

# Wildflowers for dry landscapes

Florida's native wildflowers and plants are essential to the pollinators we depend on. But wildflowers are vanishing. Landscaping with wildflowers can create pollinator pathways through urban areas, helping bees, butterflies and other beneficial insects to move and thrive.

If you have added wildflowers to your landscape, you've probably learned how adaptable they are to a wide range of environmental conditions. Although it is a challenge to introduce wildflowers to a dry site, many species will adapt and flourish once established.

## Beach sunflower (*Helianthus debilis*)



photo by Stacey Matrazzo

Succulent green leaves support bright yellow 2-inch flowers on a plant that covers a 3- to 4-foot area. Although it spreads, this plant varies in height from 6 to 18 inches, depending on the source of seeds. It will reseed dependably in Central and South Florida.

## Blanketflower (*Gaillardia pulchella*)



photo by Claudia Larsen

Light grey-green narrow leaves create a soft background for bright 3-inch, yellow and red flowers that float 10 to 18 inches above the ground, forming a mass display. Blanketflower proliferates each year from previous year's seeds.

Some wildflowers prefer 8 to 10 hours of full sun per day and thrive in heat. The best examples are found on beaches, but these plants also can be used inland to fill large beds with continuous color from summer through fall. Both species respond to late-summer pruning that renews foliage and flowers, which last until cold weather.

## False petunia (*Ruellia caroliniana*)



photo by Ron and Diane Bynum

This low-growing plant might spread too much in fertile moist soil, but it is easily controlled in dry, shady locations. The light-blue petunia-shaped flowers create a cooling effect under dappled shade of oaks. False petunia also grows well in full sun, where it forms a compact 8-to 10-inch mound that blooms throughout summer.

## Frostweed (*Verbesina virginica*)



photo by Stacey Matrazzo

The Florida Museum of Natural History recommends this little-known plant as a pollinator magnet. Its natural habitat is shady hammocks, where it grows to 3 to 4 feet, but it does well in sunnier locations, too. The flowers are a cluster of white with green central discs. The large, coarse, scalloped leaves may be more adapted to the background in a bed or a forest-edge planting where it can form colonies.

Dry, shady areas can be difficult to landscape with wildflowers because they tend to be more open in nature and may have natural leaf mulch. Try these species:

Plants whose habitats are open sunny areas in sandhills or flatwoods can make nice additions to your landscape while being drought-tolerant. These plants typically bloom for three to six weeks, so combining several species will ensure longer blooming and an interesting diversity. There are many species that fit here — these are just a few:

### Greeneyes (*Berlandiera* spp.)



photo by Walter Taylor

This member of the aster family is one of the earliest plants to bloom in spring. Flowers occur in single heads with yellow ray flowers radiating around the central green disc or “eye,” giving the plant its nickname. Greeneyes grows 1 to 2 feet high and may bloom intermittently throughout the summer and fall in South Florida. Its long taproots contribute to its ability to thrive in dry locations.

### White beardtongue (*Penstemon multiflorus*)



photo by Walter Taylor

This member of the snapdragon family has white flowers on terminal panicles that are supported above lance-shaped basal leaves in a clumping rosette. The summer bloomer also may attract hummingbirds. It makes striking statement when planted in groups of five or more.

### Milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)



photo by Claudia Larsen

Orange milkweed is a host plant for Monarch and Queen butterflies, but it is also valuable as a long-blooming garden plant for dry sites. Each flower cluster consists of many small orange flowers with downward-curving petals. Although evergreen in South Florida, the long taproot assists in its drought durability and stores energy for its perennial reappearance each year in other parts of the state.

### Bluecurls (*Trichostema dichotomum*)



photo by Walter Taylor

Bluecurls forms a mist of light blue with its delicate airy appearance of small flowers, which have long feathery, curved stamens. This short-lived perennial grows to 1 to 3 feet and blooms in late summer. It will reseed prolifically if the soil below is unmulched. This member of the mint family is popular with bees and small butterflies.

### Paintbrush (*Carphephorus corymbosus*)



photo by Walter Taylor

Dry pinelands are where you will find this beauty in the fall. It is a lovely companion plant for clumping grasses such as Lovegrass and Lopsided indiagrass. Thick, leathery basal leaves grow in a rosette and gradually form larger clumps. The 18- to 30-inch single flower stalks have flat-topped inflorescences studded with bright purple-pink disk flowers.

### Silver-leaved aster (*Pityopsis graminifolia*)

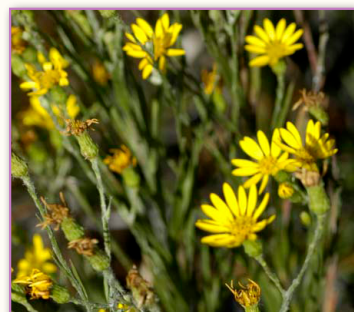


photo by Walter Taylor

If you are lucky to have gopher tortoises on your property, you may already have Silver-leaved aster, also known as Narrowleaf silkgrass, growing as a food source. This colony-forming plant spreads by underground stems and has nice silvery, lance-shaped foliage that makes a low groundcover. In fall, 1- to 3-foot spikes of bright yellow, half-inch flowers appear on multi-branched stems.

All these wildflowers can be grown throughout Florida. Even with drought-tolerant plantings, remember that your garden may need supplemental water during prolonged dry periods. If plants look wilted and do not recover overnight, an application of one-half to three-quarter inches of water will renew vigor. Some perennials go dormant in the heat of summer, dying back to roots and waiting for cooler fall or winter weather, when they will produce fresh leaves. Light mulching can help reduce evapotranspiration and wilting.

***By discovering which plants are best suited to your dry areas, you can concentrate them in your plantings and create a great visual display that you can enjoy rain or shine!***

To learn more about Florida’s native wildflowers, visit [www.FlaWildflowers.org](http://www.FlaWildflowers.org).