

Groundnut

(*Apios americana*)

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

Groundnut is an herbaceous vine found along the edges of floodplain forests, wet hammocks, lakes or streams, and in wet, disturbed areas throughout much of the state. Blooming late spring through fall, the fragrant flowers are primarily pollinated by mason or leafcutter bees (Megachilidae family), although some suggest they are also fly-pollinated. The plant is a larval host for the Silver-spotted skipper.

Groundnut's flowers are quite unique. The petals are pale pink on the outside, and vary from red to purple to brown inside. Upper petals are fused into a hood-like structure. Lateral petals are small and wing-like. The lower petal is keeled and curves in under the "hood." Flowers are born in dense terminal spike-like racemes. Leaves are pinnately compound with five to seven lance-shaped leaflets. Leaf arrangement is alternate. The stem is smooth. Fruits are inconspicuous flattened pods with many seeds.

Pollination in *Apios americana* is unusual — the anthers are essentially spring-loaded. When a pollinator of a certain size or weight lands on the flower, the "spring" is released, flinging pollen onto the insect.

Most of the plant is edible. Flowers may be eaten raw or cooked. Seeds can be cooked but should be shelled first. The potato-like tubers contain a bitter latex and should be peeled and cooked before eating. Green Dean of EatTheWeeds.com recommends boiling them first to eliminate the latex. They can then be fried, added to soups or stews, or dried and ground into a flour. The cooked tubers have a pleasant nutty flavor and dry texture. Groundnut was a staple among North American indigenous peoples. The plant is relatively high in protein.

The genus name *Apios* is from the Greek word for "pear" and may allude to the shape of the tubers. The plant is also known commonly as Indian potato and potato bean, referencing its edible parts.

Family: Fabaceae (Legume, bean or pea family)

Native range: Nearly throughout

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

Hardiness: Zones 8A–11

Lifespan: Perennial

Soil: Moist to wet organic soils

Exposure: Partial shade

Growth habit: 8+ feet long

Propagation: Seeds, division of tubers

Garden tips: Groundnut's twining, clambering tendency is best suited for naturalistic landscapes or restorations where it can roam freely. It is not recommended for small areas. The plant is a nitrogen-fixer, so it may improve and enrich soils, allowing for the introduction of more demanding plants into your landscape. It does not tolerate drought or salt exposure.

Plants are occasionally available from nurseries that specialize in Florida native plants. Visit www.PlantRealFlorida.org to find a nursery in your area.



Photo by Mary Keim



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