

Wild pennyroyal

(*Piloblephis rigida*)

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

Wild pennyroyal is a low-growing, evergreen, herbaceous to semi-woody shrub. It typically flowers in late winter through spring, but can bloom year-round. It occurs naturally in scrub, scrubby and pine flatwoods, sandhills, dry prairies and ruderal areas. Except for a small population in Georgia, it is endemic to Florida. Its flowers are attractive to a variety of bees and butterflies. Because of its early bloom period, it supplies pollen and nectar when little else is available, making it an important part of natural landscaping and restoration areas.

Wild pennyroyal's small, 2-lipped flowers may be lavender, purple or pinkish. Lower lips are lobed with dark purple spots. Stamen are prominent. Flowers are borne in dense, cone-shaped terminal clusters. Sepals are pubescent and green with purple margins. Leaves are tiny and needle-like with entire margins. They are oppositely arranged. Stems are semi-woody and branched. The fruit is a small aggregate of nutlets.

Piloblephis rigida is the only species in its genus. The genus name comes from the Greek *pilo*, or "hairy," and *blephis*, or "eyelid," and refers to the tiny soft hairs that coat the sepals. The species epithet *rigida* is from the Latin *rigidus*, meaning "rigid," and refers to its stiff branches.

The entire plant is delightfully aromatic, particularly when crushed. Like most members of the mint family, it has a minty smell, although the scent may be more lemony in some populations. Its leaves can also be brewed into a minty tea.

Family: Lamiaceae (Mint family)

Native range: Peninsular Florida

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

Hardiness: Zones 8B–10B

Soil: Dry, well-drained, sandy soils

Exposure: Full sun

Growth habit: 1–2' tall and equally broad

Propagation: Seeds, cuttings

Garden tips: Wild pennyroyal is best suited for naturalistic plantings and restorations, but also works well as a groundcover or border planting. It is drought tolerant and grows in nutrient-poor soil.

Wild pennyroyal plants are often available at nurseries that specialize in native plants. Visit www.PlantRealFlorida.org to find a native nursery on your area.



Photo by Wayne Matchett