

# Mountain laurel

(*Kalmia latifolia*)

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

Mountain laurel is an evergreen, perennial shrub to small tree that puts on a spectacular springtime display. Its many showy flowers are whitish-pink with dark pink rings in their centers and deep rose-colored “pockets” along the petals in which the filaments fit. Each five-lobed corolla is cupped or bell-shaped and flattens into a decagonal shape as the flower opens. Flowers occur in a multitude of flat-topped clusters. Mountain laurel’s thick, leathery leaves are elliptic, narrowing at the base, and have entire margins. They are alternately arranged.



Photo by Eleanor Dietrich

Pollen dispersal in mountain laurel is unusual compared to many other flowers. The filaments are bent and under tension. When an insect lands on the flower, the movement releases the tension and the pollen is catapulted from the filament onto the insect.

Mountain laurel typically blooms in spring and occurs naturally in slope forests, bluffs and along creeks, seep streams and swamp edges. It attracts bees and provides cover for birds and small mammals. It is a state-listed threatened species in Florida.

The genus, *Kalmia*, was named by Carl Linnaeus for his student, Peter Kalm, an 18th century botanist who visited the United States.

**Family:** Ericaceae (Heath or heather family)

**Native range:** Panhandle west of Jefferson County and Suwannee County

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

**Lifespan:** Perennial

**Soil:** Moist to moderately dry, acidic soils

**Exposure:** Partial to full shade

**Growth habit:** 10'+ tall, 5+' wide

**Propagation:** Seed

**Florida regions of landscape suitability:** North

**Garden tips:** Mountain laurel makes a nice specimen tree. It can also be used as a buffer or background screen, as it can be thicket-forming.

Mountain laurel is often 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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