

Pine Rockland Plants

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Pine Rocklands are found only in the Lower Keys. They are very sunny and dryer than other upland plant communities. The two major components of the Keys pinelands are the presence of freshwater lenses within the Miami oolite, and the periodic fires which prevent the habitat from transitioning to hardwood hammocks. Common trees and shrubs in the Pine Rocklands are Southern Florida Slash Pine, Locustberry, Florida Silver Palm, and Keys Thatch Palm.

Southern Florida Slash Pine, *Pinus elliottii* var. *densa*, the famous "Dade County Pine" of hardwood fame, extends from the Florida Keys up into central Florida. It grows slower than *Pinus elliottii*, reaching about 40 feet with a rounded crown in 30 years.

Locustberry, *Byrsonima lucida*, is a low, spreading, evergreen shrub. In the Pine Rocklands where nutrients are not abundant, it will grow to a height of 2 to 3 feet. However, it can reach a height of 8 to 10 feet in the hammocks where soils are richer. On Cudjoe Key, Locustberry can grow into a small tree standing 20 feet tall. The branching habit of the Locustberry is quite irregular, and the shrub is often a host for air plants. The spring flowers of this plant occur in clusters that turn from white to pink and from pink to crimson. The beautiful colors of the flowers attract different species of butterflies.

Florida Silver Palm, *Coccothrinax argentata*, is a slow-growing, small, native Florida palm that can reach 20 feet in height but is usually seen at 6 to 10 feet with a crown spread of six feet. The slender Florida Silver Palm has distinctive dark blue-green, drooping, delicate, deeply divided palmate leaves which have a beautiful silver color beneath, and they provide a bright glint in the landscape when the leaves sway in the wind. The six-inch-wide trunk is either smooth and gray or is sometimes covered with woven, burlap-like fiber. The small, white flowers are borne in profusion on two foot-long stalks. The small, round, purple fruits ripen in late summer and fall.

Keys Thatch Palm, *Thrinax morrissii*, will grow no taller than 20 to 30 feet and can take full coastal exposure. The smooth, slender trunk is topped with 3.5-foot-wide, beautiful, green and silver fronds. The insignificant white spring flowers are followed by small, round, fleshy, white fruits. This palm is small enough to be popular in residential landscapes. It is often planted as a single specimen or in groups of three to accent an area. Keys Thatch Palm should be grown in full sun or partial shade and is highly drought- and salt-tolerant, making it ideal for seaside applications.