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Host, nectar



Blanketflower

Blanketflower (*Gaillardia pulchella*), also known as Firewheel and Indian blanket, is one of two *Gaillardia* species native to Florida, the other species being Lanceleaf blanketflower (*G. aestivalis*). Blanketflower occurs throughout Florida in coastal areas and disturbed sites.

Description

In Florida, Blanketflower is an annual or short-lived perennial. Its linear- to lance-shaped leaves are quite hairy, which makes the plant appear grayish-green. Under natural conditions, it is from 12 to 18 inches tall and about as wide. In gardens, it can easily spread to twice that.

Its brightly colored flowers, long blooming season and drought tolerance make this a popular garden plant. Flower petals typically are bi-colored with an inner red band surrounded by an outer yellow band. The relative amounts of red and yellow can vary considerably. Petals can be entirely red or yellow, have an inner red band surrounded by a white band, or, on rare occasions, be entirely white. Sometimes the petals even are tubular — narrow at the base and flaring out like trumpets.

Peak flowering is from mid-spring to late summer, with diminished flowering until frost; in Central and South Florida, Blanketflower can bloom at any time of the year.

Planting

Plantings can be established by seed or plants. Space plants about 18 to 24 inches apart on center, or closer for a dense bed. Use it in landscape sites where it can be allowed to spread, as



Lanceleaf blanketflower

it can be a very aggressive re-seeder, especially in loamy soils. To ensure seed set, several to many plants should be in close proximity so bees and other insect pollinators can cross-pollinate flowers.

Seeds

Blanketflower seeds are commercially available. Sow in early to mid-fall on an untilled seed bed.

Plants

Plants often are sold in 4-inch, quart and gallon containers.

Butterflies and bees

Blanketflower is an excellent nectar plant for butterflies and pollinators. Its “tough as nails” reputation is well deserved. If you have an open, sandy, sunny spot where nothing grows, try Blanketflower.

Care

Established plants are drought tolerant, so supplemental watering might be needed only during extended dry periods. When irrigating, apply 1/3- to 1/2-inch of water.

In late fall, plants that have not died can be cut back to 6 to 8 inches of stubble. No cold protection is needed during winter; even the tiniest seedlings tolerate frost and freezes into the low 20s.

Blanketflower is relatively pest- and disease-free. When viewing leaves closely, you may notice tiny white speckles, which horticulturists refer to as

stippling. Whatever the cause, stippling does not appear to be detrimental to a plant’s overall health.

Site conditions

Blanketflower is salt tolerant and grows best in full sun in dry to slightly dry, well-drained soil. It prefers neutral to alkaline soils found near the coast, or areas with concrete or limerock. In shadier sites, it gets very leggy and can even creep into adjacent shrubs. Once established, Blanketflower is very tolerant of hot, dry conditions, especially in very sandy soils. Drought tolerance may be diminished in heavier soils.

Hardiness zones

Blanketflower is best suited for zones 8A–11.



Varieties sold at many large retail outlets and garden centers, and by national wildflower seed companies, often are non-native *Gaillardia aristata* or one of the many varieties of *G. pulchella* or *Gaillardia x grandiflora* (a hybrid of *G. pulchella* and *G. aristata*). Avoid planting these in the vicinity of native ecotype *G. pulchella*, as they may hybridize.

