

Plant Identification and Information Service¹

N.H. Williams²

The University of Florida Herbarium in the Florida Museum of Natural History maintains a plant identification and information service for the use of Extension and Research personnel and the general public. The staff of the Herbarium will assist in providing such types of information as scientific names and authors for cultivated plants, weeds, and native species, their common names, range, dates of flowering, and possible human or animal toxicity.

The facilities of the Herbarium comprise a rather extensive taxonomic and general botanical library and a collection of nearly 450,000 preserved plant specimens, emphasizing the native and naturalized flora of the state and the plant species cultivated here, but also representing the flora of other areas. A seed collection is available for visitors with an appointment to consult for comparative identification of weed seeds and grain contaminants. The Herbarium's website (<http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/herbarium/>) includes information on plant collecting techniques and a collection database with about 65,000 entries and hi-resolution images for around 30,000 specimens.

A number of factors influence our ability to provide an accurate and timely identification. A complete specimen prepared according to our specifications **below** will be more likely to include the characteristics necessary for an efficient identification.

- Researchers requiring plant identification and other herbarium services for grant projects should consult with the Keeper or Collection Manager for cost estimates.

Reimbursement for staff time is usually requested for grant-related plant identifications.

- All specimens should be routed through a local county cooperative Extension office or another appropriate government agency.
- Specimens submitted should always be accompanied by [IFAS Form 3100/03-2008](#).
- Do not send more than 5 specimens at a time unless special arrangement is made. Storage and protection from insects may cause problems that we are not equipped to handle.
- Please remove all dirt from roots. Please include the roots of herbaceous plants, when possible.
- Each specimen should consist of a stem with attached leaves (and flowers and/or fruits, if present).
- The best method to ship plants is by flattening each specimen between a fold of newsprint (ranging in size from 8½" x 11" to 11" x 16") and, if available, two pieces of cardboard. Please do not crumple the specimen.
- **Never! Never enclose plants in plastic!** Do not send them in a plastic-lined mailer.

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- Please number each specimen if more than one plant is involved. These numbers will then be used for reference in our reply to you.
- Additional information about the plant is often critical in its identification. Include whatever comments or facts as to its source (especially whether it is cultivated), time of flowering, flower and/or fruit color, size, aroma, etc., that you think may be useful.
- Stand by to send additional material or information should it be needed. Interesting specimens are often used to make permanent herbarium specimens, and to ease the task of future identification for other people.
- Assistance from specialists at other institutions may be required to identify uncommon cultivated plants and specimens in complex plant groups. These groups may not be well represented in our collection or in our available literature. They may have hundreds to thousands of species and grow in diverse areas of the world. This process can take a long time.
- Specimens submitted will NOT be returned, as this is expensive and time-consuming. Please try to collect two of anything you send so that you can keep one for reference.

IFAS Form 3100/03-2008 (Request for Plant Information) is available through EDIS at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/sr/sr02400.pdf>. For those unable to access the form on EDIS, one copy may be obtained from the Herbarium. This copy may be used as a master in your office for duplication as needed.

For more details and questions about the plant identification and information service provided by the Herbarium, contact:

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