Wild petunia (Ruellia spp.) is an easy-to-grow, lavender- to blue-flowered native that works well in most conditions. It is endemic to the eastern United States, where its range extends from New Jersey southward and west to Texas. In Florida, it is found in sandhills, flatwoods and moist to wet hammocks in about 52 counties. There are five species of Ruellia native to Florida, but Ruellia caroliniensis is the most common, both in the wild and commercially. Other species include Ciliate wild petunia (Ruellia ciliosa) and Thickleaf wild petunia (Ruellia succulenta), endemic to South Florida. A non-native species of Ruellia is commonly available for purchase but should not be used as it is invasive. (See Caution.)

**Description**

Wild petunia is a long-lived perennial that can attain a height of 12 to 18 inches. Its 5-petaled blooms are tubular, grow to about 1 to 2 inches, and appear in clusters along multi-branched stems. It resembles the common garden petunia, although they are not related. Its simple leaves are green with an ovate to elliptic shape and are oppositely arranged on stems. R. caroliniensis is easily distinguished from other Ruellia species by the long, pointed sepals and bracts that surround the flower’s base.

**Seeds**

Seeds are generally not commercially available. To grow this plant from seed, collect mature capsules in a paper bag in mid- to late summer. Seeds gradually ripen on the plant over a period of weeks, so visit plants several times to check the capsules. They will turn from bright green to brown when mature.

**Plants**

Plants are widely available from native nurseries in various pot sizes, and can be planted throughout the growing season. Stem cuttings are also an easy way to propagate it. Take 3- to 4-inch cuttings in the summer from flexible stems. Plants root easily in 3-4 weeks.

**Care**

Wild petunia may need trimming halfway through its growing season to promote new growth and blooms. Remove 3-4 internodes (4-6 inches) with scissors or clippers. Annual pruning may be required to remove old stems.

Wild petunia is a prolific self-seeder and may form colonies over time. (Like other members of the Acanthaceae family, its mature seed capsules will explode open, sending seeds far from the parent plant.) Plants have a strong root system, making them easy to transplant.

**Site conditions**

This plant adapts well to varied sun and soil moisture conditions. It will thrive in a moderate-to-dry sunny location but also tolerates shade and even wet, mucky soils. Establishing Wild petunia in shadier locations will result in plants that appear lanky with fewer blooms. Plants have some salt tolerance.

**Hardiness zones**

Wild petunia is best suited for zones 8A–10B.

Although the nursery industry offers some sterile non-native Ruellia, the widely grown Mexican petunia (Ruellia simplex; synonyms R. brittoniana and R. tweediana) should be avoided as it may reproduce via underground rhizomes. As a Category I invasive exotic species, it has spread into municipal and natural areas, displacing native species and changing community structures or ecological functions.

**Butterflies and bees**

Several butterfly species, including the White peacock, Malachite and Mangrove buckeye, gather nectar from Wild petunia. It is a host for the Common buckeye. The blue corollas attract a variety of bees, including bumble bees, leafcutter bees and honey bees.