

THE 2008 PLANTS OF THE YEAR

By Ralph E. Mitchell, Director/Horticulture Agent - UF/IFAS Extension Service, Charlotte County

Each year the Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association (FNGLA) releases their pick of Plants of the Year. These plants are picked out for recognition due to their superior characteristics and usefulness in the landscape. This year's plants are the almond bush, the blue ginger, a groundcover Mimosa, the sand live oak, the dwarf palmetto, and a plant called *Stromanthe sanguinea* 'Triostar'. Let's look at these plants and highlight some of their characteristics and qualities.

The almond bush or *Aloysia virgata* is a drought tolerant, butterfly attracting large shrub that can grow up to 12 feet tall. As its name indicates, the spiked white flowers release an almond fragrance. The shrub grows vigorously and pruning between bloom cycles to curb its somewhat weeping habit will help develop a denser, neater plant.

Blue ginger, *Dichorisandra thyrsiflora*, is not really a ginger, but looks similar to one. Growing more than five feet tall and three feet wide, blue ginger gives a real tropical look with glossy green foliage and that produces purple-blue flower spikes up to 10 inches long in the summer and fall. Blue ginger grows into a large clump that is perfect for

mass planting. Well adapted to part to full shade, this plant does best in a moist, but well-drained soil. Blue ginger is generally pest-free with only mealy bugs causing occasional problems.

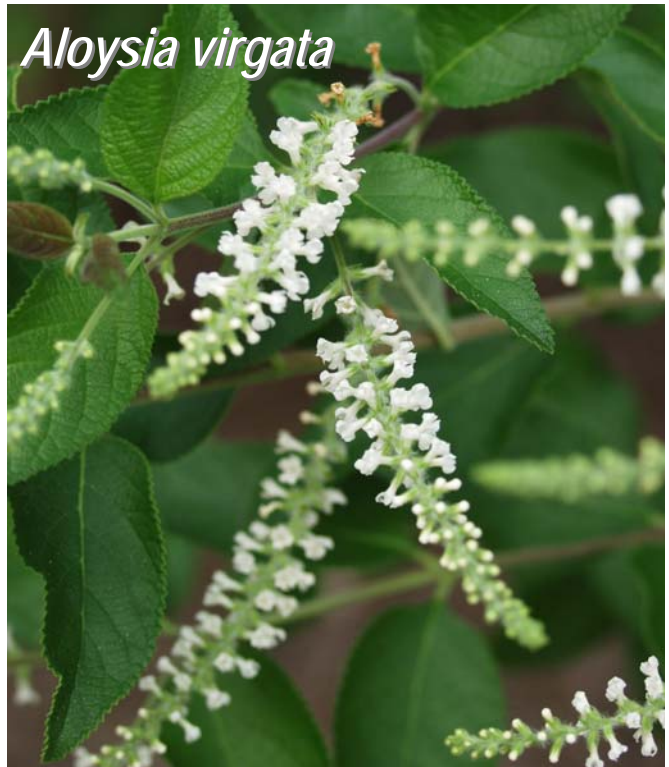
Mimosa strigillosa is a native plant that is seen in many landscapes in Charlotte County. You may have seen it as it produces an eye-catching carpet of ferny foliage topped with pink, powder-puff-like flowers. Interestingly enough, the foliage is sensitive and will fold-up when touched. As a groundcover, it is very durable and can take a certain amount of foot traffic, car interaction, and some mowing. Very adaptable to dry or moist soils, in full sun or shade, this mimosa is drought tolerant with individual plants growing no higher than nine-inches tall and up to five-feet wide.

The sand live oak, another native, looks like a smaller version of the southern live oak but only grows to about 20 feet tall and 20 feet wide. A woody plant known for its storm, salt and drought tolerance, its dark green cupped leaves and irregular growth habit may develop into a small tree or thickets. The acorns produced are notable wildlife food. Another native, the dwarf palmetto is a small, four to six foot tall plant which is superior

Mimosa strigillosa



Aloysia virgata



in its cold and drought tolerance. With green to blue-green fan-like fronds and fragrant white flowers in the spring and early summer, the fruits produced are another wildlife favorite. Looking more clump-like, the underground trunk of the dwarf palmetto gives the palm a trunk-less appearance.

Stromanthe sanguinea 'Triostar' is a plant that I have seen in local garden centers and nurseries for some time. It is a beautiful and striking plant with variegated white, green, pink and red foliage. Often grown as an indoor container plant, 'Triostar' will also adapt well to shaded areas in Charlotte County. Too much sun will result in very apparent leaf burn, so keep your 'Triostar' in a protected site.

To find these plants, check local garden centers first. Some native plants may have to be obtained from local or regional native plant nurseries. Enjoy these plants and make sure to include them in your landscape.



Resource:

FNGLA (2008) 2008 Florida Plants of the Year - <http://ftp.fn gla.org/2008FloridaPlantsOfTheYear>.

Florida Gardening (2008) 2008 Florida Plants of the Year.

Williams, L. (2008) 2008 Florida Plants of the Year. UF/IFAS Extension Service, Okaloosa County.

For more information on all types of beautiful plants in our area, please contact our Master Gardeners on the Plant Lifeline at 941.764.4340 from 1:00pm-4:00pm Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Our office is located at 25550 Harbor View Road, Suite 3, in Port Charlotte. Our Plant Clinics are available across the county:

- **Demonstration Garden** (6900 Florida Street, PG) Thursdays 9:00am-11:00am.
- **Englewood/Charlotte Public Library** Thursdays 10:00am-1:00pm.
- **Mid-County Regional Library** 1st and 3rd Thursday of month 1:00pm-3:00pm.
- **Edison College Learning Resources Library** 3rd Tuesday of month 1:00pm-4:00pm.

Ralph Mitchell (Ralph.Mitchell@charlottefl.com) is the County Extension Director/Horticulture Agent for Charlotte County Extension Service. Contact a volunteer Master Gardener from 1:00pm-4:00pm Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 941.764.4340 or by email (Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com).

For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Steele, at 941.764.4351. Allison can help educate you about the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program so that you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.