


  


1–3 ft
Nectar



Fourpetal St. John's wort



St. Andrew's cross

Thirty-one species of St. John's wort (*Hypericum* spp.) are found in Florida. All are native, and several are on state and federal endangered plant lists. In nature, look for St. John's wort in sandhill and flatwood habitats, as well as on the margins of cypress swamps and marshes.

Species vary in the appearance of their leaves, but their reddish stems and delightful yellow flowers are constants. Some have short needlelike leaves, while others might look as if they belong to a different genus entirely.

Description

St. John's wort is an evergreen perennial shrub known for its outstanding ornamental features. With sturdy reddish-brown twigs, species in this genus can grow from 1 to 3 feet tall and have spreads of 2 feet or more. Species found at native nurseries typically have 1-inch yellow flowers with four or five petals that contrast with their dark green foliage. Plants of most species flower in summer.

Atlantic St. John's wort (*H. tenuifolium*) is the most typical species encountered at nurseries and plant sales. It likes dry to moist soils and usually doesn't need any pruning, maintaining a delightful, mounding shape. Its summer blooms last a month or more. St. Andrew's cross (*H. hypericoides*), found in nature in moist shaded areas, has an elegant, feathery form and produces three seasons of flowers. For a showy addition to the garden, consider Fourpetal St. John's wort (*H. tetrapetalum*), which has larger, four-petaled flowers; and Myrtleleaf St. John's wort (*H. myrtifolium*), which has blue-green foliage and rich yellow flowers.

Butterflies and bees

Hypericum species are attractive to polyester, yellow-face, large carpenter, bumble, leafcutter, resin and sweat bees, as well as to Gray hairstreak butterflies, whose caterpillars feed on its seed capsules.



Atlantic St. John's wort



Myrtleleaf St. John's wort

Planting

St. John's wort can be used a foundation plant, along a border or edge, or in a mass planting. Space plants from 24 to 36 inches apart.

Seeds

Native ecotype seeds are not available commercially but may be collected from plants when dry. Sow directly in the garden in the fall for spring growth.

Plants

Plants are sold in 1-gallon containers.

Care

These hardy perennials are easy to care for once established. A light pruning in winter, if needed, is all established plants require to maintain a desired shape. Give wetland species a drink after a few days without rain.

Site conditions

St. John's wort does best when planted in full sun to part-shade in sandy soils. However, they can adapt to a variety of other soils, including clay and loam, and acidic and lightly alkaline soils. Plants are not salt tolerant and are moderately drought tolerant once established. Keep Myrtleleaf St. John's wort, a wetland species, moist by adding it to a rain garden or moist site.

Hardiness zones

Most St. John's wort species are suitable for zones 8A–10B, though St. Andrew's cross' southern limit is 9B.

The St. John's wort that is promoted as a supplement for use in treating depression is a non-native species. According to Dan Austin in his book, *Florida Ethnobotany*, using native St. John's wort can lead to dermatitis or photosensitization due to a hypericin compound found in the plants.

Some species may be toxic to livestock.

CAUTION