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Wildflowers of Wakulla County, Florida

The western part of Wakulla County hides a fleeting treasure available to only those with a curious mind and a will to witness the ageless autumn display. Fall wildflowers have marshaled a colorful shout against the muted and inevitable silence of a coming winter.

A leisurely ride out Smith Creek Road into the Apalachicola National Forest provides the opportunity to observe vibrant displays in and under the pines, palmettos and other permanent residents of the area. In the current cul-de-sac lifestyle of two income homes and crammed schedules, even for the children, the autumn forest provides a stark contrast.



A GPS is recommended for the novice observers venturing off Smith Creek Road, or at least a compass for basic headings. The forest roads can be confusing and remember the sun sets in the west.

The aptly named Golden rods are common in clumps and individuals. This native plant has the unjust reputation for causing hay fever. Research has shown its pollen is too heavy to be windblown. The culprit causing the red eyes and sneezing is ragweed, which blooms nondescriptly at the same time.

Golden rods were once considered a strategic resource critical to national security. Thomas Edison used flamboyant perennials to produce a natural rubber when off-shore sources were threatened by world politics. A ball of golden rod rubber currently resides at Edison's winter home in Fort Myers, Florida.

On the other end of the color spectrum is the Blazing Star. This plant produces lavender blooms on an eight to 12 inch spike. The clusters are frequently seen on roadsides because the plant has a need for exposure to sunlight.

The Pitcher Plant, while not a wildflower, is a colorful local inhabitant of wetter terrain. Sometimes located in a roadside ditch, sometimes found on the edge of swampy areas, the plant is frequently found in a group.

A carnivorous plant whose unique prey-trapping mechanism features a deep cavity filled with a liquid. Unsuspecting insects are attracted by lures into the cavity formed by the cupped leaf.

The interior sides of the pitcher are slippery and leave nothing for a fatigued insect to rest upon. Soon the prey is down its body is gradually dissolved providing the plant with needed nutrients.



Ladies Hatpins are commonly found with pitcher plants in wet areas. The diminutive button-like bloom clusters are located on the end of a ram-rod straight stalk. These perennials bloom throughout the warm seasons of the year.

Blue Mistflowers are aggressive colonizers that spread by underground runners. The dense deep blue and purple blooms appear as autumn progresses. Like the blazing stars, they are frequently seen on roadside habitats because of their requirement for sunlight.

And there are so many more not mentioned here: Asters, False Foxgloves, Sunflowers, Deer Tongue and the list goes on. However, as the days get shorter, so does the treasure of autumn 2012.

To learn more about local wildflower, contact the UF/IFAS Wakulla Extension Office at 850-926-3931 or visit <http://wakulla.ifas.ufl.edu/>.