

For the past 16 years, the Florida Native Plant Society (FNPS) has conducted an annual Design with Natives Landscape Awards Program, recognizing both the aesthetically pleasing and environmentally sensitive use of native plants in landscaping. Awards are given to a variety of landscape projects, including commercial and residential landscapes, ecosystem restoration and mitigation projects, parks and schools, and roadside beautification. Projects continue to become more innovative and sophisticated, and in the past few years, jurors have observed an increase in submissions from new, upscale developments around the state. Developers are beginning to recognize the aesthetic distinction of native landscaping as well as the return on investment earned from sustainable landscaping practices. AFNN has been proud to help sponsor the awards program and is pleased to present a few of this year's winners.

## **1st Place Commercial, Passarella & Associates Office and Pond in Fort Myers**

Ken Passarella was so pleased with the native landscape at his private residence that he asked Custom Earthworks Design to design and install native landscaping at his business and around the adjacent stormwater retention pond. Typical of commercial sites, the land had been cleared to the soil, there was a lot of parking space but little boundary space for plantings around the building, and both the building and retention pond were big, square boxes. Diverse, informal plantings give a rich, lively look to what would otherwise be a very boring space. Over 21 different species in a somewhat random, layered planting gives a lush, natural feel around the building. Plants are hand pruned for correct growth only, no hedging or chainsaw massacres are allowed. Pine straw mulch enhances the Real Florida look. The now heavily vegetated pond attracts nesting mallards, wading birds, and employees and visitors looking for a quiet place to relax. This native oasis has been established with minimal irrigation, and fertilization needs steadily decrease.

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# Feature Florida Native Plants



**ABOVE, from left:** Exuberant native plants in natural forms soften the edges of the building and provide a welcome relief from clipped grass and foundation hedges. **CENTER:** Retention ponds are all too often sterile squares surrounded by sod and chainlink fencing. This beautifully vegetated pond shows what is possible with imagination and native plants. **RIGHT:** Instead of a boring sodded sideyard, this diverse mix of trees, shrubs, and perennial flowering plants makes for a lovely, lively, and ever-changing view.