

Native Demonstration Garden



In coastal Georgia, human habitat often closely borders natural wetland communities. The way that we design these transitional spaces—whether it is a back yard or a public park—can reflect, celebrate, and protect nearby natural communities and water quality. This Native Demonstration Garden was built on a site that was cleared and mowed for many years. It now provides a beautiful and protective link to the flora and fauna you will encounter as you stroll down the boardwalk through Cay Creek’s natural marshes and tidal forest. It also serves to buffer the natural wetlands from runoff created by the park’s necessary built areas and access roads.

Benefits of Constructed Native Plant Wetlands

Water Quality:

Wetlands, whether formed by natural processes or constructed by people, are characterized by slow flow and shallow water depth. Since water moves slowly through the system, sediment has time to settle among the stems and roots of plants, which act as water filters. Microorganisms break down pollutants that may be carried in the water, so they are more readily absorbed by plants and removed from the water before it reaches our groundwater.



Dwarf Palmetto



Groundwater Recharge:

Wetlands store and slowly release water into groundwater and aquifers. Even wetlands with little or no visible surface flow have significant storage capacity and play an important role in recharging groundwater.

Flood Protection & Erosion:

Decreasing the speed of runoff from rain events facilitates the deposition of suspended solids and minimizes bank erosion.

Habitat & Species Diversification:

The natural processes taking place in wetlands create unique habitats that are home to a diverse cast of microorganisms, flora, and fauna—a significant number of which can only survive in this specialized environment. Many animals and plants native to the Southern Coastal Plain can also thrive in constructed wetlands that mimic the region’s natural marshes.

Pollinators:

Many native plants that grow in wetlands support pollinators by providing pollen, and in the case of butterflies and moths, food for caterpillars.

Aesthetics & Recreation:

A well designed wetland can be an attractive solution to managing stormwater or treating wastewater. Designing a wetland also helps preserve open space and creates opportunities for recreation such as walking or bird watching.



Funding support provided in part by grant award #NA14NOS4190117 from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. We would also like to acknowledge The Orianne Society and The Nature Conservancy for their partnership. Photographs in this panel were taken by Christa Frangiamore Hayes unless otherwise credited.

