

Some very interesting plants that are often overlooked in nature are bromeliads, members of the pineapple family. There are 16 species of bromeliads that are native to Florida and are found growing in some part of the state, if not all.

Ten of Florida's 16 native bromeliad species are listed as threatened or endangered. A threatened species is at risk of becoming endangered, and an endangered species is at risk of becoming extinct. Loss of habitat through the development of natural areas and illegal plant collecting have dwindled the populations of these bromeliads. A non-native Mexican bromeliad weevil is also a great threat because the larvae typically kill the plant.

Bromeliads are often referred to as 'air plants' because they absorb nutrients and water through special cells on their leaves. They don't need soil and roots like most other plants. All of Florida's native bromeliads are epiphytes which are plants that simply use another plant for support.

Most of Florida's bromeliads are 'tank' bromeliads that can hold their own water. Tanks are formed by the way the leaves are arranged on the stem. Water collects in the tanks along with decomposing dead insects and plant debris. Water and nutrients from the tank are used by the plant.

Spanish moss is not actually Spanish, and it isn't even a moss. It is one of our native bromeliads that can be found throughout the state. Many people think that Spanish moss injures their trees. But this epiphyte doesn't even have roots. It prefers bright areas, so it hangs in trees that typically have sparse leaves for some other reason.

Columbia County is also home to Bartram's airplant and ball moss. Bartram's airplant is a flowering bromeliad that blooms from spring to fall. The thin long leaves are fuzzy gray, and the small blooms are violet. Ball moss grows in areas of lower light, and it clings to other plants with 'false roots'.

None of these bromeliads are parasites and do not take nutrients from the tree on which it is growing.

Additional information can be found by visiting "Save Florida's Native Bromeliads" Web site

<http://entomology.ifas.ufl.edu/frank/savebromeliads/>

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