



This semi-annual newsletter is published by the USDA-NRCS Plant Materials Center, 14119 Broad Street, Brooksville, FL 34601-4525, Tel: 352-796-9600, FAX: 352-799-7305. Email: Clarence.Maur@usda.gov

1998 PMC Distance Award

Follow staff from most any NRCS office around for a week, and you will discover people who are always trying to squeeze as much work into a day as they possibly can. The PMC staff is no exception. Staff, time and other resources are always just a bit too thin to accomplish all that needs to be done. That is why our volunteers are greatly appreciated, especially with off-site projects. The PMC staff would like to thank Darryl Williams, Mable Caton and Magaly Rodriguez, of the Crestview FO; Violet Whitman and Sherri Kite of the Area 1 Administrative and Technical Team office in Marianna, for going the extra mile for us. On Oct. 20-21, 1998, these individuals helped PMC and Eglin staff plant native grasses on a critical area site on the Eglin Air Force Base, in the FL panhandle. This was not a job for those who don't like to get dirty. These dedicated individuals put in a hard day's work on their hands and knees, and even came back a second day to do it again. Although Darryl was not able to assist with the actual planting, he was very instrumental in setting up this project.

Several thousand wiregrass, indiangrass, and creeping bluestem seedlings were planted on plots in a reclaimed borrow pit. Eglin A.F.B. is working to decrease downstream sedimentation of rivers and streams. To meet this goal, they are reclaiming several old borrow pit areas. Eglin staff would prefer to use FL native species to do this, but few are currently on the commercial market. PMC staff gathered native seed from Eglin the previous year and grew the seedlings in the PMC greenhouse for this project. Darryl reports that seedlings are doing well, thanks to some timely winter rains. Thanks for all your help folks!



Eglin AFB planting

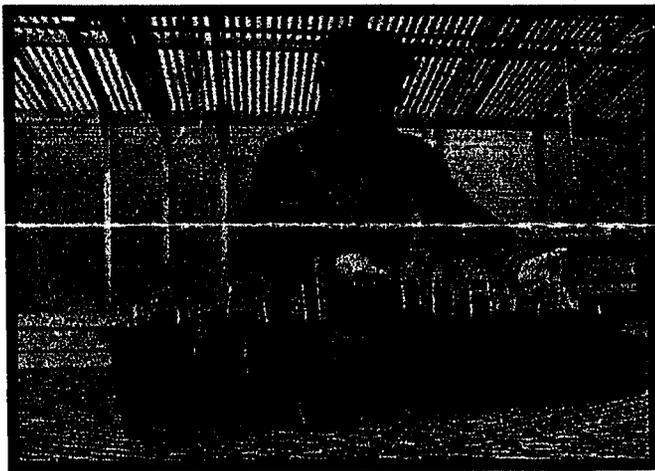
Upland Restoration Symposium

On February 25, 1999, the Coastal Plain Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration held a native upland restoration symposium in Lakeland, FL. Several speakers from around the Southeastern US discussed their adventures in restoring native habitat. Much good information was exchanged. Sharon Pfaff, PMC Agronomist, presented research results of native species reclamation work the FLPMC is doing on phosphate minedlands. For the evening poster session, the staff had put together a seed quiz, as a fun way to let people learn about the different native species we are working with. Clarence Maura, Jr., PMC Manager; and Mary Anne Gonter, Biological Technician, helped curious participants match packets of seed to pictures of 15 native grasses and forbs. Most struggled mightily, maintaining that they would recognize the seed when it was on the seed-head of the plant, but not when it was separated.

Mission: Improve and Maintain Water Quality; Reduce or Control Erosion; Improve Forage for Pasture, Range, and Wildlife.

PMC Training Gets Rave Reviews

Vero Beach FO staff knew a good thing when they saw it. They read in the last PMC newsletter about the FO staff that had attended a hands-on training on plant materials in the summer of 1998. Clare Nichols and his staff contacted the PMC and asked if they could also come for training on the Plant Materials Program. When AC, Jim Piper, heard another training session was being set up, he asked the PMC if several more people could attend. Altogether, nine people from five FO's participated in the training on Jan. 4, 1999. They learned about the different projects the PMC is involved in, and what the PM program is doing for the field offices. Several brave participants came back the next day to learn, hands-on, how to identify and increase plant materials. Almost all commented that the hands-on part of the training was the most educational, and they wished the session could have been longer. Everyone agreed they had learned many things and the time was well spent. If you or someone you know would be interested participating in training on the PMC program, please don't hesitate to contact us. We are always happy to let people know about "the best kept secret" in NRCS.



Clare Nichols working with trays of Northpa (*Panicum amarum*) cuttings in PMC greenhouse (Photo by Susan Arrants)

Native Plants In Landscape

Homeowners, landscape architects and nurserymen are realizing native plants have a great deal of aesthetic value, and are being considered more and more for landscaping on residential and commercial properties. Many of the native plants, once established, prefer little water and dry sandy soils. In Florida, any plant that is drought tolerant and likes sandy sites is definitely a plus for our resources, by helping to conserve our water supply and aiding in soil erosion.

For instance, the eastern gamagrass soon to be released by the PMC, has a bluish color and wide lance-shaped leaves. These features make it an attractive specimen plant in a landscape, or for use in groupings along a wall or in a planter. However they are used, when they extend their tall seed head above the foliage it makes an even more attractive plant.

Another plant, gulf muhly, being worked with at the PMC, is already being used by local nurserymen for landscaping. For instance, a landscaper used a number of these plants along one of the paths on a miniature golf course in Citrus County. Shortly after planting they put up their beautiful deep pink seed heads. Needless to say it made quite a show.

And of course there is the ever popular beach sunflower that blooms profusely during the summer. All it requires is a sandy dry site that gets lots of sun, and basically needs water only to get established. Ask the State Office folk how well these do in the flower beds around the building. It is not restricted to beach sites even though it was developed for that use.

For those of you who are working with the backyard conservation projects, don't forget to include native plants. If we can assist you with any of this material, or other plants please let us know.

Did You Know?

Of the fifteen major crops that stand between us and starvation, ten are grasses. (Brown, Lauren. Grasses—an Identification Guide, page I-1)