

TREASURED Trunks

Trees enhance our Lowcountry environment

Treeless landscapes, observed on much of the evening news, certainly serve to reinforce our appreciation of the abundance of trees with which we are blessed in the Lowcountry. Hilton Head Island has laws on the books to protect and preserve them from indiscriminate destruction and requires mitigation when it becomes necessary to take down a single tree. Each plantation has similar protective laws, as trees are valued for their role in enhancing and preserving the land that they grown on, as well as the total environment.

In this instance, we take a look at trees, both canopy and understory, that are indigenous to our beautiful island. Landowners may purchase and plant whatever trees they choose, but it is the natives that make the island the treasure it is. Among the natives are many beautiful and useful trees for the home or commercial landscape. There are also many that, once introduced, thrive so well that they become naturalized. And there are many natives which have been hybridized through selection and breeding crosses to create new “cultivars” (shorthand for “cultivated variety”) which are used to great advantage on Hilton Head and elsewhere.

Chief among these natives are the American holly (*Ilex opaca*), Yaupon holly (*Ilex vomitoria*), Southern magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*) and red maple (*Acer rubrum*).

Each is beautiful in its own right but hybridizers have worked to bring out new cultivars with desirable characteristics, whether it be in form, size, bloom extension, hardiness or other features for landscape use.

Thus, American holly is one of the “parents” of ‘Savannah Holly,’ ‘East Palatka,’ and the slim ‘Foster #2,’ among others. Yaupon holly, in and of itself a medium, shiny red-berried tree, has helped to give us dwarf Yaupon holly, one of the most widely used landscape shrubs. Dahoon holly, *Ilex cassine*, is a bright-berried native found most often in the lowlands of nature preserves. Southern magnolia offers many improved forms, such as ‘Claudia Wannamaker,’ ‘Hasse’ and the popular ‘Little Gem.’ Red maples, which favor low, moist conditions in nature, have brought us ‘Autumn Flame,’ ‘October Glory’ and ‘Red Sunset,’ all more tolerant of average soil conditions.

But the most dramatic and typical Lowcountry native is the magnificent live oak, *Quercus virginiana*, which looms in the imagination as a Southern icon. It is extremely long-lived, up to 400 years in some cases, and homes have been built to incorporate this specimen tree as part of the overall architectural and landscape design. Other widely seen oaks include the water oak, southern red oak and white oak, the latter having the unfortunate habit of hanging on to its very dead leaves all winter long. The live oak, on the other hand, releases its narrow green leaves all at once in the spring, replacing them immediately with new growth – giving the appearance of being evergreen and thus, “live.”

PHOTOS BY NEIL HODGES



PRE-REVOLUTIONARY TALBIRD OAK FROM WITHIN THE ENORMOUS CANOPY

A very underused but valuable native landscape tree is eastern red cedar, or *Juniperus virginiana*. It is a densely needled, usually pyramidal, large dark green conifer which is very forgiving of most soil and climate conditions. It is pest free and excellent as a screening hedge or a single specimen. The Hilton Head Council of Garden Clubs planted a fine specimen in the front area of Jarvis Creek Park to commemorate the past Arbor Day, and several line the walk and pond perimeter in the park.

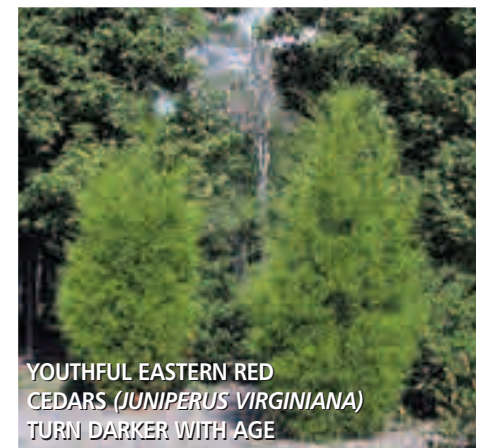
Bald cypress is an attractive landscape tree with all-season interest. It hosts green needles a large part of the year, turning rusty-red in the fall, before dropping them and revealing its strongly horizontal branching silhouette, commanding attention in the winter landscape. Akin is the pond cypress, which requires much moister conditions and can be seen in its native habitat in conservancies such as the Audubon-Newhall Nature Preserve off Palmetto Bay Road.

Smaller, desirable natives include the loblolly bay (*Gordonia lasianthus*), and sweet bay (*Magnolia virginiana*). Both have fragrant, medium-sized white magnolia-type flowers during late spring and summer, the loblolly blooming slightly later. Leaves of the sweet bay display a white underside, flickering in the slightest breeze. Seen often in low roadside swales, it prefers a moist situation.

Pine trees are ubiquitous throughout the island. Major varieties include short-leaf, long-leaf and slash and they are largely valuable as



MAGNOLIA BLOSSOM IN JUNE



YOUTHFUL EASTERN RED CEDARS (*JUNIPERUS VIRGINIANA*) TURN DARKER WITH AGE