

Shrink the Lawn & Create Habitat Using Coastal Plain Native Plants

South Georgia Native Plant and Wildflower Symposium

Mary Alice Applegate
March 25, 2026



Coastal Plain Chapter
Georgia Native Plant Society

Why / How / Lessons

1. Why native?
2. Assess the site
3. Goals
4. Draft a plan
5. Remove invasive plants
6. Enlarge over time
7. Lessons and tips
8. Native evergreens, vines, perennials, grasses
9. Signage
10. How to choose plants
11. Eco-friendly practices

Starry rosinweed



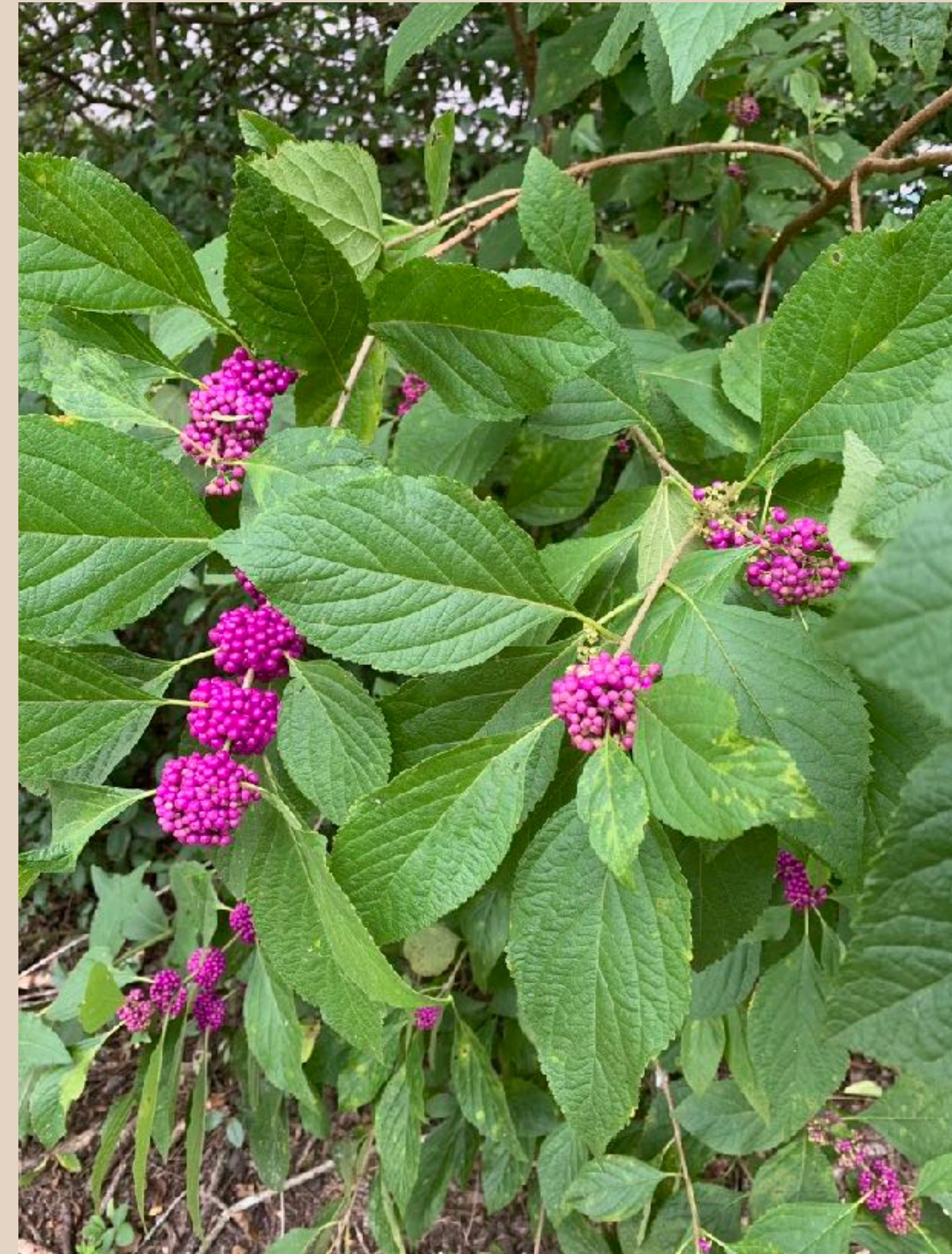
Why?

Inspiration from Entomologist Doug Tallamy's books and lectures.

Research about "Insect Apocalypse" & declining bird populations.

Gardens need to support life, sequester carbon, manage water...etc. (Not just look pretty.)

DO SOMETHING!



Birdfood! Beautyberry

If something is not eating your plants, then your yard is not part of the ecosystem.

- ♦ Native Insects prefer to lay eggs on native plants they have co-evolved with over many millennia.
- ♦ Birds (95%) need to feed their young soft foods, like larvae (caterpillars / grubs).

Right: Gulf fritillary butterfly caterpillars on host plant passion vine.



Starting point:

Intown, 1/3 acre property with grass lawn, like the rest of the neighborhood



Existing plants, mostly exotic



Centipede grass lawn

Boxwood foundation shrubs

Japanese azalea hedge (left)

Glossy ligustrum hedge (right)

w/ mimosa & camphor trees

Crepe myrtles on each side

Two dogwoods that died

My Goals:

Create pollinator & bird habitat using native plants

Offer pollinators host plants and nectar for three seasons

Remove the worst exotic invasive plants

Use plants our Coastal Plain Chapter sells, to see how they grow



Swamp milkweed with spicebush swallowtail butterfly

More Goals

Use deciduous trees (western exposure) for passive solar benefits

Design like nature: contrasting heights, textures, colors, shapes

Tame it enough for neighborhood acceptance with defined borders and shorter plants near the edges of beds



Fringe tree

First small steps



Prune shrubs, enlarge beds

Plant some basics:

Swamp milkweed

Purple coneflower

Blanket flower

Black-eyed Susan

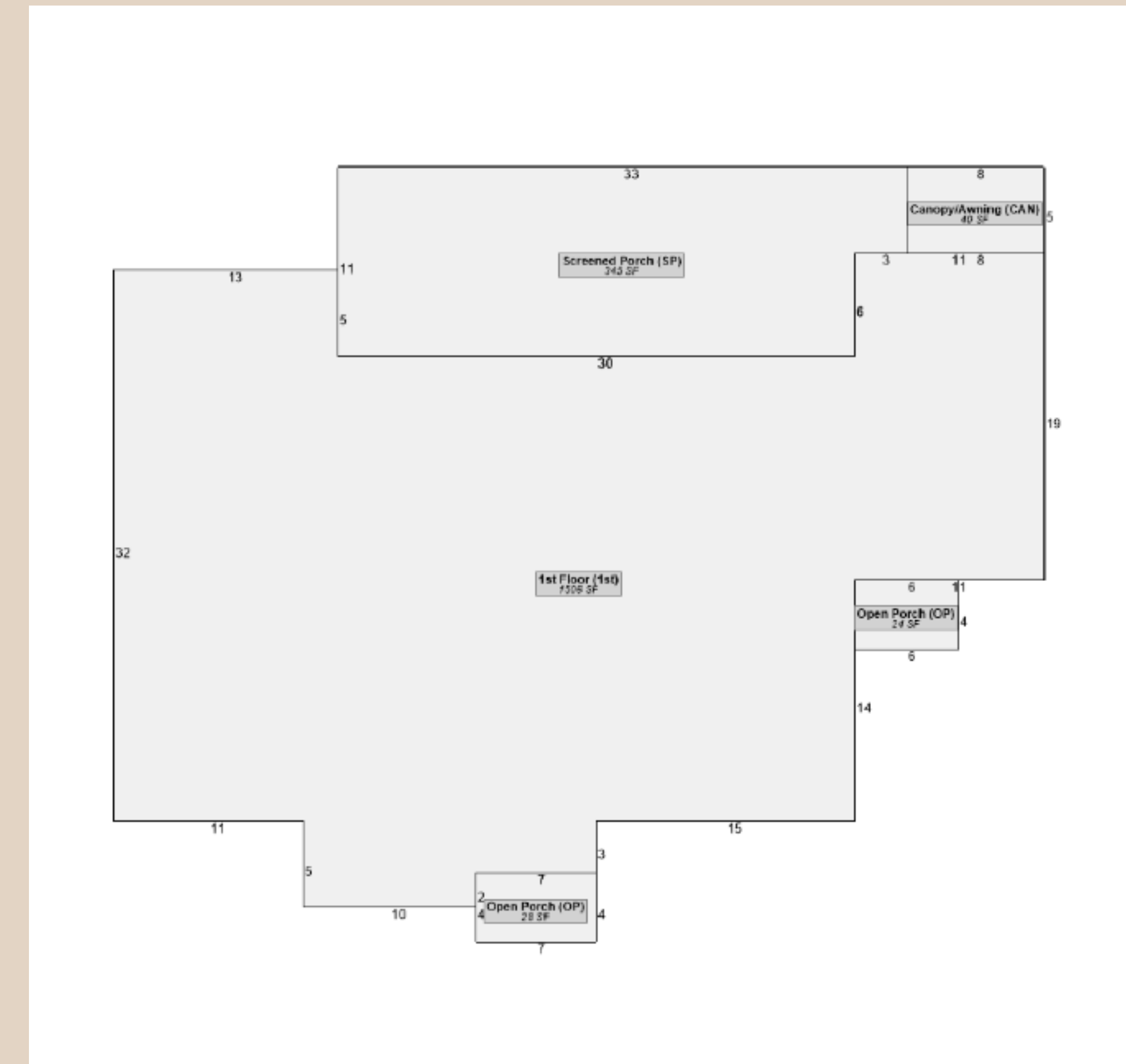
Bigger steps

Take measurements of yard, using county tax record map for lot and house size.

Use measurement wheel for details:
distance from edges, driveway, existing
trees.

Look at Google Earth / Google maps to see existing tree cover.

Note sun vs. shade areas during the day,
soil moisture, flow of water through yard.



A hand-drawn landscape plan on graph paper. The plan features several green-colored shapes representing trees and shrubs, each labeled with its name and dimensions. At the top left is a purple circle labeled "Crape Myrtle". Below it is a large, irregular green shape labeled "FL. Maple" with dimensions "8-12'". To the right of the FL. Maple is a circular green shape labeled "Fringe Tree" with dimensions "7.0" and "15-18'". Further right is another circular green shape labeled "Anna Apple" with dimensions "12'" and "spread". At the bottom left is a large, irregular green shape labeled "Sweetbay Magnolia" with dimensions "25-30'". In the center-right is a circular green shape labeled "Dahoon Holly" with dimensions "8-12'". Various other plants are noted around the main features, including "Sax. Aster", "Rustle maple", "Dwarf Wax myrtle", "Magnolia", "Stolonis Peter", "Pecan", and "Existing spruce pine". A dashed line at the bottom is labeled "Row". A compass rose indicates North (N) and South (S). Dimensions like "54' wide" and "13" are also present.

Cut out shapes for new trees, showing **maximum** spread

There are software programs that help,
if you are more savvy.

Removal of invasive plants



Professionals help remove ligustrum, crape myrtles, mimosa & camphor.

Chainsaw, then paint stumps with glysofate.

Later—front end loader pulls up most stumps

Stump grinder to remove others.

****Utility locate first!**

Removal of invasive plants

Fall is the best time for removing trees and shrubs when sap is going down.

Cut limbs / trunks, use a foam brush to dip and paint with undiluted Glyphosate.

Brush on herbicide within 15 minutes of cutting, or plant will start to heal itself (compartmentalization).

Mark shape of beds with garden hose, then outline with flour.

Cover with cardboard and mulch and water, then wait a few months.



Enlarge over time

- * Lay cardboard and cover with mulch. Wet to hold down cardboard and wait a few months. (Occultation)
- * Another method to kill grass: place clear plastic over moist soil for 4-6 weeks. It can kill beneficial soil organisms. (Solarization)



Flowers for new spaces

- * Add plants by sowing seeds using the “winter sow” method. (Multiple species)
- * Multiply plants by plant division: blue-eyed grass, Stokes aster, purple coneflower
- * Root cuttings with rooting hormone—Calamint
- * Root cuttings with water—salvia, climbing aster



Trees, shrubs, fillers

Plant trees first, in smaller sizes to save money.

Saplings establish more quickly and can surpass larger trees in a few years.

Keep in mind the eventual spread of tree canopy, changing sunlight availability over time.



Red maple tree

Evergreens for framing, privacy & winter interest

Dahoon holly

Wax myrtle

Dwarf wax myrtle

Walter's viburnum

Ashe's calamint

Blue-eyed grass

Gamma grass



Evergreens also feed wildlife



Left - right: Wax myrtle, Ashe's calamint, Dahoon holly

Evergreens add winter color



Coontie (above) and Florida anise



Evergreen cultivars replace boxwoods

Boxwood (left)
replaced with
Viburnum
obovatum
'Christmas snow'
(blooming in Feb.)



Evergreen cultivars



Viburnum obovatum 'Densa' (above) and
Viburnum obovatum 'Mrs. Shillers
delight' (right)



Before ... circa 2017



After—Nov. 2025



Back and side yard



Oak leaf hydrangea
and scarlet sage

Lessons learned

One area at a time—no more than you can water and weed.

Group species with similar sun/moisture requirements. I resist buying thirstier plants, except for one area of my yard.

Plant groups of 5 or more—“drifts” look more natural and get the attention of pollinators.

“Meadow” (sun loving, taller) plants droop over when spaced too far apart. Competition gives support, and limits growth.

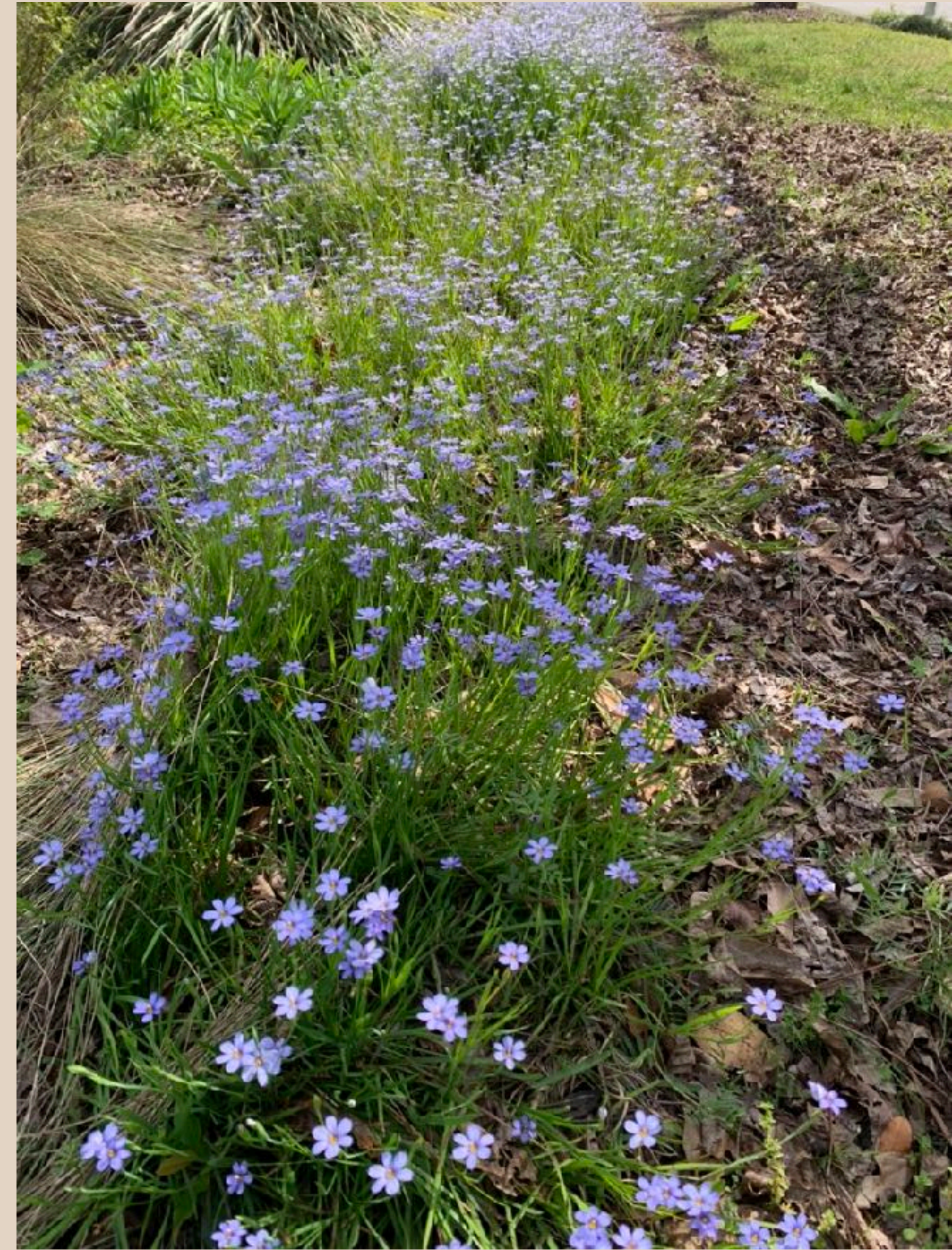
A “Chelsea chop” (pruning back by 1/3) is good to keep plants from getting too leggy and then falling over. I do this in early spring for spotted bee balm and Georgia aster.

Lessons, cont'd.

Buy more than one plant at plant sales. Some plants are self-sterile and need to cross-pollinate with another plant of same species to make fertile seed—important if you collect seeds to propagate.

Divide clumps to increase the “drift” effect. Blue-eyed grass does best when divided every three years.

Use soakerhoses near thirstier plants or hand-water to establish. (I don't have a functioning irrigation system.)



Blue-eyed grass in March

Tips, cont'd.

Find the right place for “friskier” plants that can dominate, like spotted bee balm, passion vine, river oats.

Remember: Your native habitat evolves over time!

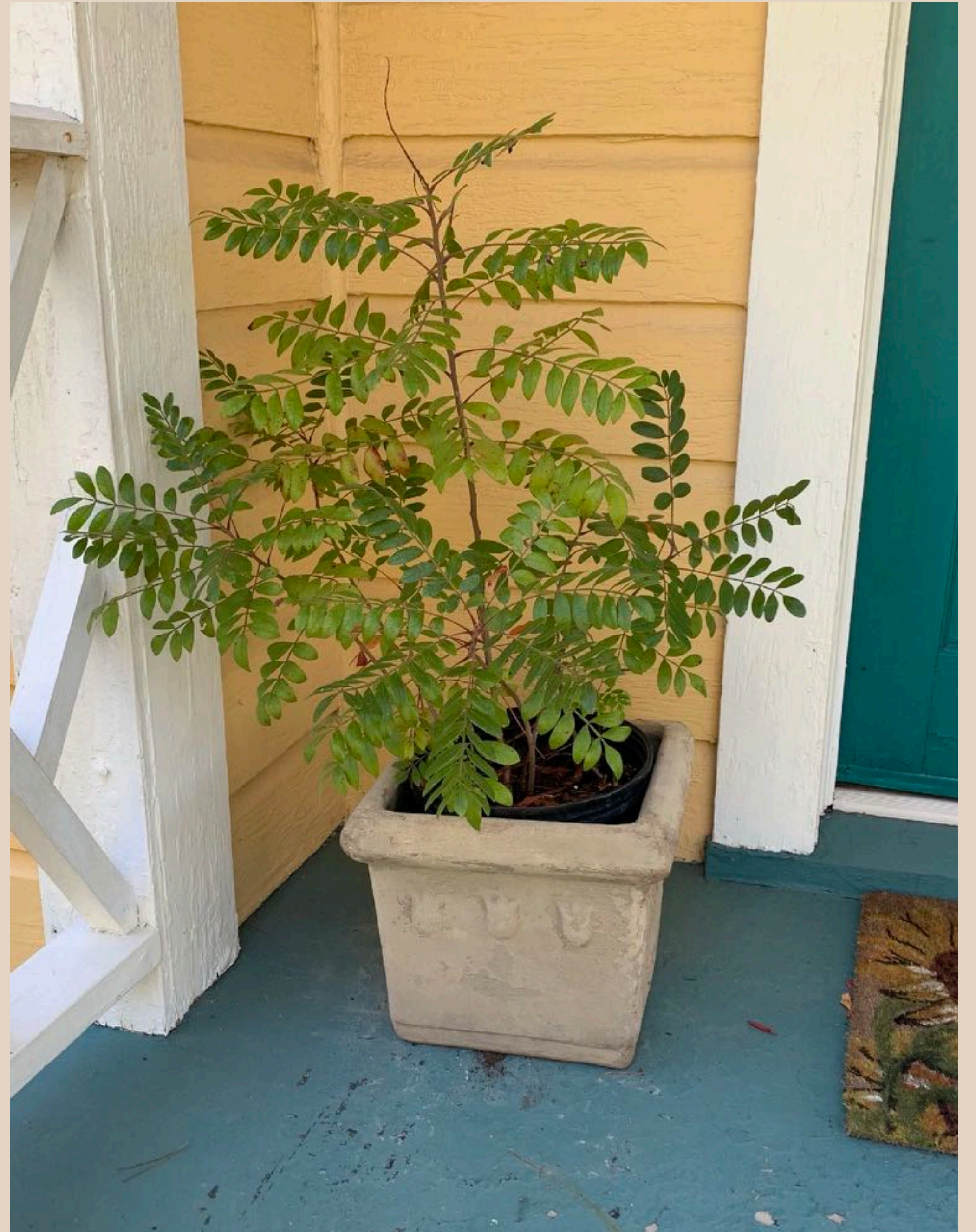
Spotted bee balm in August



Try using pots



L-R: River oats, winged sumac



Maintenance — I have help for big jobs!

Spring cut-back

Weeding

Dividing plants and expanding
area

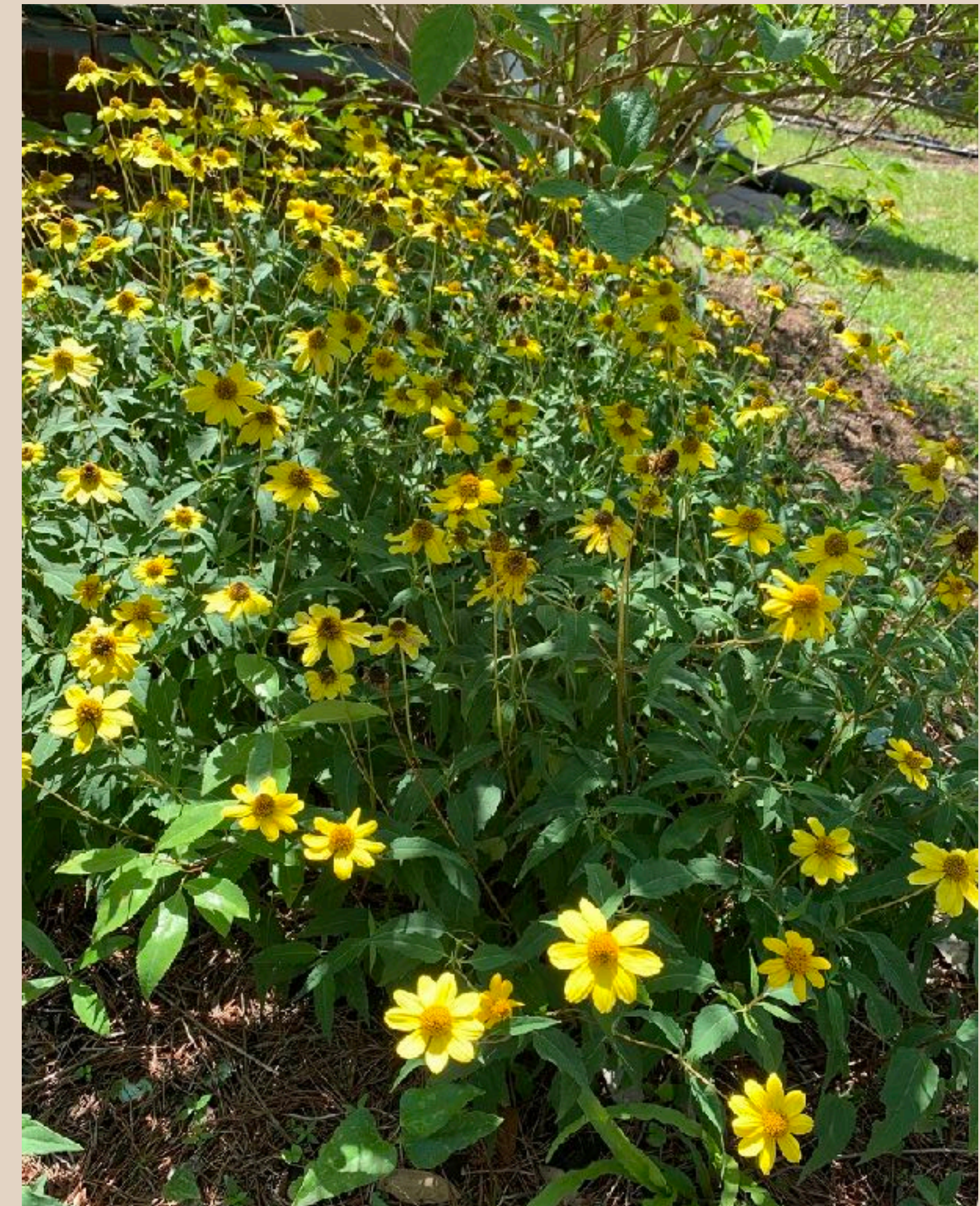
Watering during extreme heat
with drought

Lawn mowing and edging
native beds



All-star perennials

May: Stokes aster and
false sunflower



Seasonal changes—spotted bee balm, August; Muhly and purple love grasses in November



August: Black-eyed susan, obedient plant and rosinweed



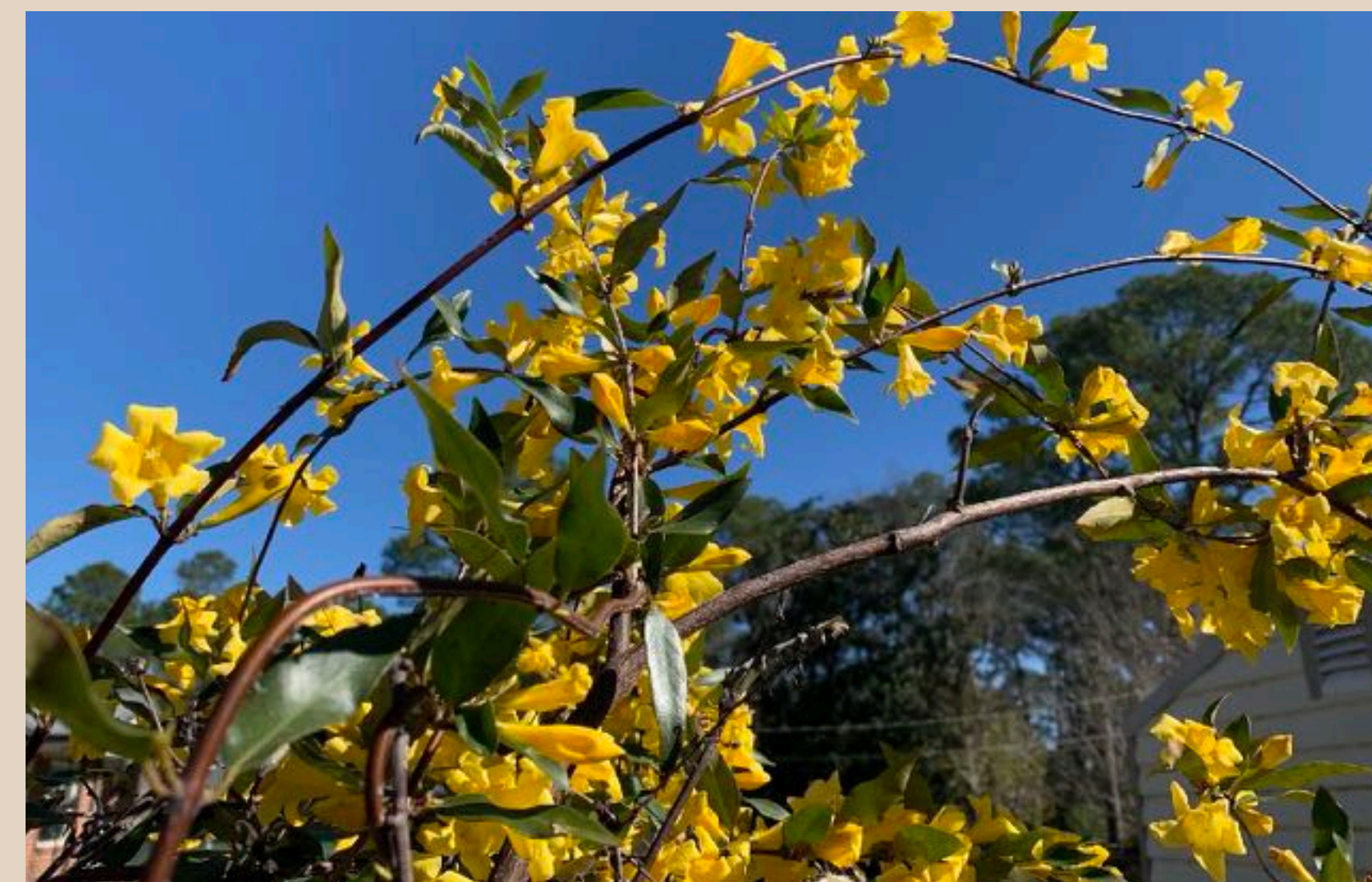
October: grey goldenrod, blue mist flower, Muhly grass



Vines



L-R: Coral honeysuckle,
Passion vine (aggressive),
Cross vine, Carolina
Jessamine



Signage informs visitors

Certifications:

GNPS Native Plant
Habitat (Silver)
Certification

Rosalyn Carter Butterfly
Trail

Homegrown National
Park (no sign yet)





Signage / community education

Coastal Plain Chapter
GNPS partnership with
Keep Tift Beautiful leads
to new understanding of
eco-landscape.

Native / wild is beautiful!

Eco-friendly practices

- Features to support wildlife (water source, brush pile, etc.)
- Composting
- Avoid herbicides / pesticides
- Capture rainwater
- Soaker hoses
- Minimize lawn
- Mulch or leave leaves
- Reduce fossil fuel equipment



Choosing Coastal Plain Plants

Georgia Native Plant Society Publications <https://gnps.org/education/>

Sources of plants: <https://gnps.org/georgias-native-plants/sources-native-plants/>

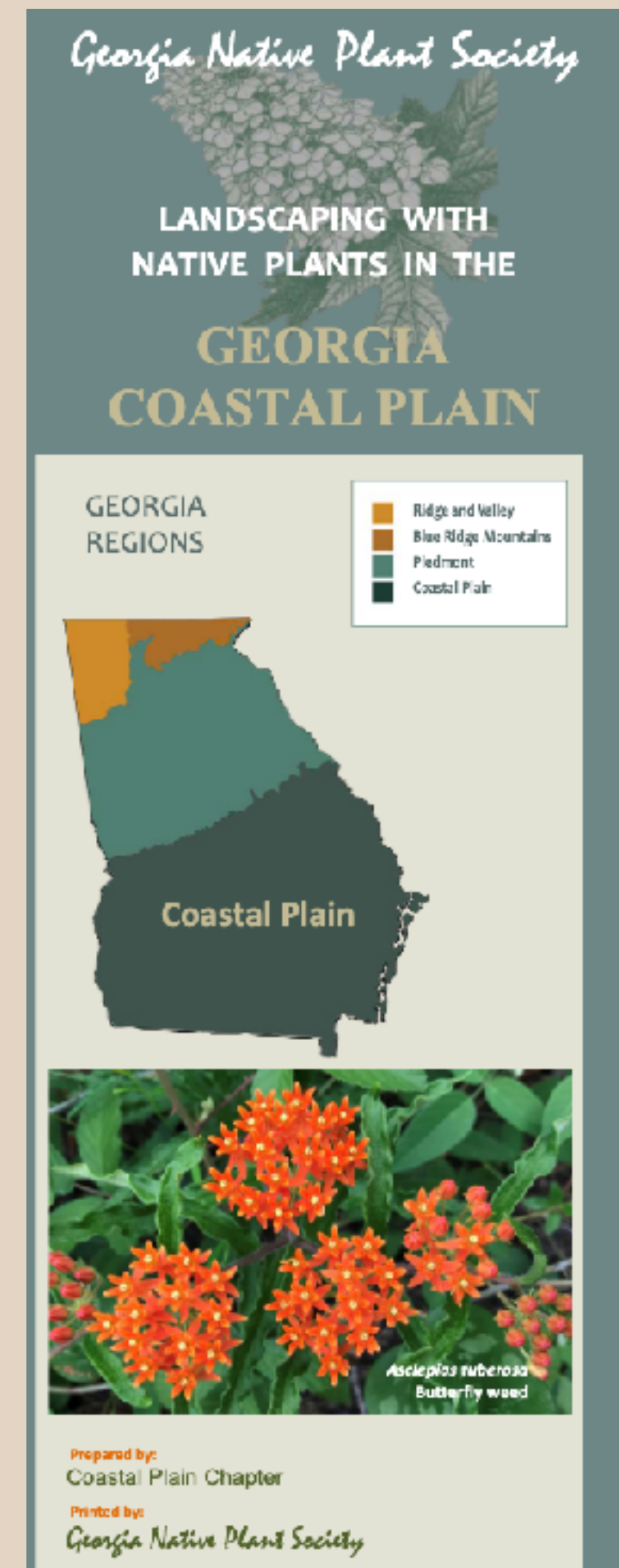
Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center <https://www.wildflower.org/plants/>

USDA Plants Database. <https://plants.usda.gov/home>

UGA Ecoscapes Database: <https://ecoscapes.bugwood.org/>

Zip Code searches for appropriate species for your region:

- Zerces Society, Audubon Society, National Wildlife Federation, Homegrown National Park (**look for keystone species**)



“Keystone” plants feed the most insects.
96% of our terrestrial birds rely on insects
supported by keystone plants.

Top Keystone Trees:

Oak (Quercis) hosts 436 caterpillar species
Plum (Prunus) hosts 340 caterpillar species
Birch (Betula) hosts 284 caterpillar species
Cottonwood (Populus) hosts 249 caterpillar species
Maples (Acer) hosts 238 caterpillars species
Other top species: crabapple, hickory, pine

Top Keystone Perennials:

Goldenrod (Solidago) hosts 104 caterpillar species
Aster (Symphyotrichum) hosts 100 caterpillar species
Sunflower (Helianthus) hosts 66 caterpillar species
Black-eyed susan & others (Rudbeckia) hosts 20 species

Shrub: Blueberry (Vaccinium) host for 217 caterpillar species

Research by entomologist Doug Tallamy.

<https://www.nwf.org/-/media/Documents/PDFs/Garden-for-Wildlife/Keystone-Plants/NWF-GFW-keystone-plant-list-ecoregion-8-eastern-temperate-forests.pdf>

Plants mentioned

Swamp milkweed—*Asclepius incarnata*
Purple cone flower—*Echinacea purpurea*
Blanket flower—*Gaillardia pulchella*
Blackeyed Susan—*Rudbeckia fulgida* ‘Goldsturm’
Beautyberry—*Callicarpa americana*
Dahoon holly— *Ilex cassine*
Wax myrtle—*Morella cerifera*
Dwarf wax myrtle—*Morella cerifera* ‘Don’s Dwarf’
Walter’s viburnum—*Viburnum obovatum*
‘Christmas snow’, ‘Mrs. Schillers Delight’, ‘Densa’
Blue-eyed grass—*Sisyrinchium angustifolium*
Ashe’s calamint—*Calamintha ashei*
Muhly grass—*Muhlenbergia capillaris*
Red maple—*Acer rubrum*
Fringe tree—*Chionanthus virginicus*
Stokes aster—*Stokesia laevis*
Spotted bee balm—*Monarda punctata*
Obedient plant—*Physostegia virginiana*

Grey goldenrod—*Solidago nemoralis*
Georgia aster—*Symphotrichum Georgianum*
False sunflower—*Heliopsis helianthoides*
Scarlet sage—*Salvia coccinea*
Oak leaf hydrangea—*Hydrangea quercifolia*
River oats—*Chasmanthium latifolium*
Coral honeysuckle—*Lonicera sempervirens*
Cross vine—*Bignonia capreolata*
Passion vine—*Passiflora incarnata*
Carolina Jessamine—*Gelsemium sempervirens*
Rosinweed—*Silphium sp.*
Coontie—*Zamia pumila*
Florida anise—*Illicium floridanum*
Gamma grass—*Tripsacum dactyloides*
Spurred butterfly pea—*Centrosema virginianum*

Complete Plant list available.

Get started— Every native plant counts!

Mary Alice Applegate
maapple@mac.com



Coastal Plain Chapter
Georgia Native Plant Society



Spurred butterfly pea