



About Florida Pines

Pines, not oaks, are characteristic of the Southwest Florida Coast. They thrive in nutrient poor, sandy, droughty and salty soils. They tolerate flooding during stormy periods. Their high canopy and stout branches attract eagles, ospreys, hawks, owls and many other kinds of birds. Migratory species feed and rest in pine canopy as they move from summer nesting grounds to wintering grounds. In coastal urban areas, pines provide habitat for birds foraging along the coast. Pinecones are very nutritious; birds also eat the sap and the insects that are attracted to the sap. Pine bark provides habitat for moths and other insects that birds feed to their nestlings in spring.

Longleaf Pine (*Pinus palustris*) prefers higher and dryer locations, has longer needles and a flatter canopy. The new growth of needles at the tip of the branch forms a single white 'candle.' The range in Florida covers the upper two thirds of the state, including Sarasota and Manatee Counties.

South Florida Slash Pine (*Pinus elliottii*) prefers lower wetter locations and has a rounder canopy. The new growth of needles forms 3 to 4 yellow 'candles'. Slash pine is found all over Florida, but there are two subspecies here with different ranges. The *Pinus elliottii* var. *elliottii* only grows well in North Florida. The variation in our area is the *Pinus elliottii* var. *Densa*.

Where Should We Plant Pines?

Pines are large trees and need space to grow, perhaps at the back of your property (at least 25 ft away from your home). Take into account your neighbor's property, too. Plant young pines in natural groupings (three or more). They like community! A good spacing is 10 to 12 feet apart. Dig a wide hole and plant the tree so that the soil level at the top of the potted tree is level with the ground. Don't dig the hole too deep or shallow. Pines will grow to 30 ft., often in the first ten years. In nature; this is an adaptation to surviving fire which is crucial to many Florida habitats. Pines provide high, dappled shade and self-mulching pine needles, which is an ideal environment in Florida for understory shrubs, grasses, wildflowers and edible plants. You can keep needles beneath the tree or use some to mulch other garden beds in your yard (the needles do make the soil a little more acidic). Pine needle mulch is expensive when purchased at a garden center.

Pine Care

All native plants and trees need to be cared for and watered regularly after they are planted. Do not let them dry out while they are establishing strong roots and learning to thrive under natural conditions. At a minimum, water deeply (soaking the soil to the base of the roots) and daily for the first two to three weeks. The soil must be kept moist at all times during the beginning of the establishment period so that root hairs will grow into the surrounding soil. Water every other day for the second two to three weeks. Water every third day for the third two to three weeks. No need to water on days when it rains more than one inch. During the first year, water larger trees at least twice a week especially during spring months when it is hot and dry. Larger trees require supplemental watering during hot and dry periods for the first three years. Native plants do not require fertilizer if planted in the right place. They will respond to sunlight, rainfall, soil temperatures and humidity and will grow at a naturally sustainable rate. No pruning is needed.

Once a pine is established, don't disturb the roots. Don't pave over them, dig around them, lay heavy material over them, irrigate them or fertilize them.

How many pines can we, as a community, plant in Sarasota and Bradenton?

If you manage, live or work on a larger piece of land, you can PLANT MORE PINES. We encourage schools, businesses, government, churches, condos, apartments, homeowner associations and neighborhood groups to plant a community of pines.

Thank you Annie and Laurel of **Florida Native Plants Nursery & Landscaping** floridanativeplants.com for sharing this information with us.

