The Florida Panhandle – a great place to see native wildflowers

The Florida Panhandle's relatively high percentage of public land makes it a splendid place to see wildflowers in natural ecosystems. These holdings include the Apalachicola National Forest, a number of state forests and wildlife management areas, large natural areas surrounding two US Air Force bases, and land owned by the Northwest Florida Water Management District. Private conservation organizations such as Tall Timbers Research Station and Land Conservancy and The Nature Conservancy also own and/or manage substantial acreage.

Most of this land is routinely managed by prescribed fire, which promotes the growth of native wildflowers and grasses. Soil characteristics also are key. Many wildflowers thrive in the moist, slightly acidic fine-sand soils abundant in the Panhandle. In addition, cool winters, warm summers and plentiful rainfall (historically more than 60 inches annually) help support wildflower growth.

State Wildflower license plate

You can support Florida's native wildflowers by purchasing the Florida State Wildflower license plate, which funds research, education and planting projects statewide. Learn more at ***FlaWildflowers.org***.

Wildflower viewing tips

- Spring and fall typically are the best seasons to view showy stands of wildflowers, but check moist areas in the summer for flowers such as Meadow Beauty, Hibiscus, and Rosegentian.
- ***Don't miss*** State Road 65 in the Apalachicola National Forest, widely acknowledged as the best place in Florida to view native wildflowers.
- The best places to see showy wildflowers are rural areas (especially moist ones), recently burned natural areas and infrequently mowed roadsides.
- Please don't pick wildflowers. If you want to preserve your memories, take a picture – it will last longer. Picking flowers reduces a species' ability to sustain itself. Picking the flowers of endangered or threatened species is illegal *(see Florida Statute 581.185 Preservation of native flora of Florida)*.
- Stopping on the road or shoulder to view or photograph wildflowers can be hazardous to you and other motorists. Many Panhandle roadsides have numerous pullouts where you can park to explore the roadside.
- If you've photographed a beautiful wildflower or wildflower site, share your photo on the Florida Wildflower Foundation's What's Blooming page. Visit ***FlaWildflowers.org/bloomreport.php*** for instructions about submitting your photo.

Acknowledgements

This brochure was made possible through funding provided by VISIT FLORIDA and the State Wildflower license plate, with support from the Florida Wildflower Foundation and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

Support also was provided by Florida Department of Transportation; Florida Scenic Highways Program; Apalachicola National Forest; Leon County; Visit Tallahassee (Leon County); Wakulla County Chamber of Commerce; Wakulla County Tourism Development Council; Gadsden County Tourism Development Council; Big Bend Scenic Byway; Magnolia Chapter, Florida Native Plant Society (Leon, Liberty counties); and Sarracenia Chapter, Florida Native Plant Society (Wakulla County)

Native WILDFLOWERS In Florida's Eastern Panhandle

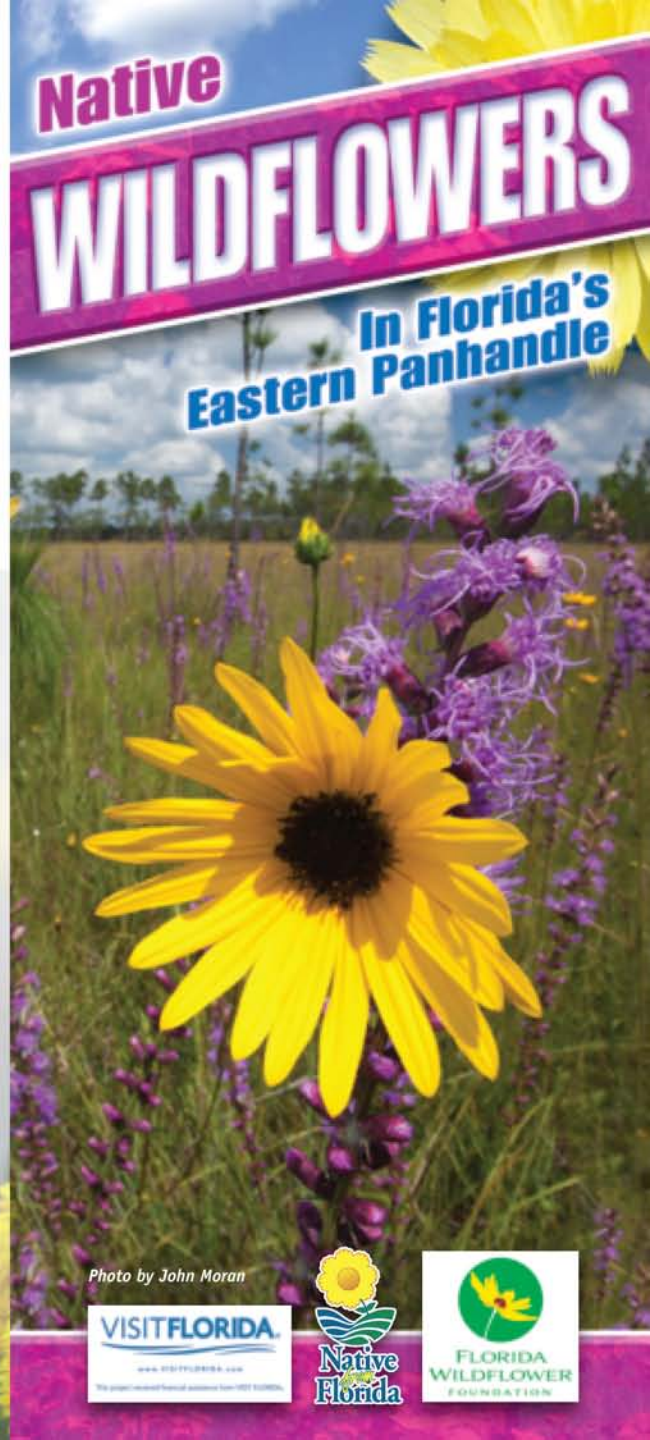


Photo by John Moran

VISITFLORIDA

Native Florida

Florida Wildflower Foundation

Large stands of wildflowers that appear after fire often are easily viewed from roadsides, forest roads and trails

Photo by John Moran

Celebrating 500 years of *La Florida*

On Easter Sunday in 1513, Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de Leon sighted land near what is now St. Augustine. He dubbed it *La Florida* — "land of flowers" — in honor of Spain's Easter celebration. The abundant spring wildflowers he would have seen almost certainly influenced the name choice.

Hundreds of years later, the number of wildflowers that once thrived in wild places and along roadsides and trails has greatly diminished. However, many organizations and agencies now are working to conserve and preserve wildflowers, especially along roadsides.

Modern-day efforts to beautify roadsides with wildflowers began with local garden and civic clubs. A statewide effort took root in the 1960s when motorists gave rave reviews to crimson clover, which cropped up in sod planted by the Florida Department of Transportation on US Highway 27 south of Tallahassee.

Because native wildflowers are adapted to Florida's soils, insects, and diseases, roadside planting programs gradually have grown to include more of them. Naturally occurring wildflowers also are being managed with reduced mowing practices that keep them flourishing. These efforts have been supported by:

- The **Florida State Wildflower license plate** and the **Florida Wildflower Foundation**, which provide funds for native wildflower education, planting and research.
- The Florida Department of Transportation's **Wildflower Program Procedure**, which was created in 2004 in response to increased interest and enthusiasm for roadside wildflowers.
- The development of a native wildflower seed-production industry, which began in the late 1990s.
- The **Florida Federation of Garden Clubs' Paths of Sunshine Awards**, which recognize and promote the conservation, restoration, management and planting of native plants and wildflowers on Florida roadsides.

Coreopsis, commonly called Tickseed, was declared Florida's State Wildflower in 1991. Fourteen species occur in Florida.

Native wildflowers are recognized in Florida's state seal because of their cultural significance to its indigenous people and settlers.

What is a native wildflower?

In general, the Florida Wildflower Foundation defines "Florida native wildflower" as any flowering herbaceous species, or woody species with ornamental flowers, which grew wild within the state's natural ecosystems in the 1560s when Florida's first botanical records were created. Also recognized as native are flowering plants and grasses introduced before that time by Native Americans through travel and trade, and wildflowers introduced without aid of human intervention. To see the complete definition, visit ***FlaWildflowers.org/learn.php.***

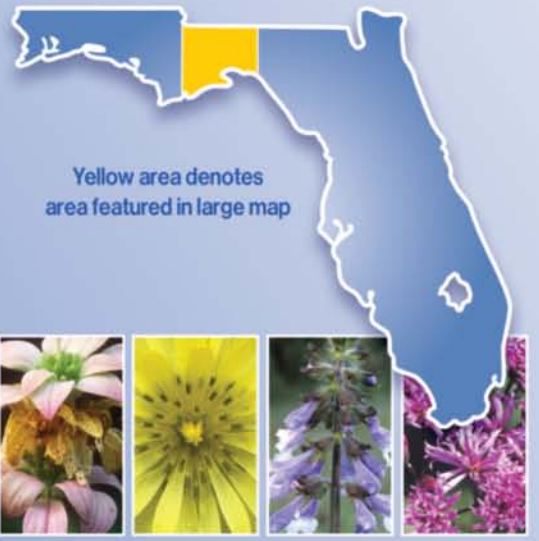
Get Involved
Conserve, preserve, protect

Help preserve Florida's native wildflowers on roadsides by urging your county to adopt wildflower-friendly mowing practices. Visit the Florida Wildflower Foundation Web site to download a county resolution to present. You can also support work for wildflowers by purchasing a State Wildflower license plate or becoming a Florida Wildflower Foundation member. Visit ***FlaWildflowers.org*** to learn more. The Florida Native Plant Society, a Foundation partner, has chapters throughout the state. Learn more at ***FNPS.org.***

Florida Panhandle
Wildflower Map

Please see the following websites for visitor information:

- **Tallahassee (Leon County)** – VisitTallahassee.com
- **Gadsden County** - egadsden.com
- **Wakulla County** - VisitWakulla.com
- **Franklin County** - ANaturalEscape.com
- **Liberty County** - LibertyCountyFlorida.com
- **Big Bend Scenic Byway** - FloridaBigBendScenicByway.com



Common Panhandle Wildflowers

Agalinis

False Foxglove

The attractive lavender or purple flowers of our several false foxgloves are harbingers of autumn. Most begin to flower in late summer but are at their best in September and October. About a dozen species occur in our region, many of which are difficult to distinguish from each other.

Summer, Fall

Aletris lutea

Yellow Colicroot

Yellow colicroot can dominate moist to wet roadsides during its mid to late spring flowering period. The stiffly erect, 3′ stem arises from a flattened whorl of ground-hugging leaves and is terminated by a spikelike inflorescence of bright yellow, tubular flowers.

Spring

Amsonia ciliata

Fringed Blue Star

Two species of blue star occur in the panhandle, one in wet woodlands, the other, pictured here, along the backslope of dry, sandy roadsides. The stem is about 2′ tall with very narrow leaves and is topped by a showy cluster of pale blue, star-shaped flowers.

Spring

Baptisia alba

White Wild Indigo

This large, shrubby bean stands 3-4′ tall. In early to mid spring it produces numerous tall, showy racemes of creamy white pea flowers that are unmistakable. It prefers moist open roadsides in full sun.

Mid Spring

Berlandiera pumila

Greeneyes

Greeneyes takes its name from its flower heads, which have a round green disk at the center of 8 bright yellow rays. The stem is 8-32″ tall with concpicuous 4″ leaves. It is most often seen in dry, open, sandy roadsides.

Spring, Summer

Calopogon barbatus

Grasspink Orchids

Several species of grasspink orhcids occur along the routes recommended here. All have "upsidedown" flowers, with the lip petal pointing upward rather than downward. The patch of showy hairs at the top of the lip resemble stamens and are an adaptation designed to attract bees and other pollinators.

Spring

Cirsium horridulum

Thistle

The several thistles that occur along Florida's roadsides are among our most distinctive wildflowers. Although their flower structure is similar, flower color can range from yellow to pinkish, or purplish. Bull thistle, shown here, is characterized by a treacherous nest of prickly, leaflike bracts under the flower head.

Spring, Summer

Conoclinium coelestinum

Blue Mistflower

Blue mistflower is a sure sign that autumn has arrived, or is certainly not far away. Spreading rapidly by underground runners, this aggressive perennial forms large colonies of 1-3′-tall plants. The numerous compact heads of deep blue or purple flowers add significant charm to October roadsides.

Fall

Coreopsis lanceolata

Lanceleaf Coreopsis

Coreopsis is Florida's state wildflower. Fourteen species occur in the state. Most have yellow flowers, like the lanceleaf coreopsis pictured here. The ray flowers of many species are notched at the tip, a conspicuous identifying feature. Lanc leaf coreopsis is one of Florida's morecommon, showy spring wildflowers.

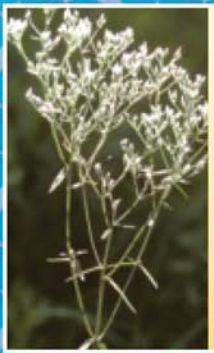
Spring

Eriocaulon decangulare

Ladies Hatpin

It is not difficult to see how ladies hatpins got their name. The erect, 1-3′-tall, arrow-straight stem topped by a buttonlike cluster of creamy white flowers suggests a knitting needle. These clump-forming perennials are denizens of wet roadside ditches and often occur in large, conspicuous colonies.

Spring, Summer, Fall



Eupatorium

Thoroughworts and Fennels

At least half of the nearly 20 thoroughworts that grace Florida's roadsides occur in the panhandle. All have tiny white flowers borne in congested heads at the top of a branched inflorescence. Look for them in summer and fall.

Summer, Fall

Eurybia eryngiifolia

Thistleleaf Aster

The disheveled appearance of the thin, creamy white rays surrounding a dark-brown center sets this species apart from other asters. Its Florida range is restricted to the several counties of the central panhandle, and it is not uncommon along roadsides in early summer, especially in the Apalachicola National Forest.

Spring, Summer

Common Panhandle Wildflowers

Helianthus heterophylla

Sunflowers

Sunflowers are among the showiest of our fall wildflowers, providing ornament to moist road shoulders and the bottoms of wet roadside ditches. Most have large flower heads with numerous yellow rays encircling a brown or yellow center. Our only exception is the common and abundant rayless sunflower, shown elsewhere on this chart, which has the dark brown head, but lacks the yellow rays.

Fall

Hypericum

St. John's-wort

More than 20 species of St. John's-wort occur in the panhandle, many along roadsides and woodland margins. All have yellow, 4- or 5-petaled flowers with a brushlike mass of yellow stamens. The one shown here makes its appearance in spring, but one or another of the species is flowering spring through fall.

Spring, Summer, Fall

Ipomoea cordatotriloba

Morning Glory

The showy blossoms of most morning glories fade quickly as the day progresses. The flowers of tievine, pictured here, are funnel-shaped, less than 2" long, and range in color from pink to rose-purple. It is conspicuous as it scrambles over roadside vegetation in late summer and autumn.

Summer, Fall

Lophiola aurea

Goldcrest

This wetland loving herb stands 1-3' tall and prefers savannas and wet ditches. The stem is erect, whitish hairy, and supports a branching inflorescence. The scientific epithet aurea means golden, a fitting description of the flower color.

Spring, Summer, Fall

Lupinus villosus

Lady Lupine

Lady lupine is one of the more common of our native lupines. The dense cluster of hairy, blue-gray leaves and erect 1-2' spikes of lavender to pinkish flowers make a conspicuous display along dry, sandy roadsides.

Spring

Monarda punctata

Dotted Horsemint

Dotted horsemint is worth stopping for. The large pink bracts and spotted yellow flowers are exquisite when seen close up, and the minty aroma only adds to the sensory appeal. Handling any part of the plant can impart a pleasing, even if temporary fragrance to the skin.

Fall

Pyrrhopappus carolinianus

Carolina Desert Chicory

This yellow-flowered member of the Aster family begins flowering as early as February and continues throughout the spring, even into mid summer. Its slender single stem is about 2' tall and is terminated by a dense head consisting only of soft yellow ray flowers. Unlike the black-eyed Susan and most other species in this family, the flower head lacks a central disk.

Spring, Summer

Rhexia nashii

Meadow Beauties

As their name suggests, meadow beauties prefer treeless savannas, open bogs, and sunny roadsides. There are about a dozen species, most of which have lavender or purple flowers with large, yellow, hooklike anthers. They are one of our most abundant groups of summer-blooming wildflowers.

Summer

Rhynchospora latifolia

White-topped Sedge

Not many sedges make the list of showy bloomers. Our two species of white-topped sedge are the exceptions. The white structures below the flowers are actually leaflike bracts, but their effect is that of flower petals.

Spring, Summer

Sabatia decandra (bartramii)

Rosegentians

Rosegentians are summer delights. About a dozen species occur in the panhandle, some with white flowers, others with pink flowers. Roadside species usually have 5 or 10 petals. Pictured here is Bartram's rosegentian, a bright pink, 10-petaled form.

Summer

Salvia lyrata

Lyreleaf Sage

The lavender-blue flowers of lyreleaf sage often dominate early spring roadsides. Plants average 1-2' tall, with a single, upright stalk, and a whorl-like cluster of ground-hugging leaves.

Spring

Sarracenia flava

Pitcherplants

Northwest Florida is well known for its assortment of insectivorous pitcher plants, at least 4 of which can be seen along our recommended roadsides. The conspicuous trumpet-like leaves of the yellow pitcherplant, shown here, can be 2' tall. All can be seen along wet to moist roadsides, especially along SR 65 and the Apalachee Savannas Scenic Byway.

Spring, Summer

Symphyotrichum adnatum

Blue Asters

Several blue-flowered asters are found along panhandle roadsides. Scaleleaf aster, shown here, is a low-growing species with tiny, awl-shaped leaves that point upward and tightly hug the stem. Chapman's aster has similar flowers but grows much taller, with a slender arching stem that is nearly devoid of leaves.

Spring, Summer, Fall

Trillium

Trilliums

You'll have to find a shady, hardwood forest to see our native trilliums. The leaves of these long-lived perennials make their annual appearance in late winter and flower in early spring, well before the trees put on new leaves. Chattahoochee Nature Park, Torreya State Park, and Jackson Mounds are good destinations to search for these interesting plants.

Spring

Vernonia

Ironweeds

Ironweeds are tall, wispy plants with striking purple flowers and an upright form. Plants average 3-5' tall, usually with several upright stems. Some prefer dry sites, others moist roadsides. Look for them in autumn.

Fall

Common Panhandle Wildflowers

Asclepias lanceolata

Lanceleaf Milkweed

Milkweeds are most easily recognized by their unique flowers and best known for their attractiveness to butterflies. Some are low-growing, others tall and conspicuous. Flower color ranges from white to lavender, green, yellow, or bright orange-red. Lanceleaf milkweed, shown here, can be 3-4' tall, which makes it a conspicuous component of wet roadside ditches.

Spring, Summer

Balduina uniflora

Honeycomb Head

Honeycomb head usually occurs in large showy populations, with literally thousands of plants stretching across the wet savannas of the Apalachicola National Forest. Two species occur in our region, including one that prefers dry, sandy roadsides. Both bloom in autumn.

Fall

Campsis radicans

Trumpet Creeper

The tubular, orange-red flowers of trumpet creeper make their first appearance in late spring but continue into summer. This is a high-climbing woody vine with lacy leaves. Look for it scaling trees and shrubs just off the road shoulder.

Spring, Summer

Carphephorus odoratissimus

Deer Tongue

These single-stemmed, fall-blooming herbs range from 1-5' tall. All have numerous densely packed heads of tiny purple flowers. Most occur in large, conspicuous colonies that are especially notable when flowers are present.

Fall

Coreopsis nudata

Pink Coreopsis

Our only pink-flowered coreopsis is found mostly in the panhandle. Plants can grow to 5' tall and often occur in large showy colonies, with numerous flower heads adding a conspicuous splash of color to wet ditches. Pink coreopsis is common along several of this brochure's recommended routes.

Spring

Erigeron vernus

Daisy Fleabane

The daisy fleabanes are among the most common roadside wildflowers. The several species are easily recognized by their daisylike flower heads with a dark center surounded by numerous small, laterally spreading rays. At least four species occur in the panhandle, all of which ornament our road shoulders in spring and early summer.

Spring, Summer

Helenium vernale

Sneezeweed

Several species of sneezeweed are found along Florida roadsides. Savanna sneezeweed, shown here, is about 3' tall, blooms mid spring, and is typical of the group. At least one species flowers mostly in summer, giving us sneezeweed in at least 2 seasons.

Spring, Summer

Helianthus radula

Rayless Sunflowers

Rayless sunflower stands in stark contrast to Florida's other *Helianthus* species. Although its flower head lacks the bright yellow rays associated with most species, its dark brown disk more than makes up for the loss. Its sheer abundance in wet savannas and ditches ensures it won't be missed.

Fall

Common Panhandle Wildflowers

Lachnanthes caroliana

Redroot

Redroot makes its appearance in late May, but reaches its peak in mid to late June. Its 2' stem is crowned by a white and yellow inflorescence and is very showy. Large populations of several hundred plants often occupy wet roadside ditches and are easily spotted, even at highway speed.

Summer

Liatris chapmanii

Blazing Star

About a dozen species of blazing stars occur in the central panhandle, all of which have erect, spikelike inflorescences. Species vary from 2-6' tall and usually occur in showy colonies along moist or dry roadsides. The individual flowers are small, 5-lobed, and star-shaped, which explains the common name.

Summer, Fall

Packera glabella

Butterweed

Butterweed is one of our earliest blooming native wildflowers, sometimes flowering as early as January. It stands about 2' tall and prefers low roadsides and wet ditches. The golden flowers and deeply divided leaves are distinctive.

Spring

Platanthera cristata

Fringed and Fringeless Orchids

Several upright, 1-3'-tall orchids can be found along moist or boggy roadsides, especially in the Apalachicola National Forest. Flower color ranges from bright white to yellow or orange. Blooming begins in June for the white-flowered forms, with a succession of oranges and yellows from mid July into August.

Summer

Rudbeckia mohrii

Mohr's Coneflowers

Several of our roadside Rudbeckias are immediately recognizable from their resemblance to garden plants of the same name. Most have a central, conelike head surrounded by numerous yellow rays. Mohr's coneflower is one of our showiest examples.

Summer

Rudbeckia graminifolia

Grassleaf Coneflower

The combination of short brick-red rays and large conelike disk sets grassleaf coneflower apart. It can be abundant in savannas and on moist roadsides, where hundreds of the 2' stems can dot the landscape, each topped with a single flower head.

Summer

Solidago

Goldenrods

The narrow, spikelike inflorescencs of goldenrods give them their common name. They are among our most commonly recognized native wildflowers and usually bloom in the fall. Species vary from 2-6' tall and prefer open roadsides in full sun.

Fall

Stenanthium densum

Crowpoison, Osceola's Plume

Natural and prescribed fire is a well-known wildflower catalyst. This is certainly true of crowpoison, which sends up its slender 3' stems and cone-shaped inflorescences within days or weeks following a growing season burn. The small individual flowers start out white, but turn purplish as they age.

Spring

Zephyranthes

Rain Lilies

Rain lilies often flower immediately following a downpour. Two species occur in our region. Both have shiny green, grasslike leaves, and white, trumpet-shaped flowers. One species grows along the margins of moist roadside ditches, the other mostly in shady hardwood forests. They are very similar.

Spring

FLORIDA WILDFLOWER FOUNDATION

Native Florida

VISITFLORIDA.

All photos on this page by Gil Nelson, PhD