

# Wiregrass gentian

(*Gentiana pennelliana*)

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

Wiregrass gentian is a rare herbaceous wildflower endemic to only nine Panhandle counties where, it occurs naturally in pine flatwoods, wet prairies and seepage slopes. It is a state-listed endangered species and one of only four species of *Gentiana* that occur in Florida. Wiregrass gentian typically blooms in winter but may bloom from October into May. It is pollinated primarily by bees. The plant is fire-adapted and will bloom profusely after a burn.

Wiregrass gentian's flowers are white, funnelform and five-lobed. When open, the lobes spread out wide and flat. Between lobes, the floral tube is fringed. The tube interior is yellowish-green and lined with many tiny dark green dots; its exterior and underside of lobes may be purple. Lobes and fringe edges are often tinged with purple. Flowers are solitary and terminal. Leaves are linear or narrowly elliptic with entire margins. They are widely spaced and oppositely arranged along erect, unbranched stems. Lower leaves are reduced and scale-like.

The genus name *Gentiana* and the family name Gentianaceae references the Illyrian king Gentius, who was thought to have discovered the tonic properties of Yellow gentian (*Gentiana lutea*). The species epithet *pennelliana* pays homage to American botanist Francis Whittier Pennell (1886–1952).

**Family:** Gentianaceae (Gentian family)

**Native range:** Central Panhandle

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

**Hardiness:** Zone 8

**Lifespan:** Perennial

**Soil:** Moist to wet, well-drained sandy or peaty soils

**Exposure:** Full sun to high pine shade

**Growth habit:** up to 1' tall

Wiregrass gentian is not commercially available. Visit a natural area to see them.



Photo by Eleanor Dietrich