

ECOQUEST

May 2020

Tilly Tally



Tillandsias (fondly called “tillys” here or often “air plants”) are in the plant family Bromeliaceae, or the pineapple family. There are three native bromeliad genera in the state, but only one, *Tillandsia*, is found in our area. Florida has 13 native species of *Tillandsia*, with eight of them found in our EcoFlora region. Some, like Spanish moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*) are quite familiar, but a few species are rather rare! As epiphytes, air plants grow upon other plants, but do not take sustenance from them as would a parasite. [Click here](#) for more information on the bromeliad family in Florida. Unfortunately, many of the larger species are under threat by the invasive [Mexican bromeliad weevil](#) (*Metamasius callizona*), which kills the plants and has spread widely since its introduction in Florida 30 years ago. This month’s challenge is to search the trees and tally those tillys!

WHAT IS AN ECOQUEST?

EcoQuests, part of the [Sarasota-Manatee Ecoflora Project](#), challenge Floridians to become engaged citizens in the observation, study, appreciation, and conservation of the native flora and fauna of Florida.

HOW DO I GET STARTED?

1. Download the easy-to-use [iNaturalist app](#) on your mobile device, or register on a laptop or /desktop at [iNaturalist.org](#).
2. Visit the [Sarasota-Manatee EcoFlora Tilly Tally page](#) and click “join” on the upper right.
3. Photograph plants anywhere in Sarasota and Manatee Counties.
4. Post your observations to iNaturalist.

WHAT IS THE GOAL?

Help us document as many air plants as possible by May 31! Can you find all eight known tillandsias in our area? Do you see any invasive weevils damaging our tillandsias or causing them to fall from trees? The goal here is to document the current distribution of air plants and the spread of the weevil threatening their populations.

WHERE SHOULD I LOOK?

Up! You will find air plants growing on trunks or limbs of trees which receive ample filtered light and sometimes full sun. The giant air plant (*Tillandsia utriculata*) can often be found on oak trees. Common species such as Spanish moss and ball moss are readily found in urban areas. The rarer species such as Balbis’s air plant are found in our numerous natural parks and preserves.

Remember not to remove the plants from the trees and to take careful pictures of any insects on the plants or signs that insects have eaten them, such as holes or fallen plants.