

# Nature Notes

...from Sharon

## Golden Creeper (*Ernodea littoralis*)

Golden Creeper is a native to South Florida and also known as wild pomegranate, cough bush, and beach creeper—due to its love of the beach dunes. You will see this plant throughout Barefoot Beach Preserve. Although it thrives in sunny, dry locations near the dunes, it tolerates partial shade and you will also find it along the Saylor Trail. One of the easiest plants to see is on the most northern boardwalk, near the southwest corner where it intersects from the shower area...near Lucy's burrow. Is this by design since it is one of the plants the gopher tortoise is known to eat? It currently has a few flowers on it. The flowers are so small that you will see the bees first. The scientific name is always interesting...the genus is from the Greek work meaning "like a young sprout" and the species name references being found on the seashore.



The Golden Creeper is an evergreen shrub that grows up to 3-feet tall as a prostrate ground cover. This plant has small, light green, succulent leaves borne on bright red stems. As it ages, the stems are a brownish-gray. It has simple, opposite, ovate leaves that are less than two inches long. Its rhizomatous roots make it a great dune stabilizer and its shrubby nature can catch blowing sands. This plant makes a nice ornamental to the home landscape and thrives on neglect, poor soils, lack of water, and even salt spray. University of Florida has an excellent article entitled *Native Ground Covers for South Florida*. If interested in native ground covers that grow well in South Florida, check out the article at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/eh402>.



Documentation indicates the Golden Creeper has "inconspicuous" non-showy, pinkish white, tubular flowers that occur throughout the year. These flowers are less than an inch long and, when you get close to them, they are anything but inconspicuous—you just have to get really close to enjoy their beauty. When closely observing these, be careful of the bees, as they love the nectar!



After flowering, you may observe little green berries that turn into an attractive golden berry when ripe. These golden berries, in part, give this plant its common name. The berries grow in clusters and are very small—only half an inch and shaped somewhat like a small pomegranate. It has a single small seed and is edible, tasting similar to an apple. These berries are enjoyed by birds and small animals. This plant is also known as the cough bush because a tea made from the leafy branch tips has been used as a home remedy for coughs.