

## News from the Watershed

### Florida: Land of Flowers

La Florida, Spanish for flowery or covered with flowers, was the name that Ponce de Leon chose for our beautiful state back in 1512. Today, famous for its sandy beaches and year-round sunshine, Florida has much to offer residents and tourists alike.

The diversity of Florida soils provides a rich abundance of various types of vegetation and plant communities including marshes, hammocks, swamps, pine flat woods and scrub. In addition, Florida is populated with an abundance of wildlife. More than 80 species of land mammals and 400 species of birds reside in Florida. Millions of migratory birds visit the Sunshine State every year and Florida's waters host over 700 species of fish, not to mention the famous American Alligator.

Florida became a state on March 3, 1845, when it entered the Union. It became the 27<sup>th</sup> and the last state east of the Mississippi River. Florida has an interesting and rich historical background made up of different people and traditions. Native Americans, soldiers, pirates, sailors, planters, outlaws, sheriffs, migrants and slaves are all found in the pages of our history books. Different traditions such as Indian, French, Spanish, English, Southern and Modern American all make up our historical diversity.

Florida's major industries include tourism, agriculture, manufacturing, plants, forest products and phosphate. Populated with approximately sixteen million people, Florida ranks fourth in the nation in population and is the 26<sup>th</sup> largest state with 53,997 square miles of land.

Florida's motto is *In God We Trust* and the state song is *Suwannee River*. It is often called the *Sunshine State* or *Peninsula State* and the capital city is Tallahassee. In 1987 the Florida legislature designated the American alligator the official state reptile. The Mockingbird is the state bird; our state tree is the Sable Palm; the animal that represents our state is the Florida Panther and finally, the state flower is the orange blossom.

By resolution of the Florida legislature on November 15, 1909, the orange blossom (*Citrus sinensis*) was adopted as the state flower. Apparently there were a variety of difficult choices in picking this particular flower, which included the gardenia and camellia. But the orange blossom won, most likely because of the wonderful fragrance it produces. It is one of the most aromatic flowers in Florida and millions of these tiny blossoms permeate the atmosphere throughout central and southern Florida each year.

Orange blossoms are white, have a wonderfully sweet smell and are arranged in clusters of 1-6 and generally bloom in spring. The result of these tiny blossoms is a round, orange fruit, called an orange. As you know, orange trees are not native to Florida; however because of the fragrant scent their blossoms produce, they have the distinct honor of being host to Florida's state flower.

In 1991, the Florida legislature named *Coreopsis* as Florida's official wildflower. This attractive bloom is usually yellow in coloration and is often used to beautify medians and roadways. Even though coreopsis are known for their yellow color, the daisy-like flowers range in various shades of yellow to dark gold to almost orange and even shades of pink.

The common name for Florida's state wildflower is Tickseed because their seeds resemble ticks. The bloom usually has a toothed tip and grows about one inch in diameter. Their active growth period is in spring and summer. They are a part of the Aster family and their name is derived from the Greek word *koris*, meaning Bedbug.

In addition to beautifying our highways, *Coreopsis* can be used as fresh cut flowers, especially those with long flower stems. At the end of the flowering season, if seeds are allowed to remain, the birds will enjoy them in their diet. Not many plants offer season-long beauty, both indoors and out and also provide food for wildlife.

Florida may have some features that are not so pleasant, such as mosquitoes and humidity, but take a moment to look around at all the beauty that our state offers us. If you would like to find out more about Florida and our environment, please visit our website at [www.highlandsswcd.org](http://www.highlandsswcd.org) or give us a call at (863) 402-6545.