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### **Going Native: The “Right Place, Right Plant” Perspective on Landscaping**

Back in 2011, when Archbold Biological Station added two state-of-the-art buildings to its facility, known as the Adrian Archbold Lodge and Frances Archbold Hufty Learning Center, the decision was to “go native” with the landscaping around the buildings. Bringing their inspiration to life was the work of Nancy Bissett of The Natives, located in Davenport, Florida. Together as a team, Bissett and Archbold Biological Station designed the entire 2-acres surrounding the buildings using only plants native to this region. Bissett also grew and planted a total of nearly 12,000 individual plants of more than 75 species for the project. The open vista of native plants surrounding the buildings is now a peaceful, aesthetic setting and serves as a beautiful living display to educate visitors.

“The inspiration for our native landscaping comes from the concept that we should use the right plants in the right places,” states Hilary Swain, Executive Director of Archbold. “We decided during the early planning phase of our new buildings to ‘go native’ by using only trees, shrubs, grasses, and flowers found in natural areas in south central Florida and by planting them in the right spot in the lands around the buildings based on their unique light, water, and soil needs.”

“Despite being known for our work in Florida scrub, we did not want to create a Florida scrub habitat around the Lodge and Learning Center,” explains Plant Ecology Program Director, Eric Menges. “After testing the soils, and putting careful thought into the water and sunlight

resources the area naturally receives, we decided to create a prairie system on our driest soils and a retention pond downslope of that, with a transitional prairie in-between.”

In Florida, a change in elevation of a few inches means big shifts in plants, soils, and water levels. Archbold’s Lodge and Learning Center lies on the Lake Wales Ridge, approximately 140 feet above sea level; here, soils tend to be very well-drained and sandy. However, even this elevation, depth to groundwater can fluctuate annually from 3 to 6 feet below the ground surface, causing soil moisture and water availability to plants to fluctuate as well. “We had to establish plants that could tolerate variable conditions seasonally, depending on rainfall,” says Swain. “When groundwater is high, soils do not drain very well, and water periodically submerges plant roots, limiting growth of flood-intolerant plants. Understanding these subtle differences helped drive our ‘right plant, right place’ perspective.”

“Although the majority our of landscaping is a prairie system,” Menges continues, “islands of shrubs and trees made up of species found in the Florida scrub were planted within the prairie mosaic.” These ‘scrub islands’ are home to plants and animals that are found in the surrounding ecosystem. “In addition to being a beautiful setting,” Swain adds, “this landscaping acts as a refuge for animals in need of shade, rest, food, and water, and serves as a safe, traversable route between wild areas. Archbold staff frequently see Northern Bobwhite Quails, Hispid Cotton Rats, and the occasional Indigo Snake crossing the prairie.”

Now seven years since the initial plantings, staff and volunteers provide maintenance and upkeep for the landscaping. “We employ a variety of maintenance approaches to imitate natural processes in our landscaping environment,” says Stephanie Koontz, Research Assistant for Plant Ecology Program. “We mow to recycle dead plant material and stimulate flowering, and weed to reduce competition with exotic species. By planting native species, we’ve created a relatively self-sufficient system. Best of all, after the year it took to get them established, these plants do not need to be watered. We estimate that we save more than 750 thousand gallons of precious water every year compared to a typical irrigated landscape.” However, there is work involved. Swain adds, “We do have to spend time weeding or spot-herbicide non-native grasses, especially Natal Grass, and other plants. We are very grateful to the volunteers who help us with this task.”

Archbold’s Lodge and Learning Center landscaping project was recognized as “Gold Certified” in 2012 by the Florida-Friendly Landscaping Program of the University of Florida. The landscaping was also a contributing factor to Lodge and Learning Center’s certification as a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) “Platinum” building, the highest ranking achievable. As only the twelfth LEED Platinum building in that state of Florida at the time of its certification in January 2012, the Lodge and Learning Center serves as “model” for the region, showcasing the significance of sustainable buildings.

If you would like to visit and learn more about sustainable landscaping, the Adrian Archbold Lodge and Frances Archbold Hufty Learning Center at Archbold Biological Station is open to the public 9:00 am to 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday.



**Photo 1: Fall flowers fill the dry prairie in front of the Frances Archbold Hufty Learning Center with color. Photo by Reed Bowman.**



**Photo 2: Staff and volunteers provide maintenance and upkeep for the landscaping. Photo by Dustin Angell.**