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# Eastern purple bladderwort

(*Utricularia purpurea*)

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

Eastern purple bladderwort is an aquatic carnivorous plant found in wetlands, freshwater swamps and shallow ponds and lakes throughout Florida. Its small but showy lavender flowers bloom year-round. This highly specialized plant feeds on insects and other small organisms caught in its bladder-like trap. Unsuspecting prey brush against tiny hairs that trigger a trapdoor. As the door closes, the organism and water are sucked into the bladder. With the bladder full and the door closed, the plant releases enzymes to digest the organism. The whole process takes less than a second and is one of the most sophisticated processes in the plant kingdom.



Photo by Alan Cressler, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

Eastern purple bladderwort's flowers are pale purple and two-lipped. The upper lip has a violet patch in its center, and the lower lip bears a white patch with a bright yellow center. Flowers grow to about ½ inch long and are born atop thick flower stalks that extend several inches above the water line. Leaves are finely divided, giving them a lacy appearance. They are arranged in whorls of 5 to 7 leaves and are generally submerged. Small ovoid bladders emerge from leaf tips. The plant has no roots. It spreads via a matrix of underwater stems. Seeds are born in minute dehiscent capsules.

The genus name *Utricularia* is from the Latin *utricularius*, meaning “bagpiper” or “one who uses animal bladders.” The species epithet *purpurea* is from the Latin *purpureus*, meaning “purple.” There are 14 species of *Utricularia* native to Florida; most have yellow flowers, but four have purple.

**Family:** Lentibulariaceae (Bladderwort family)

**Native range:** Nearly throughout

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

**Hardiness:** Zones 8A–10B

**Lifespan:** Annual or perennial

**Soil:** Wet to inundated, poorly drained acidic soils; shallow, tannic water

**Exposure:** Full sun

**Growth habit:** Up to 6” tall

Eastern purple bladderwort is not commercially available. Visit a natural area to see it.

