

Hairy laurel

(*Kalmia hirsuta*)

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

Hairy laurel is a low-growing, evergreen shrub that is easy to miss when not in bloom. But in spring and summer, it forms colonies of rose-colored flowers in moist, open habitats. Its distinctive, fragrant blooms attract a variety of pollinators, especially bees. It occurs naturally in pine flatwoods, savannas, sandhills and moist ditches in North Florida.

Hairy laurel's pale to dark pink flowers are axillary and may be solitary or born in clusters of two to five. Each flower is five-petaled and cup-shaped with dark pink spots and center ring. The flower flattens into a decagonal shape as it opens, exposing the pale greenish-yellow ovary. Stamens are reflexed and number 10. Anthers are held under tension within pocket-like pouches found on the petals. When an insect lands on the flower, the movement releases the tension and the pollen is catapulted from the filament onto the insect. Leaves are small ($\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ long) and elliptic to ovate with slightly revolute margins. Leaf arrangement is alternate. Sepals, leaves and stems are noticeably pubescent. Fruits are rounded, glandular capsules.

The genus name *Kalmia* was named by Carl Linnaeus for his student, Peter Kalm, an 18th century botanist who visited the United States. The species epithet *hirsuta* is from the Latin *hirsutus*, meaning "hairy" or "bristly."

Family: Ericaceae (Heath or heather family)

Native range: Panhandle, north to north-central peninsula

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

Hardiness: Zones 8A–9A

Lifespan: Perennial

Soil: Moist, well-drained, acidic sandy soils

Exposure: Full sun

Growth habit: 6–24" tall

Propagation: Seeds (may require stratification)

Garden tips: In the right conditions, Hairy laurel might make a nice groundcover. However, it tends to spread aggressively via underground rhizomes and should only be used in areas where it can proliferate freely. Plants are not commonly available commercially.



Photo by Eleanor Dietrich



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