

Celestial lily

(*Nemastylis floridana*)

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

As its name suggests, Celestial lily is a heavenly little wildflower found in wet flatwoods and freshwater marshes and swamps. Its dainty violet flowers bloom August through October and attract mostly bees. In his book, *Central Florida Wildflowers*, Roger Hammer christens the plant as “Happy hour flower,” as its ephemeral blooms only open in the afternoon and close by dusk. Another common name is Fall-flowering ixia, alluding to its bloom season. The plant is endemic to peninsular Florida. Once common, it is now a state-listed endangered species, largely due to loss of habitat and fire suppression. It is the only species of *Nemastylis* to occur in Florida.

Celestial lily's bluish to purple flower is composed of a 6-parted perianth, with 3 petals and 3 sepals that are wide-spreading. Stamens are thick, bright yellow and number 3. Anthers are twisted. The style is whitish and split into 6 threadlike branches. Basal leaves are few, long (12–18 inches) and grass-like. Stem leaves are reduced. Stems are thin and may grow to 2½ feet tall. The fruit is an oval capsule.

The genus name *Nemastylis* is from the Greek *nema*, meaning “thread,” and *stylos*, meaning “pillar” or “rod.” It refers to the flower's threadlike style.

Family: Iridaceae (Iris family)

Native range: Occurs mainly in the St. John's River basin counties, with localized populations in Pasco, Polk, Lake, Martin, Palm Beach and Broward counties

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

Lifespan: Perennial

Soil: Moist to wet, well-drained soils

Exposure: Full sun to minimal shade

Growth habit: up to 2½' tall

Garden tips: Celestial lily is not commercially propagated. Visit a natural area to see it.



Photo by Mary Keim



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Florida Wildflower Foundation • P O Box 941691, Maitland, FL 32794-1691 • 407-622-1606 • www.FlaWildflowers.org

