

Bluestem pricklypoppy

(*Argemone albiflora*)

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

Bluestem pricklypoppy is a formidable flower often spotted in open, disturbed sites and along roadsides throughout much of Florida. Its large white flowers are eye-catching from a distance, but a closer look reveals this plant's dynamic defense mechanism — sharp spines cover its leaves and stems, discouraging cattle and other hungry critters from grazing on it. The plant blooms late spring through summer and attracts a variety of pollinators, especially bees. Its oil-rich seeds are eaten by quail and doves.



Photo by Jim Duggan (CC BY 2.0)

Bluestem pricklypoppy's flowers are 1–3 inches wide and cup-shaped with 4–6 white petals that often appear crumpled. Stamens are numerous with yellow filaments and yellow to reddish-orange anthers. Pistils are topped with a dark reddish-orange stigma. Flowers are subtended with bracts and may be solitary or born in loose terminal cymes. Stems are branched and arise from a basal rosette of long, deeply lobed leaves with prickly margins. The young rosette may be misidentified as a thistle (*Cirsium* spp.). Leaves are sessile, clasping and alternately arranged. Leaf and stem surfaces are glaucous, giving the plant a bluish hue. Fruit is a bluish-green, spine-covered capsule.

The plant exudes a toxic yellowish latex that, while poisonous if ingested, has been used medicinally by many cultures. The seeds contain oil that was used as a lubricant during World War II.

Bluestem pricklypoppy is also known as White pricklypoppy and Texas pricklypoppy. Other than its bloom color, it is almost identical to Mexican pricklypoppy (*A. mexicana*), which has yellow flowers. Both occur in the same habitat.

Family: Papaveraceae (Poppy family)

Native range: Panhandle, north and central peninsula, Broward County

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

Lifespan: Annual or biennial

Soil: Dry, well-drained sandy soils

Exposure: Full sun to partial shade

Growth habit: 3–4' tall

Bluestem pricklypoppy is not commercially available. Visit a natural area to see it.

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PLANT PROFILE:



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