

A Florida Moon Garden

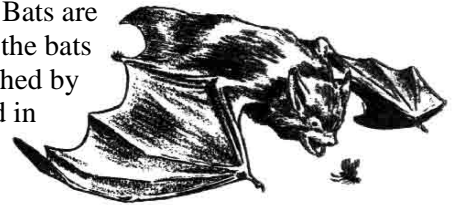


A moon garden's night blooming flowers emit a wonderful fragrance for our own enjoyment and the foliage is also beautiful to observe in the silvery glow of the moonlight. We share appreciation for the beauty of the moon garden with feeding moths and other insects that in turn attract feeding bats.

Plant your moon garden near a window so the evening breeze will carry the fragrance indoors. A bench for evening observation is a wonderful way to enjoy the aromatic flowers and magical surroundings. Native trees with blooms that are fragrant in the evenings are basswood (*Tilia americana*) & Pygmy fringe tree (*Chionanthus pygmaea*). Pygmy fringe tree fragrance is reminiscent of cotton candy. Virginia willow (*Itea virginica*) and yucca (*Yucca filamentosa*) are low growing shrubs with fragrant evening flowers. Moonflower (*Ipomoea alba*) is a vine with large white flowers that release an evening fragrance. Night blooming ruellia (*Ruellia noctiflora*) and narrowleaf evening primrose (*Oenothera fruticosa*) are low growing, fragrant, evening blooming flowers.

Night blooming flowers use their light reflecting properties and fragrance to attract insects for pollination. They are therefore white or light in color in order to reflect the moonlight and advertise their beauty to passing moths and other insects. Sphinx moths are the primary pollinators of night blooming flowers.

The insects that are attracted to your moon garden will in turn attract bats. Bats are a wonderful means of insect control and a wonder to watch as well. All of the bats in our area are insectivores and much of their food supply has been diminished by pesticide use. Contrary to popular belief bats will not fly into your hair and in flight can maneuver around objects as fine as a human hair.



Fragrant flowers are important in a moon garden, however, planting other natives with contrasting foliage in and around the night blooming flowers is another consideration. Contrasting textures of foliage and blooms can create a glowing appearance when reflecting moonlight. Natives such as yucca (*Yucca filamentosa*) and button snakeroot (*Eryngium yuccifolium*) have interesting sword shaped foliage and tall flower stalks. Adam's needle has white bell shaped flowers (that are also fragrant at night) and Button snakeroot has small, white, globe shaped flowers. Beach tea (*Croton punctatus*) and silver croton (*Croton argyranthemus*) have silvery-green foliage with white flowers. Not only will the beautiful, white, shaggy flowers of the pygmy fringe tree (*Chionanthus pygmaea*) add fragrance, but they will also provide another texture element. The bent, gnarled trunk of a sparkleberry (*Vaccinium arboreum*), the fine foliage of rosemary (*Conradina* spp.), or the purple flowers and leaf bracts of dotted horsemint (*Monarda punctata*) all contribute other interesting textures. Placing a few rocks in and around the moon garden adds a completely different texture element and also light reflecting surfaces. Be creative and experiment - your reward will be a beautiful new dimension to your landscape.

Pygmy fringe tree (*Chionanthus pygmaea*) - a deciduous tree reaching 6 feet in height. The small white drooping flowers appear in the spring. It is found in sand pine scrub. It grows in full sun to part shade with average moisture. It is listed as endangered.

Rosemary (*Conradina* spp.) - the foliage of these small shrubs is very aromatic and the small pale purple flowers that appear in the spring & summer provide nectar for insects. Most species are found in dry pinelands and scrub. It grows in full sun to part shade with average moisture.

Silver croton (*Croton argyranthemus*) - a perennial wildflower reaching 3 feet high. The flowers appear in the spring, summer & fall. The foliage is silvery-green. It is found in dry pinelands & sandhills. It grows in full sun to part shade with average moisture.

Beach tea croton (*Croton punctatus*) - a perennial wildflower reaching 3 feet high. The flowers appear all year. The foliage is silvery-green. It is found in coastal areas and dunes. It grows in full sun with average moisture.

Button snakeroot (*Eryngium yuccifolium*) - a perennial wildflower reaching 3 feet high at maturity. The white, globe shaped flowers appear in the spring, summer & fall. It is found in dry pinelands & open woods. It grows in full sun to part shade with average moisture.

Moonflower (*Ipomoea alba*) - this annual morning glory may climb and spread to 10 feet. Its large white flowers, tightly closed by day, open in the evening to release a lemony aroma.



Virginia willow (*Itea virginica*) - a deciduous shrub reaching 6 feet in height. The small white flowers are born on elongated clusters. It grows in part shade to full sun with average to moist soils. A good nectar plant for insects.

Dotted horsemint (*Monarda punctata*) an aromatic perennial wildflower reaching 4 feet high at maturity. The flowers appear in late spring, summer & fall. The purple leaf bracts are much more noticeable than the flowers themselves. It is found in meadows, roadsides, floodplains, and disturbed sites. It grows in full sun to part shade with average moisture. The leaves, flowers & leaf bracts make an excellent tea. A good nectar plant for insects.

Narrowleaf evening primrose (*Oenothera fruticosa*) - a perennial wildflower that reaches a mature height of 2 feet. The yellow blooms appear in the summer, and open in the evenings. It occurs in flatwoods and hammocks. It grows in full sun to part shade with average moisture. Although the name 'evening primrose' implies that all *Oenothera* are night blooming, this is the only one that generally blooms in the evening.

Night blooming wild petunia (*Ruellia noctiflora*) - a perennial wildflower with white flowers that open in the evening. Blooms appear in late spring & early summer. It occurs in wet flatwoods & seepage slopes of northern Florida. It grows in full sun to part shade with moist soils. Endangered

Basswood (*Tilia americana*) - a deciduous tree reaching 75 feet in height at maturity. The flowers are borne in clusters. It is found in mixed, moist woodlands. It grows in full sun to part shade with average to moist soils.

Sparkleberry (*Vaccinium arboreum*) - this semi-evergreen shrub is Florida's largest blueberry. It may reach 20 feet in height. It grows in part-shade with average moisture. The berries are edible, but do not have much flavor and tend to be rather gritty. The trunk is generally bent and gnarled. A good nectar plant for insects.



Yucca (*Yucca filamentosa*) - The flowers of this perennial are open all day, but at night the blossoms lift up and release a fragrance to attract moths. Yucca flowers are pollinated by the Yucca moth to insure that the egg that she lays in each flower will have seeds to eat. It is also the larval food for the Yucca skipper, which lays her eggs on the underside of the leaves. The larva eat the leaf and pupate in the roots.

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