



Privet senna



Chapman's senna

Senna is a genus of diverse flowering plants native throughout the tropics. Four species are native to Florida, and two — *S. ligustrina* and *S. mexicana* var. *chapmanii* — are commercially propagated. Both are great for attracting pollinators and adding a touch of the tropics to the home landscape.

Senna mexicana var. *chapmanii* is known commonly as Chapman's wild sensitive plant, Chapman's senna and Bahama senna. It occurs in pine rocklands, coastal strands and along hammock edges in Miami-Dade County and the Florida Keys. However, it can be planted in landscapes as far north as Central Florida. Due to its limited natural range, it is a state-listed threatened species.

Privet wild sensitive plant or Privet senna (*S. ligustrina*) naturally occurs in coastal counties from Brevard south on the east coast, and from Gilchrist and Levy south on the west coast. It can be found along hammock edges and in disturbed areas.

Description

With an abundance of showy yellow flowers and gleaming evergreen foliage, both Privet and Chapman's senna make exceptional ornamental plants. Chapman's senna is a robust evergreen perennial that can take on a variety of shapes — from upright to nearly prostrate and sprawling. Its flowers have bright, buttery-yellow petals with subtle red venation. They are born on stalked clusters in spring and fall.

Privet senna is a fast-growing shrub that can reach a height of 10 feet or more. It is lanky, with a thin crown and many short side branches. If allowed to self-sow, it may form a dense colony. At maturity, Privet senna tends to bend under its own weight. Its flowers are lemon yellow. Its

foliage is similar to that of Chapman's senna, with pinnately compound leaves that are alternately arranged, but its leaflets are linear- to lance-shaped and more numerous. Overall, its foliage is less dense. Privet Senna typically blooms from autumn to late spring but may bloom sporadically throughout the year.

Butterflies and bees

Senna flowers are visited by sweat, resin, cuckoo, leafcutter and bumble bees for their pollen and nectar. Butterflies such as the Sleepy orange, Little yellow, and Cloudless, Orange-barred and Statira sulphurs are also frequent visitors. All members of the *Senna* genus are larval host plants for sulphur caterpillars.

Planting

Both species may be used as specimen shrubs, but Chapman's senna works best planted in mass and as a border.

Seeds

Senna seeds usually aren't available commercially. Both species are prolific self-seeders. Seeds typically sprout in spring.

Plants

Plants of both species are available in 1- and 3-gallon pots at native plant nurseries.

Care

Sennas are not cold tolerant and may die if exposed to below-freezing temperatures. Seedlings are slightly more resilient and may survive. Sennas require occasional pruning; otherwise, they

can become leggy. Removal of brown seed pods will help the plants remain attractive when not in flower and will help decrease seedlings. Unwanted seedlings can easily be removed.

Site conditions

Plant Privet senna and Chapman's senna in dry to slightly moist, well-drained soils. Both can tolerate nutrient-poor soils but do better with some organic content. Full sun to light shade is best for both species. Privet senna can tolerate a little more shade than Chapman's — up to half a day — but neither will flower without several hours of daily direct sunlight. Despite being native to coastal areas, Privet senna is not salt tolerant, although Chapman's senna is.

Hardiness zones

Privet senna is suited for zones 9A–11; Chapman's senna for zones 10A–11.



Cloudless sulphur caterpillar on Privet senna

Many non-native *Senna* species are sold commercially. In particular, Christmas senna or Butterfly senna (*S. pendula*) is often recommended for butterfly gardens. However, the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council (FLEPPC) lists it as a Category I invasive species, known to alter native plant communities. It should be avoided. For more information on Butterfly senna, visit the FLEPPC website: www.fleppc.org.

CAUTION

