

**KNOW THE DIFFERENCE****Native & Non-Native Firebush**

**F**irebush is a popular shrub for Central and South Florida landscapes. To distinguish the native from non-native, look at flower color and leaves. Our native firebush, *Hamelia patens*, has flowers that are mostly red or reddish orange with darker linear stripes, and the leaves are softly hairy. *Hamelia patens var. glabra*, a non-native firebush, is frequently mistakenly identified as native, but has smooth leaves and flowers that are much more strongly yellow colored.

**Native Firebush***Hamelia patens*

Firebush attracts both butterflies and hummingbirds with an abundance of bright, orange-red tubular flowers year-round in South Florida and nearly year round in Central Florida. Following the flowers are fruits that change from green to red to purplish black and are favored by many birds. Native to coastal hammocks and shell middens of Central and South Florida, firebush flowers heaviest and produces a mounded shape in full sun. But it will tolerate some shade and is equally attractive with a more open, leggy habit. Firebush is excellent for a single species shrub bed (guaranteed to attract hummingbirds) and also mixes well with other native shrubs. Although it can reach 10' or more in height, *Hamelia patens* is typically 5-8' feet high and shears well to a shorter height of 3-4', if desired. Cold sensitive, it generally rebounds after die-back from a freeze.

**NATIVE****Reddish-orange or mostly red flowers****Dull hairy leaves**

Photos by Roger Hammer

**NON-NATIVE****Yellowish red-orange flowers****Smooth leaves****Non-native Firebush***Hamelia patens var. glabra*

There's more than one non-native firebush in the trade, and a lot of confusion and mislabeling. *Hamelia patens var. glabra* is native to southern Mexico, Central America, and northern South America. It is not native to Florida and is not a cultivar of *Hamelia patens*. It was introduced into the Florida nursery trade from a botanical garden in Pretoria, South Africa. As a result, it is frequently referred to as "African firebush" or even more misleading, *Hamelia patens 'African'*, suggesting that it is a named selection of our native firebush. It has sometimes been listed under *Hamelia nodosa*.

Unfortunately, no one has been able to reliably determine the origin of plants being sold as *Hamelia patens* 'Dwarf' or 'Compacta.' As a result, AFNN does not list these as natives.