

## **Plant Materials Information**

1. Spanish moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*)
2. beach sunflower (*Helianthus debilis*)
3. milkberry or snowberry (*Chiococca alba*)

## **Conservation message**

The beach sunflower (*Helianthus debilis*) is great for dune stabilization, which keeps our beaches together.

## 500-word Rationale for Plant Selections

The Fairchild challenge is a great way for kids to get involved with their community. Since I'm participating in this challenge, I'm going to be using the Spanish moss, beach sunflower, and the common snowberry (milkberry) to create my wreath native to the Florida Keys.

Spanish moss will be the base of the wreath I'm creating. It was once used as a stuffing for mattresses, furniture, and seats in cars. Today, the stems are only occasionally used in upholstery, and as a packing material. This plant is also very common base in flower arrangements, because it helps keep in moisture. Spanish moss is also useful to many animals; different species of birds use this plant in creating their nest, or weave their nests into clumps of Spanish moss. Different reptiles and amphibians also hid in this moss. Warblers and bats also love this plant. Native people used this moss in many different ways. They would use its fiber for clothing, decoct the plant for fevers or chills, or drying the fibers out and twisting them for mats or rugs, which we also occasionally do. The Spanish moss is also known as *Tillandsia usneoides*, which is its Latin name.

The next plant I'm using is the beach sunflower. With its Latin name, *Helianthus debilis*, or also called a dune sunflower, this plant is great for mass planting, or dune stabilization, which keeps our beaches together. It grows one to three feet, and is highly salt tolerant. This makes it great for planting in coastal areas, like the Florida Keys. It blooms with a bright yellow sunflower which is usually 3 inches, and has heart shaped leaves. Most people think it's just planted along the beach, but this plant can grow anywhere if it has a full amount of sunlight.

The next plant that I used is the *Chiococca alba*, or common milkberry. This plant is commonly found in forest edges, or forest gaps. You can tell it's a milkberry by its white, yellow, or peach flowers, and its white drupe like berries. Its bark is yellowish-gray, and it has thin, green leaves. The natives used this plant for many different medicines such as, using the leaves for a burn dressing, chewing the berries and using the juice for eye medicine, and using the plants to disinfect sores.

There are many different native plants that we are able to use, but I picked some of the most beautiful plants available. I love being able to represent the Florida Keys with my wreath, and show people who read my essay how some plants can help us conserve, like the Spanish moss, where anybody's able to use it in different ways, whether an animal's using it for shelter, or we're using it for medicines, clothing, or seats in our cars. I also used the beautiful, native beach sunflower, which can be used for bird dispersing, or to stabilize sand dunes, which keeps our beaches together. I also used the unique snowberry, which animals use for food, or we're able to use for different medicines. All of these plants have a different conservational message behind them, but all are beautiful and unique.