

Chapman's wild sensitive plant

(*Senna mexicana* var. *chapmanii*)

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

Chapman's wild sensitive plant is a robust evergreen perennial that occurs in pine rocklands, coastal stands and along hammock edges in Miami-Dade County and the Florida Keys. Due to its limited natural range, it is a state-listed threatened species. Its many flowers are visited by sweat, resin, cuckoo, leafcutter and bumble bees for their pollen and nectar. Butterflies such as the Sleepy orange, Little yellow, Cloudless, Orange-barred and Statira sulphurs are also frequent visitors. All members of the *Senna* genus are larval host plants for Sulphur caterpillars.



Photo by Alan Cressler

The plant's flowers are born in stalked clusters. They have five buttery-yellow petals with subtle red venation. Each bloom has seven stamens with reddish anthers. Leaves are pinnately compound and alternately arranged. Leaflets are dark-green and linear to elliptic with pointed tips. A gland at the base of the lowermost leaflets attracts ants that attack caterpillars. Stems are glabrous. Seeds are born in slender brown pods.

Family: Fabaceae (Legume, bean or pea family)

Native range: Miami-Dade County and the Florida Keys

To see where natural populations of Chapman's wild sensitive plant have been vouchered, visit www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu.

Lifespan: Perennial

Soil: Dry to slightly moist, well-drained calcareous soils

Exposure: Full sun to minimal shade

Growth habit: 2–4' tall and sprawling

Propagation: Seeds

Florida regions of landscape suitability: South

Garden tips: Chapman's wild sensitive plant is drought but not cold tolerant and may die if exposed to below-freezing temperatures. The plant may require occasional pruning. Removal of seed pods will help the plant remain attractive when not in flower and will help decrease unwanted seedlings. Chapman's wild sensitive plant grows quickly. Interesting foliage and bright, showy flowers that bloom year-round make it a great ornamental specimen.

CAUTION: Many non-native *Senna* species are sold commercially. In particular, Christmas senna (*S. pendula*), or Butterfly senna, is often recommended for butterfly gardens. However, the Florida Invasive Species Council lists it as a Category I invasive species known to alter native plant communities. It should be avoided.

Chapman's wild sensitive plant is often available from nurseries that specialize in Florida native plants. Visit www.PlantRealFlorida.org to find a nursery in your area.

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