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Pines

“To earth, and every common sight, to me did seem appareled in celestial light,” so wrote William Wordsworth, noted 19th century English romantic poet.

Wordsworth began his life in scenic northwest England. Benefiting from a privileged birth, he was afforded the time to reflect on the area’s natural beauty. Most of the residents were working just to survive and had little time to notice.

The terrain was heavily timbered in Wordsworth day, including a variety of pines which were part of the background of life for most people.

A similar situation exists in Wakulla County today. The variety of pines is so common that they are rarely seen or appreciated.

Arguably, the stateliest local pine is the Longleaf. This pine is a native North American tree capable of reaching 80 to 125 feet in height with a 30 to 40-foot-branch spread.



A distinctive characteristic this beautiful tree is the new growth clusters which are silvery white during the winter. These buds are commonly called candles, which require little imagination from the viewer to see the similarity.

Longleaf Pines stay in a tufted, grass-like stage for five to seven years after germinating. They grow very slowly in this phase while developing a root system.

Once the root system is established, the growth accelerates. The bright evergreen needles may extend up to 14 inches long and are very flexible giving a weeping effect to the tree.



Flowers are inconspicuous and occur in spring, along with abundant pollen. Soon large, spiny cones follow and may remain on the tree for several years.

The slash pine is another large, stately, heavily-branched, long-needed conifer native to Wakulla County. It is capable of a rapid growth rate and the potential of reaching 100 feet in height with a three to four-foot-diameter trunk.

The six-inch-long cones appear among the dark green, eight-inch-long needles, and are favored by wildlife. Squirrels are particularly fond of the seeds, scattering the cone debris below.

Slash Pines self-prune its lower branches forming an open, rounded canopy which creates a light, dappled shade beneath. The grey-brown bark is deeply furrowed and scaly.

The filtered light allows just enough sun to reach understory plants and grow beneath this tall, evergreen tree. This high, shifting shade provides an opportunity for wildlife habitat in the undergrowth.

Aggressive root competition for moisture takes place beneath these pines. Left unmanaged, excessive undergrowth can produce a wildfire hazard particularly during the dry season.

Pines typically have deep roots except in poorly-drained soil. Once established slash pines are more tolerant of wet sites than most other pines and are moderately salt-tolerant.

Pines grow well on a variety of acidic soils in full sun or partial shade. The tap root is prominent in well-drained soils and can make young trees difficult to transplant from the wild.

Like in Wordsworth's day, while pines go largely unnoticed they are an integral part of modern life. Pine timber for structures, pine needles for mulch, pulp for paper and there are many more pine product which are used daily without a thought to their origin.



To learn more about pines in Wakulla County, contact your UF/IFAS Wakulla Extension Office at 850-926-3931 or at <http://wakulla.ifas.ufl.edu/>, and leave your comments and questions about the article.