

Native firebush is a must have for butterfly gardens.

What if I told you that there is a beautiful native plant that attracts hummingbirds and butterflies and will perk up a drab, tired looking landscape? Native firebush is a wonderful choice for accomplishing these goals. The plant is considered a must have for most butterfly gardeners because of the ample source of nectar within its beautiful blooms. Songbirds will also be attracted to the plant because of the berries it produces. It's a great choice for anyone wanting to plant native and still have all these benefits.

Considered a nearly "trouble free" bush that produces beautiful, orange-red flowers, firebush is a great addition to most any garden. It is a subtropical plant and does not like the cold weather very much. But, if frost or a freeze occurs, the plant will usually appear to die, however in reality the plant is most likely alive and will re-sprout in the spring. It is considered low maintenance and is adapted to local Florida soils and climate.

For best blooming results, the plant should be in full sun. It will grow in shade or partial shade, but may become somewhat "leggy" without the benefit of the sun. In sunny, well-drained soil locations, the plant will give the maximum amount of blooms. In shady locations, flowering will be reduced. If planted in the shade, the growth will become open and almost vine-like.

Firebush is native to central and south Florida hammocks and open disturbed areas. It is a fast growing evergreen shrub that can grow to heights of 6 to 12 feet. The leaves have red veins and the stalks of the plant are also red. The one-inch long tubular flowers are found in clusters. The small berries begin as green, turn to yellow, then to red and finally to black. They are a source of food for many birds. The plant will have berries or flowers year round.

Hummingbirds and butterflies love the nectar of the attractive, tubular flowers. The blackened berries that the plant produces are a favorite of cardinals. In addition to being an animal attractor, the plant can take the heat and drought. It is an excellent choice as a background for lower growing plants.

Firebush is just one of the many native plants that will be offered at the Air Potato Exchange Day on January 9, 2010. The project is being paid for by a grant from Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council – Kathy Craddock Burks education grant. The \$1,000.00 received for the grant will pay for hundreds of native plants that will be provided by Lord's Farm Nursery in Lake Placid. Each person that brings in a bag of air potato bulbs will be given a free native plant. This series of articles is intended to familiarize you with the selections that will be offered.

At least four workshops on air potato will be offered between September and December of this year. The intent of these presentations is to familiarize you with air potato and the harm that it causes in our neighborhoods and environment. If you are interested in these upcoming workshops and receiving your free native plant, watch for local advertisements and articles on the program or call (863) 402-6545 for more information. You can also log on to our website at www.highlandsswcd.org.