

Lantana

(*Lantana depressa*)

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

Lantana depressa is an endemic and state-endangered wildflower that occurs in pine rockland and coastal upland habitats. Butterflies and moths are thought to be its primary pollinators, and it is also visited by bees.

There are three recognized varieties of *Lantana depressa*. All produce dense clusters of small, bright to pale yellow flowers, but they differ in growth habit, leaf characteristics and geographic range.

The most well-known variety is Pineland lantana (*Lantana depressa* var. *depressa*), a low-growing, spreading shrub with ovate leaves that typically have 3–10 teeth on each side. It is found only in Miami-Dade County.

The most geographically widespread but still rare variety is East Coast lantana (*Lantana depressa* var. *floridana*), which occurs along Florida's East Coast from Miami-Dade to St. Johns counties. It is a large, bushy shrub with ovate leaves that usually have 10–15 teeth per side.

The third variety, *Lantana depressa* var. *sanibelensis*, is found on Florida's West Coast from Collier to Pinellas counties. Its growth habit is similar to East Coast lantana, but its leaves typically have 8–10 teeth on each side.

While all three varieties are threatened by coastal development and habitat alteration, the primary threat they face is hybridization with the invasive *Lantana strigocamara* (formerly *Lantana camara*), which has been planted widely in landscapes throughout Florida. With more than 600 named hybrid varieties in cultivation, the taxonomy and genetics of *Lantana* in Florida are murky at best. Although some native plant nurseries list the native varieties *depressa* and *floridana* as available, research suggests that all commercially sold *Lantana* are likely hybrids of *Lantana strigocamara* and other species such as *Lantana montevidensis*.

Before selecting any *Lantana* for landscaping, we strongly recommend reading Roger Hammer's Florida Native Plant Society article, "The Lantana Mess."

Family: Verbenaceae (Vervain or verbena family)

Native range: Coastal counties from Pinellas to St. Johns

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

Lifespan: Perennial

Soil: Dry sand or limestone substrate

Exposure: Full sun

Growth habit: Low spreading to large and bushy

Propagation: Seed

Florida regions of landscape suitability: South, Central (Coastal)

Garden tips: Lantana can be a nice addition to landscapes in dry, sunny coastal areas.

However, it is important to ensure that the right variety is planted in the right location. Given the confusion between non-native hybrids and native varieties sold commercially, it may be best to avoid planting it unless you are certain of what you're getting and that it's the best choice for your site.



Photo by Alan Cressler

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