campus, including a wetlands and a native hammock planted by Green, faculty, students and volunteers after Hurricane Wilma in 2005.

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