

Dwarf huckleberry

(*Gaylussacia dumosa*)

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

Dwarf huckleberry is a low-growing colonial shrub found in pine savannas, flatwoods, sandhills and scrub throughout much of Florida. The plant is a larval host for the woodland elfin butterfly. Its spring flowers are attractive to pollinators, especially native and honey bees, and its juicy summer fruits are a delight for birds, small mammals and humans! Try them raw or make them into a jam or pie filling.

Dwarf huckleberry's small white to pinkish-white flowers are five-lobed, urn- or bell-shaped and cupped in soft yellowish-green sepals. They are born in clusters of five to eight on terminal racemes. Leaves are leathery, green and elliptic to ovate with pointed apices. They are alternately arranged. Leaf undersides are glandular with microscopic yellowish resin dots. Leaf margins are entire and pubescent. The leaves turn red in the fall. Young branches are covered in small curly hairs. Bark on mature branches is grayish-brown and flaky. Fruits are shiny, pubescent purplish-black drupes. Each bear 10 nutlets; each nutlet bears a single seed.



Photo by Mary Keim

Dwarf huckleberry is often mistaken for its cousins, Darrow's blueberry (*Vaccinium darrowii*) and Shiny blueberry (*V. myrsinites*). To distinguish them, look for the yellowish resin dots on leaf undersides — they are absent from the *Vaccinium* species.

The genus *Gaylussacia* is named for French chemist Louis Joseph Gay-Lussac (1778–1850), who served as the chair of chemistry at France's main botanical garden, the Jardin des plantes. The species epithet *dumosa* is from the Latin *dumosus*, meaning shrubby or bushy.

Family: Ericaceae (Heath, azalea or blueberry family)

Native range: Nearly throughout except southernmost counties

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

Hardiness: Zones 8A–10B

Lifespan: Deciduous perennial

Soil: Moist to dry, well-drained, acidic sandy soils

Exposure: Full sun to partial shade

Growth habit: 1–2' tall

Propagation: Seed, division

Garden tips: Although the plant is deciduous, Dwarf huckleberry's dense foliage and profuse blooms and fruit provide interest in the landscape as well as vital resources for wildlife. The plant spreads by way of underground rhizomes and can form small colonies. It does not tolerate salt or periods of inundation.

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