

# Vanillaleaf

(*Carphephorus odoratissimus*)

For definitions of botanical terms, visit [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary\\_of\\_botanical\\_terms](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_botanical_terms).

Vanillaleaf is a perennial that produces many small purple flowers in terminal, flat-topped inflorescences. Its basal leaves are straplike, are 6 inches to 1 foot in length, and form a rosette. Stem leaves are clasping and reduced in size as they ascend the stem. They are alternately arranged. Stems are glabrous.

The common name, vanillaleaf, refers to the vanilla-like scent that the wilting leaves emit when crushed. The species epithet, *odoratissimus*, is from the Latin for “most fragrant” and also alludes to the leaves’ scent.

Vanillaleaf occurs naturally in mesic to hydric pine flatwoods, moist sandhills and bogs and blooms late summer into fall. It is found throughout Florida; however, the species has been divided into two varieties with distinct ranges: *C. odoratissimus* is found in the Panhandle and north and central peninsula. *C. odoratissimus* var. *subtropicanus* (sometimes known simply as *C. subtropicanus*) is endemic to the central and southern peninsula. Their ranges overlap in Citrus, Sumter, Orange and Osceola counties. The leaves of *C. odoratissimus* var. *subtropicanus* emit little to no vanilla-like scent. Its common name is false vanillaleaf. Both varieties attract butterflies and other pollinators.

**Family:** Asteraceae (Aster, composite or daisy family)

**Native range:** Panhandle, north and central peninsula

To see where natural populations of Vanillaleaf have been vouchered, visit [www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu](http://www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu).

**Hardiness:** Zone 8a–10b, depending on variety

**Soil:** Moist to moderately dry soils

**Exposure:** Full sun to partial shade

**Growth habit:** 4'+ tall

**Propagation:** Seed

**Garden tips:** Although vanillaleaf likes moist soils, it does not tolerate inundation. As well, it can tolerate drought once established, but requires sufficient moisture during hot summer months.

Vanillaleaf plants are occasionally available from nurseries that specialize in Florida native plants. Visit [www.PlantRealFlorida.org](http://www.PlantRealFlorida.org) to find a nursery in your area.



Photo by Eleanor Dietrich