

# Spurred butterfly-pea

(*Centrosema virginianum*)

For definitions of botanical terms, visit [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary\\_of\\_botanical\\_terms](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_botanical_terms).

Spurred butterfly-pea is a trailing or climbing vine that occurs naturally in pine flatwoods, sandhills, coastal strands and interdunal swales. Its showy flowers typically bloom in summer, but can bloom spring through fall, or year-round in South Florida. This plant is pollinated primarily by bees, but is the larval host for Northern cloudywing and Long-tailed skipper butterflies.

Spurred butterfly-pea flowers are papilionaceous, meaning they are butterfly-shaped and highly specialized to allow for bee pollination. The upper petal, known as a banner, has the appearance of two spurred wings. They

enclose two fused petals that form a keel in the center of the bloom. The center is white with purplish stripes; this guides bees (and other insects) to the nectar source below the keel. Blooms are inverted (upside down) and may be bluish, purple, pink or near-white. They are ephemeral, lasting only half a day, but typically bloom daily during flowering season. Leaves are alternately arranged and compound, comprised of 3 lanceolate to elliptic leaflets with entire margins. Stems are thin and delicate. Tendrils are absent. Seeds are borne in long, flattened pods.



Photo by Eleanor Dietrich

**Family:** Fabaceae (Legume or pea family)

**Native range:** Nearly throughout

To see where natural populations of Spurred butterfly-pea have been vouchered, visit [www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu](http://www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu).

**Hardiness:** Zones 7–11

**Lifespan:** Perennial

**Soil:** Moist to dry, well-drained sandy or calcareous soils

**Exposure:** Full sun to minimal shade

**Growth habit:** 3–12' long

**Propagation:** Seed, cuttings

**Garden tips:** Although generally not commercially available, Spurred butterfly-pea is easy to grow and adaptable to a variety of habitats. It is suitable for butterfly gardens as well as naturalistic landscapes and restorations.