



## PLANT THIS...NOT THAT!

(Author's Note: This is the third in a series of articles by members of the City of Sanibel Vegetation Committee dealing with vegetative matters of concern to island residents. Members of the Vegetation Committee are Sanibel residents appointed by City Council for one-year terms. To be considered for appointment, contact the City Manager's Office at (239) 472-3700.)

### But how do we know what makes a plant good?

Consider choosing native plants that are self-sustaining to their environment, provide food and shelter for wildlife, grow naturally and flourish without extra maintenance, and require no fertilizer.

Almost one third of plants growing wild in Florida are not native. Some non-natives have been introduced and grow rapidly, outcompeting and displacing native plants and disrupting native plant communities. Many are typically difficult to eradicate and may eliminate or alter habitat for wildlife.

Contrast the Seaside Mahoe (*Thespesia populnea*) with the Sea Grape (*Coccoloba uvifera*). The former outcompetes other trees and grasses that stabilize beachfront areas. The Sea Grape, a native, is hardy, provides great bird habitat, has edible fruit, and the leaves provide a natural mulch.

### Choose the Sea Grape!

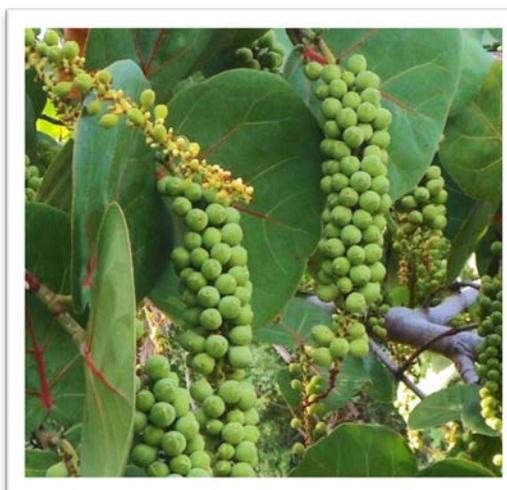


Seaside Mahoe (Non-Native)



Sea Grape (Native)

Photo Credits: LeeAnn Beanland,  
Vegetation Committee



Sea Grape Fruit (Native)

Another example is the Mexican Petunia (*Ruellia brittonia*). Like Seaside Mahoe, Mexican Petunia has been designated an invasive exotic species by the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council. It has invaded nine states, is not used by butterflies, has a rampant root system and actually sprays its seed which can persist in the soil for years!

Mexican petunia is certainly a bad actor!

Make the switch to another native petunia, the Wild Petunia (*Ruellia caroliniana*) which is hardy in sun or shade and is a host plant for Malachite and Buckeye butterflies with the same blue color! Another good choice would be Blue Porterweed (*Stachytarpheta jamaicensis*), a hardy shrubby ground cover, grows in shade or sun and a butterfly nectar plant.

### Go Native!

When in doubt about your choices, consult the following websites or a local native plant nursery where knowledgeable staff will either make a visit to your property or discuss good choices there at the nursery.



Mexican Petunia (Non-Native)  
Photo Credit: LeeAnn Beanland,  
Vegetation Committee



Wild Petunia (Native)  
Photo Credit: Mary Keim,  
Flickr Creative Commons



Blue Porterweed (Native)  
Photo Credit: LeeAnn Beanland, Vegetation Committee

[www.fleppc.org](http://www.fleppc.org) - Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council List of Invasive Plant Species

<http://mysanibel.com/Departments/Natural-Resources/Vegetation-Permits/For-Contractors>  
Click on "Plant images and Information" in the blue information box on the right side of the page. You will see native plant species in flower and fruit with descriptive information.