

8 The largest animal in the swamp is the **American Alligator** (*Alligator mississippiensis*). The adults range in size from 6 to 16 1/2 feet. Adult alligators are black in color which helps them to blend in well to their surroundings; this is called camouflage. Look for their head, eyes, or snout sticking out of the water. Young alligators are black with yellow cross bands. Breeding season is March-July. Female alligators build nests of vegetable debris on land and guard the nests until eggs hatch in late summer. The life span for a wild alligator is around 25-40 years. Alligators are beneficial to their habitat because they dig “gator” holes. These holes fill with water during the dry months and provide a place for aquatic organisms to survive. Alligators are afraid of humans. If alligators are fed they lose this fear and can become dangerous. It is against the law to feed or harass alligators.

9 Another epiphytic plant found in the swamp is **Spanish Moss** (*Tillandsia usneoides*). Spanish moss is in the pineapple (Bromeliaceae) family. These plants are not parasites. They absorb nutrients from the air. Spanish moss can absorb water up to ten times its dry weight, often cracking the branch it was growing on after heavy rains. The slender stems hang to 20 feet or more. Spanish moss grows on trees with horizontal limbs or bark with deep furrows.



10 The leafy light-green plant growing on this tree is a **lichen**. A lichen is a fungus and algae living together, this relationship is called symbiosis. Only certain algae and certain fungi can get together to form a lichen. The algae uses sunlight to make food to feed both the fungus and the algae. The fungus creates a body that will house both organisms. Lichens grow very slowly, sometimes only fractions of an inch in a year. Lichens do not rob trees or shrubs of nourishment or cause diseases, they obtain water and minerals from the air. Many lichens are very sensitive to pollution in the air. If there are many lichens where you live, then it probably means the air is clean.

11 Natural cavities in trees serve as nest sites for **Wood Ducks** (*Axis sponsa*), the only year-round duck resident found at Cypress Gardens. Wood Ducks are typically found in wooded swamps and river bottomlands. The large boxes on posts in the swamp are Wood Duck boxes. These boxes are used in areas where there are not many natural tree cavities for nesting. About 9 to 14 eggs are laid from February to April and the hatchlings emerge from the nest approximately 30 days later. A wood duck’s diet is about 90% vegetable matter; food consists of cypress cones, water lily seeds, duckweed, acorns and insects.



Please return this guide when finished.
Thank you

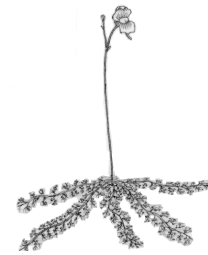
Cypress Gardens Interpretive Boat Trail Guide



Fragrant Water-lily
Nymphaea odorata
white flower blooms
April - September



Alligatorweed
Alternanthera philoxeroides
white flower blooms
April - October



Bladderwort
Utricularia sp.
yellow flower blooms
June - October
Carnivorous Plant



Larger Bur Marigold
Bidens laevis
yellow flower blooms
late summer - November

As you paddle the boat trail,
match the following numbers
with the numbers on the trees for a
self-guided tour of the swamp.

Cypress Gardens has approximately 80 acres of wetlands. Low lying areas that are wet or moist throughout the year are considered wetlands. They may be dry part of the year and several feet deep at other times. The depth and duration of water determines the types of plants and animals found in this environment. Swamps are wetlands dominated by shrubs or trees.

Wetlands provide important benefits such as:

- Flood Control
- Water Pollution Filter
- Soil Erosion and Sediment Control
- Wildlife Habitat
- Aesthetic Value

1 **Bald Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*)** trees can grow to heights of 80 - 120 feet with a diameter of 3 - 4 feet and can live several thousand years. Most of the Bald Cypress trees on the boat trail are around 75 - 80 years old. The Bald Cypress is a deciduous conifer, a relative of the redwoods of the West, but unlike most conifers, it drops its needles each winter giving it a bald appearance. When growing in water, a cypress tree forms a wide base and its roots produce cone-shaped “knees” projecting above the water. These features provide support for the tree growing in the soft swamp soil. Ball-shaped cones are produced which float on the water’s surface. The oil-like film on the water’s surface is not pollution; it is resin (sap) from the Bald Cypress tree and is released when the cones are broken open. This resin gives the Bald Cypress resistance to insect attack.



2 The **color of the water** makes people think the swamp water is dirty or very deep. The water is actually very clean. The dark color comes from **tannin**, a brown stain found in decomposing vegetation and tree roots. The swamp is actually very shallow, 3’ – 6’ deep, so the muddy bottom is seen from the surface. The tannin and shallow water give the swamp a “dirty” appearance.

3 The **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*)**, a type of woodpecker, drills small holes in rows or columns on tree trunks. These woodpeckers eat tree sap, insects, and berries. Look for white wing patches to identify both sexes and immature birds during the winter months when they reside at Cypress Gardens.



4 The most common turtle found in the swamp at Cypress Gardens is the **Yellow-belly Slider (*Trachemys scripta scripta*)**. It is often found basking on logs in the swamp, especially in early spring. Look for a yellow blotch behind the eye and a yellow plastron (bottom shell). Older adult males may lose their original markings, becoming nearly black. Males have long front claws used for attracting females. Yellowbelly Sliders are omnivorous, meaning they eat both plant and animal matter. Turtles cannot leave their shells. The top shell (carapace) is made up of their backbone and ribs and covered by scales (scutes) for protection.

New uses for old things
Instead of putting nails into trees, old bicycle tubes were used to hang trail numbers.

5 Floating logs and stumps are a unique **microhabitat** in the swamp. A microhabitat is a small habitat within a larger one that has different environmental conditions. Plant species found in this microhabitat include Yellow-eyed Grass (*Xyris sp.*), Water-spider Orchid (*Habenaria repens*), and False Nettle (*Boehmeria cylindrica*). Look for other microhabitats in the swamp at the base of Bald Cypress trees or in Spanish Moss.



Yellow-eyed Grass
Xyris sp.

6 Another common tree is the **Swamp Gum (*Nyssa biflora*)**. The deciduous leaves of this tree are 3 to 6 inches long and turn red in the fall. The trunk is buttressed when growing in water. The fruit is dark purple and found either singly or in pairs on a long stalk. Fruit is eaten by waterfowl after it drops from the trees.



7 **Resurrection fern (*Polypodium polypodioides*)** usually grows like ivy on tree trunks. During prolonged periods of drought, its leaves curl giving it a dead-looking appearance. After a few hours of rain, the leaves absorb water and uncurl. Resurrection fern is an epiphyte. An epiphyte is an air plant that grows on other plants, but does not get its nourishment from them. Epiphytic plants absorb moisture and minerals from the atmosphere to carry out photosynthesis. Look for resurrection fern in forks of trees and horizontal branches.

