

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.

Hardiness: Zones 8A–10B

Lifespan: Annual or biennial

Soil: Dry, well-drained sandy soils

Exposure: Full sun to partial shade

Growth habit: 3–4' tall

Propagation: Seeds

Garden tips: Bluestem pricklypoppy's showy white blooms and armored blue-tinged foliage add interest to wildflower and pollinator gardens. However, all parts of the plant except the petals are covered in sharp spines, making it difficult to handle. Plants die after setting seed in late spring or summer and should be carefully removed. Seeds will readily germinate in open areas with direct soil contact.



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