

Carolina cranesbill

(*Geranium carolinianum*)

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

Carolina cranesbill is an annual native wildflower that occurs in lawns, urban gardens and disturbed areas throughout Florida. It is often considered a weed, but its winter- and spring-blooming flowers attract bees and other small pollinators. Birds eat the seeds and white-tailed deer may forage on the leaves. Humans can eat the leaves, too, but they can be very bitter and astringent. The root has been used historically to treat sore throats and diarrhea. Carolina cranesbill is Florida's only native *Geranium* species.



Photo by Malcolm Manners (CC BY 2.0)

Flowers are small (about ¼ inch in diameter), five-petaled and may be pink or whitish. Petals are notched and may have contrasting venation or nectar guides. Flowers are terminal and may be solitary or born in loose clusters. Sepals are ovate with long spine-like apices that are often red-tipped. Leaves are palmate with five sharply lobed segments. They are alternately arranged. Mature leaves may have reddish margins or tips. Leaf surface is finely pubescent with deep venation. Stems are covered in fine, erect hairs. Fruits are schizocarps (specialized capsules) with conspicuous needle- or beak-like structures.

The genus name *Geranium* is derived from *geranos*, the Greek word for “crane.” It and the common name “cranesbill” refer to the beak-like fruits.

Family: Geraniaceae (Geranium family)

Native range: Nearly throughout

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

Hardiness: Zones 8A–10B

Lifespan: Annual

Soil: Dry, nutrient-poor sandy soils

Exposure: Full sun to partial shade

Growth habit: 1–2' tall and sprawling

Propagation: Seed, cuttings

Garden tips: Because of its “weedy” reputation, Carolina cranesbill is generally not propagated by commercial growers. It is easily transplanted and requires little maintenance. However, care should be taken if introducing it into a landscape as it readily reseeds and spreads on its own. The plant can be mowed or removed by hand, but both methods should be employed before it sets seed.