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“Spanish Moss... It’s Not”

by
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One morning when I decided to go walking with Jude instead of beginning my morning like I normally do, in front of the computer, I realized a great truth. A healthy body might be the reason given by those who walk on a regular basis but I discovered it’s really because they get to look at things all around them in a more intimate and meaningful manner... as opposed to whizzing by in your golf cart or automobile.

On two days out of the week, getting an early start, you can get a close up look at what trash is being thrown away by your neighbors... and a word to those who use those almost transparent white trash bags... be careful what you put into them for the “morning people” to visually invade. One must be especially alert not to put any financial data or items with Social Security numbers visible... or like that one house I saw whose owners have a strange taste in reading material. Believe me, in the wrong kind of bag your innermost private secrets become very public. Being the honest man I am I did not pry but I’m not sure everyone out walking is as disciplined as I am to not look.

One thing I enjoyed looking at and commented on to Judy was the beautiful Live Oak trees and the ethereal quality they possess with the delicate Spanish Moss (SM as I’ll call it herein) draped throughout their branches. Did you know that SM is not truly a moss.... Of course you did? For those of you who are new to the Villages is your only association with SM from the movies of the south or pictures you’ve seen of all the trees covered with it? To me it is a wonderment and totally fascinating.

In researching the moss that’s not a moss I discovered several things you newcomers just might find interesting. SM is neither a moss nor a parasite which many people say it is. The tree to which SM attaches itself is not needed to feed it... SM is a “self-sustaining tropical, epiphytic herb” and uses the tree as only a structure upon which to grow and hang while it manufactures its own food from the air and water around it.

For those who look real closely at SM you will find it is actually a flowering plant with individual stems that bear leaves with teeny-tiny, inconspicuous flowers, yellowish-brown in color with petals usually no more than ¼” long. They’re so small it’s no wonder you haven’t seen them.

It must have moisture to survive which is why it is indigenous to the tropics and it grows very slow, spreading from branch to branch and tree to tree as the wind picks it up and scatters it. My sources say some beards of the SM can be as long as 20 feet. Although many years ago it was widely used as stuffing for beds, pillows, furniture and car seats, it is not used as much today. If you decide

to use it for that be sure and spray it with an insect spray and dry it outside in the air to rid it of all those microscopic “thingies” (a technical term) that are all over it.

Some have brought it inside to use as decorative cover for flowers or doorways only to find it dies and gets brittle because there is not enough water to sustain its life. Floral shops do use it as a decorative touch to arrangements not designed for permanent use. Its habitat is just what you find here in Florida, an area of high humidity and close to bodies of water.

SM doesn't actually kill its host tree, technically speaking, however the growth of it can become so thick it could block the sun, which the tree's leaves need to live and the clumps of SM absorb a great deal of rain and so heavy they indeed are capable of doing damage to the tree in that manner by breaking off the limbs.

My research also said that SM could hang from any tree but for some reason I never see it on any trees other than Live Oaks and Cypress trees. Again, maybe it's because these two species of trees are around the water more than the others... that's a little mystery I haven't figured out yet. If you've got SM on trees of yours that are not Live Oaks or Cypress drop me a line and I'll tell everyone so they can come and take a picture of it. Just joking.

Gosh, time sure flies when you're having fun... time to go, but before I do let me leave you with this... if you want to see some really interesting trash, go to 116....., nah, better not. Have a great week.

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