

Tall elephantsfoot

(*Elephantopus elatus*)

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

You'd probably expect an elephant-sized flower from a plant called Tall elephantsfoot, but it's not the flower that gives this plant its name. It's the large rosette of flat basal leaves that, with a bit of imagination, bear a tiny resemblance to the shape of an elephant's footprint. The plant occurs naturally in flatwoods, sandhills, upland mixed woodlands, ruderal areas and wet prairies. Its small flowers typically bloom summer through fall and attract a variety of pollinators, especially native bees.



Photo by Mary Keim

Although Tall elephantsfoot is a member of the Aster family, its flowers bear no ray florets. The small disk florets may be lavender, pink or even whitish. Flowerheads are subtended by three leaf-like bracts that are hairy and deltoid in shape. Stems are hairy and erect, emerging from a basal rosette of flat oblanceolate leaves. Stem leaves are few, elliptic and sessile with alternate arrangement. The abundance of hairs on much of the foliage gives it a grayish hue. Fruits are specialized achenes called cypselae.

The genus *Elephantopus* comes from the Greek *elephantos*, or "elephant," and *pous*, or "foot." The species epithet *elatus* comes from the Latin *elatus*, or "raised," hence the common name, Tall elephantsfoot. Both the scientific and common names are a reference to the flat basal leaves from which the tall flower stalk arises.

The plant may have cytotoxic properties due to the presence of two chemicals specific to the genus – elephantin and elephantopin.

Family: Asteraceae (Composite or daisy family)

Native range: Nearly throughout Florida

To see where natural populations of Tall elephantsfoot have been vouchered, visit florida.plantatlas.usf.edu.

Hardiness: Zone 8A–11

Lifespan: Perennial

Soil: Slightly moist to very dry, sandy soils

Exposure: Full sun to shade

Growth habit: 2–3'+ tall

Propagation: Seed

Garden Tips: Tall elephantsfoot does well in a naturalized meadow but can also be a nice addition to a more formal wildflower garden.

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



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