# Lake Beautyberry

FLORIDA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

JULY 2026 NEWSLETTER

Neta Villalobos-Bell

## Why Leaf Litter is Important

Leaf litter is habitat, soil amendment, weed supressant, and moderates temperature and moisture.

“When you remove leaves, instead of retaining them, you reduce the number of moths by 45 percent, the number of spiders by 56 percent on average, the average number of beetles by 24 percent.” Credit Dr Ferlauto, state entomologist, Maryland Natural Heritage Program.
“Though it’s common to refer to fallen leaves as leaf litter, debris, detritus or yard waste, they support a diversity of invertebrates that in turn provide services like pollination and pest control”. Credit Doug Tallamy, entomologist, ecologist, author, professor University of Delaware.

Raked leaves can be relocated into existing beds elsewhere which can reduce bagged mulch.

Though it is often recommended that these leaves be composted, an approach that does reduce what goes to the landfill, but a well-managed compost pile achieves temperatures that will kill some organisms beneficial to your yard, Dr. Ferlauto said.

“If your pile is too deep, the insects are not going to get the cues that they need to know when it’s time to emerge,” he said. “The energetic output they need to just get out of that leaf pile will reduce their survival.”

***(Continued on Page 02)***

What’s hidden in the leaves? (Answer near squirrel below)

***(Continued from Page 01)***

*"Leaves have fallen for millions of years, so of course plants and animals have come to expect or even rely on them to complete their life cycles," said Rebecca McMackin, lead horticulturist for the American Horticultural Society. "It's our job as ecological gardeners to figure out how to incorporate these natural processes into our landscapes in ways that are both functional and beautiful."*

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

**Mary Uhlhorn, *Tavares***
**Natalie Yawn, *Eustis***
**Brian Francis, *Grand Island***

Where leaves were cleaned up, research identified the loss of 24 percent less carbon in soils. Soil carbon is a key to plants' access to nutrition, and to the soil's moisture-holding capacity, which is beneficial to plants and can also help prevent runoff. Healthy plants need healthy soil with the right nutrients, and decomposing leaves are a critical part of the process. Leaf litter also protects plant roots, regulates soil moisture and temperature, and does it as well as mulch as store bought mulch. And, it's free.

Many of our Florida trees lose their leaves at different times throughout the year. Deciduous trees like maple, sweetgum and cypress drop their leaves in cooler weather. Others like oaks and magnolias shed leaves throughout the year. Even "evergreen" pine trees drop some of their needles seasonally. These fallen leaves are called "leaf litter" and offer plenty of benefits to the soil and native wildlife!

Leaf litter can be very high in biodiversity. Frogs, toads, salamanders, skinks, spiders, slugs, worms, and other small invertebrates all live in leaf litter. Many of these critters help control pest insects. Certain moths and butterflies spend all or part of their lives in leaf litter. Unfortunately, many of these species are in decline due to loss of habitat; clearing yards of leaf litter plays a large role in this decline. These critters are an essential part of the food web for native wildlife and part of a healthy ecosystem.

Leaf litter provides birds that forage in the leaves with a critical diet of insect protein. Cardinals, doves, sparrows, thrashers, towhees, and others spend some or most of their time feeding in the leaf litter. Nesting birds use some of this material to build nests and fallen leaves can help shelter fledglings on the ground.
To maintain a neat and orderly yard, leaves can be raked and moved to places in your yard where they are out of the way, will not kill your turf, and will still help wildlife. Use them under tress and in garden beds.

Leaving leaf litter in appropriate areas help sustain the natural web of life.

**Lake Beautyberry Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society**
*Our Mission is to Champion Florida's Native Plants and Their Habitats!*
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# UPCOMING EVENTS

## *01 HOW TO GROW A BETTER BIRD FEEDER*

*Tuesday, July 14, 2026, 2:00pm*

*Umatilla Library, 412 Hatfield Drive, Umatilla, FL 32784*

*Speaker Neta Villalobos-Bell, Lake Beautyberry Native Plant Chapter, will show how to increase the number and variety of birds that visit a yard by providing more than store bought seed. Find out what birds really need and how to provide for them by "growing" a better bird feeder habitat with Florida native plants. Free and open to the public.*

## *02 CAN YOU NAME FLORIDA'S SEVEN (EIGHT) NATIVE PINES*

*Sunday, July 19, 2026, 1:30pm*

*W.T. Bland Library, 1995 N Donnelly St, Mt Dora, FL*

One of our popular speakers, Biologist Patti Smith, is back to share native pine tree details from history to identification, and more. Save the date. Free and open to the public.

## BOARD MEMBERS

| OFFICE | NAME | EMAIL |
|---|---|---|
| President & Treasurer | Jane Bullock | jgb4203@gmail.com |
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| Discovery Gardens | Lavon Silvernell | lavonsilvernell@gmail.com |
| Communications | Clayton Yuen | hapagraphics@gmail.com |

# UPCOMING EVENTS

## *03 CREATE A RAIN GARDEN*

*Sunday, July 19, 2026,  4:00pm*

*W.T. Bland Library, 1995 N Donnelly St, Mt Dora, FL*

**Sponsored by the Lake Beautyberry Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society**

Learn how to control rainwater runoff with yard features, including the differences between a bog, pond, rain barrel and rain garden. Basic instructions on how to build a rain garden are provided. All attendees earn door prize tickets for native plants. No registration required.

## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Volunteers are essential to the Lake Beautyberry Native Plant Chapter. Join in the fun while you help preserve the Floirda's natural beauty for the future.

Here are just some of the ways you can become involved and share your talents.

- Greeting visitors at Chapter meetings
- Environmental Education
- Exotic Plant Control
- Native Plant and Nature Photography
- Newsletter Articles

Contact Neta Villalobos-Bell for more detail or to volunteer: netavb@gmail.com

FEATURED ARTICLE

Neta Villalobos-Bell

# ATTRACT MORE BIRDS TO YOUR YARD

**Original Publication 2020:** Seminole Audubon Newsletter and Friends of Wekiva River Newsletter.

*The following is the 2nd in a series of 5 articles that will enhance your garden as bird habitat.* ***Series 1****: Fruit,* ***Series 2****: Seeds,* ***Series 3****: Nuts,* ***Series 4****: Insects,* ***Series 5****: Shelter and Nests*

## Best Florida Native Plants for Birds

*Series 3 of 5 = Food:* ***Nuts***

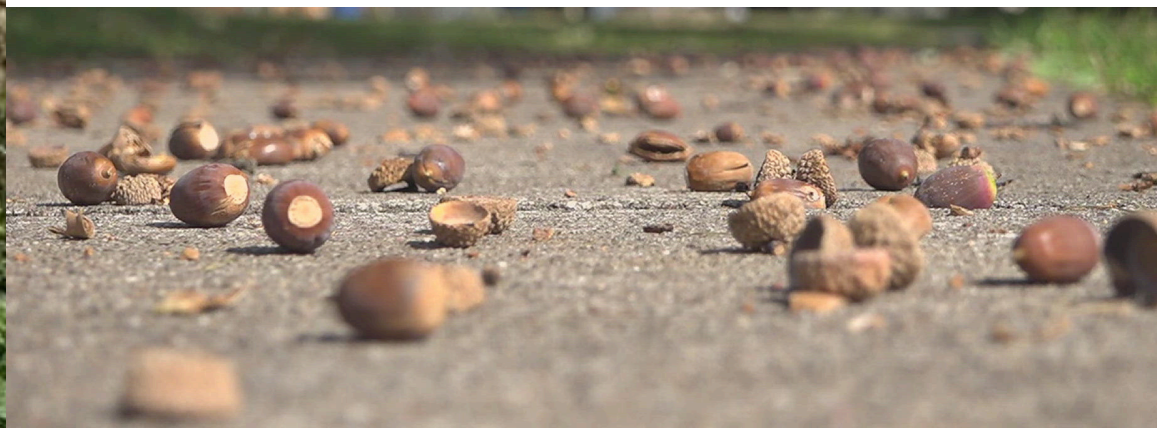
Series 3 suggests Florida native trees available that produce nuts used mostly by woodpeckers, blue jays, and wood ducks. Although there are other nut trees, such as hickory, beech, and basswood, only the oaks are listed below. Many of the other nut trees are not in Central Florida or are used more by other animals, such as mammals. If possible, place your oaks away from patios, sidewalks, and driveways to avoid a mess of crunches and stains.

And, of course, choose the plant best suited for your yard based on the plant culture and behavior to best match your yard conditions. Differing conditions can affect the growth and behaviors described in books and online.

**NUTS – OAKS**

There are 19 Florida native oak species. They generally don't produce nuts until mature at 10-15 years old. Oak trees have an added bonus, that is, insects! Check out the forthcoming Series 4 on insects as food for birds.

*(continued)*







# Nuts – Oaks (cont.)

**01. Southern Red Oak/Spanish Oak**. *Quercus falcata*

- Height: up to 90’ Spread: 10-20’
- Soil: sandy, acid
- Light: Sun to part shade
- Nut: rounded, ½” long, most September to October drop, high in protein. Deciduous

**02. Shumard Oak.** *Quercus shumardii*

- Height: 60-110’ Spread: 40-60’
- Soil: Moist, well-drained
- Light: Full sun
- Nut: 1”, shallow cup that covers less than ¼ of the nut, most drop mid-November to December, high in protein. Deciduous

**03. Post Oak.** *Quercus stellata*

- Height: 45 to 55’ Spread: 35-50’
- Soil: all soils
- Light: Full sun
- Nut: ¾”, slight stripes run toward fuzzy tip, cup covers about 1/3 of nut, singly or pairs closely attached to twigs, high in protein, autumn drop. Deciduous

**04. Bluejack Oak.** *Quercus incana*

- Height: 15-40’ Spread: 20’ to 30’
- Soil: sandy
- Light: Full sun
- Nut: about ½’ long, reddish brown cap with soft hairs underneath covers top ¼ of nut, high in fat content, autumn drop. Deciduous

**ANSWER:** At the top of the leaf litter photo, at the edge of the wall and leaves, approximately in the middle , look for a strip. It’s a toad. It was in my yard. **Neta**

## Resources for additional research on these plants.

**Tree Links**

- Florida Trees & Shrubs
- Florida Oaks

**Books**

- The Trees of Florida, Gil Nelson.

**Websites**

- www.fnps.org
- www.plantrealflorida.org


**Author: Neta Villalobos-Bell. Certified Advanced Florida Master Naturalist, Certified Horticulture Professional, Certified National Association Interpreter. Member of Florida Native Plant Society.**



**Shumard Oak** (*Quercus shumardii*)


**Post Oak** (*Quercus stellata*)


**Bluejack Oak** (*Quercus incana*)