

Partridge pea

(*Chamaecrista fasciculata*)

For definitions of botanical terms, visit en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_botanical_terms.

Partridge pea is an herbaceous annual or short-lived perennial that occurs naturally in scrub, sandhill, flatwoods, beach dunes and disturbed areas throughout the state. Flowers appear from late spring through late fall, and year-round in South Florida. The blooms attract mostly butterflies and long-tongued bees, while ants, flies, wasps and other bees are attracted to the nectar glands that grow on leaf stems. Seeds are consumed by birds and other wildlife. Partridge pea is a host plant to several species of butterfly, including the Gray hairstreak (*Strymon melinus*) and Cloudless sulphur (*Phoebis sennae*). Despite its appeal to so many insects, the flower is pollinated only by long-tongued bees.

The axillary flowers are yellow with reddish spots at the base of each petal. They bear both yellow and reddish-purple anthers; the latter contains reproductive pollen, while the former produces food pollen. Leaves are pinnately-compound with many small yellow-green leaflets that fold up when touched. Nectar is produced at the base of the leaf in tiny, reddish-orange glands. Stems and branches are typically dark red. Seeds are born in flattened pods.



Photo by Jaret Daniels

Family: Fabaceae (Legume Family)

Native range: Nearly throughout

To see where natural populations of Partridge pea have been vouchered, visit www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu.

Hardiness: Zones 8A–10B

Soil: Very dry, sandy to loamy well-drained soils

Exposure: Full sun to partial shade; fairly salt-tolerant

Growth habit: Variable, up to 4' tall, with 2–4' spread

Propagation: Seed

Garden tips: Partridge pea is an excellent plant to use in disturbed areas as it tends to establish quickly. It is a prolific self-seeder and is also fairly salt tolerant. Partridge pea is easily propagated by seed. Collect seed pods in the fall once they have turned brown and are falling from the plant. It is also a nitrogen-fixer, so it may improve and enrich soils, allowing for the introduction of more demanding plants into your landscape.

Seeds are available through the Florida Wildflowers Growers Cooperative at www.FloridaWildflowers.com. Plants are often available at nurseries that specialize in native plants. Visit PlantRealFlorida.org to find a native nursery on your area.