

Innocence

(*Houstonia procumbens*)

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

Although often overlooked, the diminutive white flowers and verdurous leaves of Innocence are a welcome sight for anyone with the winter blues. This low-growing perennial creeps along the floors of many open habitats such as pine flatwoods, sandhills, scrub and ruderal areas throughout Florida.



Photo by Mary Keim

Innocence goes largely unnoticed until late winter and early spring when it blooms with lovely white four-lobed flowers on a tidy carpet of green ovate leaves. Although its solitary flowers are only 4–6 mm in diameter, the plant can form a miniature wildflower garden. The leaves are oppositely arranged. Stems are prostrate. Seeds are born in tiny capsules.

The species epithet *procumbens* is from the Latin *procumbo*, meaning “to lie down.”

Family: Rubiaceae (Madder or coffee family)

Native range: Throughout Florida

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

Hardiness: Zones 8–10

Soil: Moderately moist soils

Exposure: Sunny, open areas to light shade

Growth habit: 1” tall, spreading up to 12”

Propagation: Seed

Garden tips: *Innocence* is rarely for sale in nurseries, but is easy to grow and can be used as a slow-spreading winter groundcover in a lightly mulched or open area. Although dormant in summer, it co-exists well with sparse grasses and seems to reseed or be long-lived.