

## **16. Hammocks**

The word origin of “hammock” is thought to be Native American: “hammaka.” It just means woods or forest.

A xeric (dry) or “high” hammock is overgrown scrub, with sand live oak, turkey oak, myrtle oak, Chapman’s oak and running oak, sometimes sand pine and/or shrubs such as lyonias, blueberries, Garberia, Gopher apple, sometimes (but not on Forever Florida) rosemary (sand heath) and any number of smaller plants.

A mesic (intermediate) hammock is a hardwood forest characterized by hardwood trees (angiosperms) such as live oak, American elm, pignut hickory and cabbage palm. Mesic (sometimes dry, sometimes wet) hammocks are in between xeric and hydric hammocks in location, flora and fauna.

A hydric (wet) or “low” hammock contains other hardwoods, including water oak, red bay, pignut hickory and pop ash; a softer hardwood, red maple; and cabbage palm, plus the most common gymnosperms: pond cypress and/or bald cypress. A few wildflowers including irises live in hydric hammocks, as well as non-flowering plants, primarily ferns. Hydric hammocks may periodically become swampy or overlap neighboring swamps.

Hammock soils range from xeric to hydric, with a high diversity of plant life and wildlife. Hammocks are found throughout Central Florida, from xeric sand hills to low mesic to hydric areas bordering swamps.

Xeric or high hammock (scrub) soil is nutrient-poor, a determining factor in its plant and animal species. Scrub in prime condition is a dwarf forest due to frequent fires. Suppression of fires allows scrub trees, primarily sand live oak, to grow above fire danger, producing the overgrown condition known as high or xeric hammock.

The soils of mesic and hydric hammocks typically have more nutrients than surrounding flatwoods due to the increased amount of organic material found in them. Fallen leaves account for most of the organic material in the soil.

Fire is infrequent within hammocks (40 to 70 years), but edges that border flatwoods and prairies encounter fire frequently and therefore never fully mature. Fires that do penetrate tend to be low-intensity ground fires, except in exceptionally dry years.

Humanity’s main impact on hardwood forests came as a result of logging. The effects were similar to that on flatwoods, with changes in fire frequency, watershed, tree diversity loss, small trees, etcetera.

Fauna – 3 types of squirrel, raccoon, opossum, deer, bear, bats, woodpeckers and owls. Larger mammals (deer, feral hogs, bobcats, panthers) range through in search of water, food and shelter, as do a variety of birds.

For guides or anyone who would like to know the scientific names of the trees, some of those mentioned above are repeated here with those names included.

Sand live oak (*Quercus geminata*), turkey oak (*Quercus laevis*), myrtle oak (*Quercus myrtifolia*), Chapman's oak (*Quercus chapmanii*), running oak (*Quercus pumila*), sand pine (*Pinus clausa*), rusty lyonia or staggerbush (*Lyonia ferruginea*), shiny lyonia or fetterbush (*Lyonia lucida*), blueberries (*Vaccinium* spp.), Garberia (*Garberia heterophylla*), Gopher apple (*Licania michauxii*), rosemary or sand heath (*Ceratiola ericoides*).

Live oak (*Quercus virginiana*), American elm (*Ulmus Americana*), pignut hickory (*Carya glabra*), cabbage palm (*Sabal palmetto*).

Red maple (*Acer rubrum*), water oak (*Quercus nigra*), red bay (*Persea borbonia*), pignut hickory (*Carya glabra*), pop ash (*Fraxinus caroliniana*), cabbage palm (*Sabal palmetto*), bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum* var. *distichum*), pond cypress (*Taxodium distichum* var. *nutans*).