

# Spiderwort

(*Tradescantia ohiensis*)

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

Spiderwort is an erect perennial wildflower that occurs in open woodlands, disturbed sites and urban areas. Of Florida's four native *Tradescantia* species, it is the most common and is highly adaptable. It blooms spring through summer and reseeds readily.

Spiderwort's showy, bluish-purple flowers are three-petaled and born in clusters atop branched stems. Flowers are most commonly blue or purple, but can also be pink or white. Each flower has six dark bluish-purple stamens; the filaments are covered with sticky hairs and the anthers are bright yellow. Individual flowers are ephemeral, only opening for one day. Leaves are simple, light green and strap-like, giving the plant a grassy appearance, particularly when not in bloom.



Photo by Emily Bell

Spiderwort is quite the powerhouse plant. Not only a great nectar source for bees, it is also edible for us! Try the flowers fresh on a salad or candied for a sweet treat. Stems and leaves can be eaten raw and leaves can also be cooked. The leaves are mucilaginous; the "juice" can be used to soothe insect bites in the same way one would use aloe. The stamens in a Spiderwort flower can even detect radiation. Low level exposure will turn the bluish filament hairs on the stamen pink!

**Family:** Commelinaceae (Dayflower family)

**Native range:** Nearly throughout Panhandle, North and Central Florida

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

**Lifespan:** Perennial

**Soil:** Dry to moderately moist, well-drained soils

**Exposure:** Full sun to light shade

**Growth habit:** 1–2' tall

**Propagation:** Seed, division

**Florida regions of landscape suitability:** North, Central

**Garden tips:** Spiderwort is a great addition to any landscape because it can bloom year-round in many parts of Florida. To keep plants looking healthy, cut them back in late summer (or when they appear to stop blooming). They will bounce back in fall. Spiderwort spreads easily, but if kept under control, it can be used as a border plant. It is striking in mass when in bloom.

Spiderwort is available from nurseries that specialize in Florida native plants. Visit [www.PlantRealFlorida.org](http://www.PlantRealFlorida.org) to find a nursery in your area.



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Florida Wildflower Foundation • P O Box 941691, Maitland, FL 32794-1691 • 407-622-1606 • [www.FlaWildflowers.org](http://www.FlaWildflowers.org)

