Common Plants of the Celery Fields

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Wetlands are important bird habitats and plants play an important role in attracting them. Birds use plants for food, not only by providing seeds, fruits, flowers or vegetative parts to eat, but by attracting other sources of food such as insects, snails, fish and frogs. Plants also provide a place for birds to rest, hide, breed, nest, and raise their young. The plants at the Celery Fields can be categorized in four main groups:

**Shoreline plants** grow in wet soil on raised hummocks or along the shorelines. These plants grow at or above the level of standing water; some may be rooted in shallow water. Examples are elderberry, saltbush, buttonbush and sand cordgrass.

**Emergent plants** are rooted in soil that is covered by water most of the time. These plants grow up through the water so that stems, leaves and flowers emerge above water level. Examples are pickerelweed, bulrush, alligator flag and duck potato.

**Floating plants** have leaves which mainly float on the water surface. Much of the plant body is underwater and may or may not be rooted in the substrate. Examples are spatterdock, duckweed and water lilies.

**Submerged plants** are found largely underwater with few floating or emergent leaves. Flowers may emerge briefly for pollination. Examples are southern naiad and the common exotics, water hydriella and parrot feather.

Additionally, there are several plants found in uplands which are not seasonally flooded. Plants such as live oak and hackberry are found at higher elevations and are also beneficial to wildlife.

*The Celery Fields is a Sarasota County park located on the north and south sides of Palmer Boulevard, just east of I-75 in Sarasota, Florida.*
Dry fruits (achenes) are eaten by many waterfowl, shorebirds and rails. Bulrush provides valuable nesting cover for waterfowl and is a habitat for insects and young fish.

Duck potato gets its name from potato-like underground corms.

Purple Gallinules and Common Gallinules are often seen eating the seeds of alligator flag.
Many wildlife species use sawgrass for both food and shelter even though the coarse texture and sharp-toothed leaf blades of the plant make it difficult and even hazardous to be near. Migrating ducks and geese eat the seeds as a high-energy food source.

Knotted spikerush is used for shelter and nesting material by Common Gallinules and other birds.

Pickerelweed has been used for human food. Each fruit contains a nutritious, starchy seed that can be eaten straight from the plant, or dried and added to granola and other cereals.
The pads of the waterlily provide hiding places for small aquatic organisms which in turn provide food for predators such as bitterns and fish.

American White Waterlily
*Nymphaea odorata*

Photo by Ron Mayberry

Flower buds are eaten by squirrels and seeds that drop to the ground are enjoyed by small rodents and Wood Ducks.

American Elm
*Ulmus americana*

Sweetbay
*Magnolia virginiana*

Sweetbay is used as forage by cattle and deer. The seeds are eaten by squirrels, white-footed mice, turkeys, quail and song birds. It tolerates periodic flooding.
Buttonbush  
*Cephalanthus occidentalis*

Buttonbush seeds are occasionally eaten by ducks and the bush is used for nesting by many bird species.

Pop Ash  
*Fraxinus caroliniana*

Pop ash provides significant food and cover for wildlife. It is the larval host plant for the eastern tiger swallowtail butterfly. Pop ash bark was used by the Miccosukee for "women's medicine."

Bald Cypress  
*Taxodium distichum*

Wood Ducks, Wild Turkeys and other birds are fond of bald cypress seeds. The trees are also used for nesting by Wood Storks, Egrets and Ospreys.
Many species of animals use live oaks for food and shelter.

Wax myrtle is also known as southern bayberry or candleberry. Early American colonists used the fruit’s pale blue, waxy covering to make fragrant bayberry candles.

Slash pines seeds are eaten by gray squirrels and fox squirrels and are also a favorite food for Wild Turkeys.
Birds such as Savannah Sparrows and Palm Warblers are often seen using sand cordgrass for cover at the Celery Fields. The seeds are eaten by many birds.

Many birds, including quail, woodpeckers, and Cedar Waxwings, consume the sweetish fruits of hackberry. This plant is also called sugarberry.

Red cedar fruit is a primary food of Cedar Waxwings and is also enjoyed by many other birds and animals. The tree is also a favorite nesting site for many birds.
Crested Caracaras nest predominately in cabbage palms. *Sabal palmetto* is Florida’s state tree.

Walter’s viburnum produces an abundance of fruit that is attractive to birds for food. It’s a good bird attracting plant for the home landscape.

Fakahatcheegrass is the larval host plant for the clouded skipper butterfly and the three-spotted skipper butterfly. Its fruits are eaten by birds.
giant bulrush
sawgrass
spikerush
sand cordgrass

Raymond Road Gazebo

spikerush
giant bulrush

pickerelweed
alligator flag
Saltbush

Nuttall’s Thistle

Common Mallow

Jointweed

Bushy Bluestem

Turkey Tangle Fogfruit, Capeweed
Duckweed

Mock Bishopweed

Ragweed

Peppergrass

Spanish Needles

Camphorweed
American Alligator

Blue Gill speared by Green Heron

Corn Snake

Marsh Rabbit

White Peacock Butterfly

Spotted Cucumber Beetle

Cooter Turtle

Gopher Tortoise