

South Florida Native Plants for Understory in Low Light Areas

For nursery availability, search for the species on www.plantant.com. Note that most of the species <4' tall listed here will not do well in areas with significant leaf litter accumulation.

Taxon	Height*	Availability	Comments
<i>Adiantum tenerum</i> Brittle maidenhair	1-2'	Occasional at specialty nurseries	Clumping fern, grows well in partial shade in South Florida, establishes readily on limestone rocks/ walls. Florida endangered.
<i>Ageratum maritimum</i> Keys ageratum	~1'	Occasional at specialty nurseries	Low-growing herb with lavender flowers, great for pollinators. Will flower best in full sun, but can tolerate partial or even full shade (with few flowers).
<i>Blechnum serrulatum</i> Swamp fern	2-4'	Widely available	Rhizomatous fern that prefers wetter soils, where it will grow densely in bright light. In drier soils, grows deeper green and less dense; For an example, see Kendall Indian Hammocks Park.
<i>Campyloneurum phyllitidis</i> Long strap fern	2-3'	Occasional at Fairchild	Clumping fern, grows in full or partial shade. In the wild this species grows on rotten logs or cypress knees but in cultivation it can thrive when planted in the ground.
<i>Ctenitis sloanei</i> Florida tree fern	3-4'	Occasional at Fairchild	Clumping fern, grows in full shade. A beautiful, very slow grower. Florida endangered.
<i>Dichantherilum commutatum</i> Variable witch grass	<1'	Occasional at specialty nurseries	Deep green, attractive, clumping grass that stays just a few inches tall. Does best in full/partial shade.
<i>Lasiacis divaricatus</i> Wild bamboo	3-6'	Occasional at specialty nurseries	A clumping bamboo-like perennial grass that is short-lived (2-3 years) but reseeds readily. Grows in partial shade.
<i>Nephrolepis biserrata</i> Giant sword fern	6-8'	Widely available	Rhizomatous fern. 'Macho' cv is widely available and shorter in stature. This species is tolerant of a wide range of light and soil moisture conditions. Spreads vigorously.
<i>Nephrolepis exaltata</i> Boston fern	3-6'	Only purchase from knowledgeable native plant vendors	Rhizomatous fern, grows sparsely in low light. Nurseries often sell the exotic <i>N. cordifolia</i> , mis-labeled as <i>N. exaltata</i> . If tubers are present or if pinnae (=leaflets) overlap closely, do not purchase.
<i>Oplismenus hirtellus</i> Basketgrass	<1'	Occasional at specialty nurseries	A creeping grass found in hammock understory. Seeds in winter and can attract seed-eating birds. Does best in medium light. Without irrigation, dies back somewhat during the dry season.
<i>Peperomia obtusifolia</i> Baby rubber plant	<1'	Widely available	Succulent herb that is epiphytic in nature but can be cultivated in the ground. It may rot in overly wet conditions.
<i>Plumbago zeylanica</i> Doctorbush	1-2'	Occasional at specialty nurseries	Larval host plant for cassius blue butterflies. This species has a wide-sprawling habit and needs room to spread out. It will need occasional pruning and is not for small spaces.
<i>Rivina humilis</i> Rougeberry	1-4'	Occasional at specialty nurseries	Important year-round nectar plant for small butterflies. Berries provide food for birds. This species can be weedy in higher light
<i>Tectaria heracleifolia</i> Broad halberd fern	1-2'	Occasional at Fairchild	A handsome, slow-growing fern that does well in full/partial shade. Florida threatened.
<i>Thelypteris kunthii</i> Southern shield fern	1-3'	Occasional at specialty nurseries	Rhizomatous fern, tolerant of a wide range of light from full shade to full sun. Tolerates dry soils but looks best in wetter soils.
<i>Thelypteris reticulata</i> Reticulate maiden fern	3-4'	Occasional at Fairchild	Large rhizomatous fern that does best in wetter soils. Tolerant of a range of light conditions but will appear yellowish in high light. Florida endangered.
<i>Vallesia antillana</i> Pearlberry	5-10'	Occasional at specialty nurseries	Very slow-growing shrub native to FL Keys coastal hammocks. Easily cultivated. Has small white flowers and white pearly fruits.
<i>Zamia integrifolia</i> Coontie	1-3'	Widely available	Low, slow-growing cycad that will do best in full sun but can tolerate shade--growth will just be extremely slow--buy larger plants for shady areas. Larval host plant for atala hairstreak.



This document was prepared by Jennifer Possley and edited by Steve Woodmansee for The Native Plant Network. *Height estimates and some comments are from the "Natives for your Neighborhood" website of The Institute for Regional Conservation. For more information and images of these plants, visit <http://regionalconservation.org/beta/nfyn/default.asp>