

# Nature Notes

...from Sharon

Wild lantana (*Lantana involucrata*), aka wild sage, is native to South Florida's coastal dune areas. This plant is a favorite of mine at Barefoot Beach Preserve, because of its tiny, delicate bouquet-like flower clusters, the small purple berries that it produces, and the aromatic leaves. The tiny tubular flowers are white with a yellow center. Although the flowers have little to no scent, the small oval leaves are very fragrant and have been used in making perfumes.



The leaves are rough-textured with small toothed-edges and have tiny fuzzy hairs on the upper surface. The ripe purple berries each have a single seed and are edible; however, the green, non-ripened berries are considered toxic. This plant flowers and provides food year-round for many birds and mammals that frequent the Preserve.

## Wild Lantana or Wild Sage (*Lantana involucrata*)



This evergreen shrub can grow up to 6 feet tall. New plants are easily started from seeds or cuttings. Wild lantana is a great dune stabilizer with stiff lateral roots and abundant fine roots. The US Forest Services lists it as one of the best butterfly nectar plants. It makes a nice low hedge in home gardens. Because it attracts butterflies, lantana was one of the first plants in my home garden long ago. The nursery told me it was native, but after researching lantana mine may not be. I found conflicting information from many resources used and trusted over the years. This set of notes may possibly put you on a journey to find out more about the different species of lantana for yourself. Some species of lantana have been determined to be invasive and their leaves toxic to people and animals.



Roger Hammer wrote an article entitled *The Lantana Mess* published by the Florida Native Plant Society. It is a great article and goes into a lot of detail about the different species of lantana and what is native where. Please read this article if you are thinking about purchasing some lantana for your yard. Check it out at <http://www.afnn.org/docs/lantanamesshammer04.pdf>. This article really made me think about what is native. When we say Florida native we think all over the state; however, it may only be native to the Miami-Dade region or the southwest coastal dunes, etc. By planting non-native lantana in our area, we may actually cause cross-pollination with area native plants, thereby, possibly causing it to out-compete natives.

In addition to *Lantana involucrata*, another lantana was found in the Preserve. So far, I have not been able to identify the species. It has lavender flowers and its leaves are more pointed or lanceolate, rather than ovate like the ones above. This one is shown to the right, so you can see the difference. Any ideas?



Folk remedies used a tea prepared from the flowers to treat high blood pressure and leaves were used to prepare a tea to treat fevers. Leaves were put into baths to relieve itching of measles and chicken pox. The leaves were also used as a condiment in cooking, i.e. wild sage. A word of caution: If you can not determine the plant is absolutely *Lantana involucrata*, do not use leaves for tea or baths, as the leaves of some varieties of lantana are toxic if consumed and some people have adverse reactions to some varieties upon contact with the skin.