



FYN Garden Q & A Series

Thomas Becker
Extension Agent, Florida
Yards & Neighborhoods



FYN Topic: Pruning Sea Grape Trees

Question: I live near a beach access point along Bonita beach. Sea grape trees grow tall and wide on either side of the foot path. Are these trees growing unusually tall and dense to be safe? Wouldn't a good pruning make them look better?
Email from Bonita Beach

Answer: Your tall-growing native sea grape (*Coccoloba uvifera*) is a coastal gift worth keeping as is. Native to South Florida's east and west coastline, a mature height can vary tremendously from one beach to the next. Sea grape trees are easy to grow and offer significant dune and coastal protection for wildlife like nesting sea turtles, gopher tortoises and others. Your access point's older and taller trees (up to 35 feet) and wide canopy (10 to 50 feet) perform another critical role providing wind protection holding sand and soil in place during hurricanes. Despite these trees shedding their heavy leaves year-round, no pruning is needed for safety except for removing dead or storm-damaged, broken branches. Sea grapes growing in private yards and landscapes can be pruned, shaped or topped as desired to maintain a short, shrubby hedge along property borders. In hurricane winds as strong as Hurricane Charley or Andrew, sea grapes are an excellent choice for planting in coastal yards or further inland. This tree survives the worst hurricane winds comparable to several others including gumbo limbo (*Bursera simarouba*), strangler fig (*Ficus aurea*), slash pine, (*Pinus elliottii*), bald cypress (*Taxodium spp.*) and live oak (*Quercus virginiana*). University of Florida/IFAS researchers studied and documented these and other tree species with good wind resistance. Their findings are reported at: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/files/FR/FR17500.pdf>



Planting a Sea Grape



Sea Grape



Sea Grape Tree



Unpruned Sea Grape Tree

Useful Links

- <http://www.floridayards.org>
- <http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu>
- <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/>
- <http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/FYN/FYNHome.shtml>
- <http://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu>

Thomas Becker is an extension agent for the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods (FYN) program at the Lee County Extension Service. Submit questions by calling the Horticulture Help Desk at 533-7504 between 9 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. or by emailing Extgardener@leegov.com. Visit his Web page at <http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/FYN/FYNHome.shtml>

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A. & M 06/02/2012.

