

# Rusty lyonia

(*Lyonia ferruginea*)

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

Also known as rusty staggerbush, rusty lyonia is a long-lived evergreen flowering shrub. Its common descriptor, “rusty,” and its species epithet, *ferruginea*, both refer to the many rust-colored hairs that cover the plant’s leaves, stems and trunk. It occurs naturally in scrub, scrubby flatwoods, xeric hammocks and moist pine flatwoods. Flowers typically appear in spring and are attractive to butterflies and bees; fruits are eaten by birds and other wildlife.

Rusty lyonia’s small flowers are white, urn- or bell-shaped and borne in clusters. They have a faint-but-pleasant rose-like fragrance. Leaves are dark green, leathery and elliptic to oblanceolate. They are alternately arranged. Leaf margins are entire and can be flat, wavy or strongly revolute (typical). All parts of the plant have a rusty pubescence, but it is most prominent on leaf undersides. Newly emerging leaves also have a rusty color. Trunks are usually crooked or irregularly shaped. Fruit is a small oval capsule.



Photo by Stacey Matrazzo

The species epithet *ferruginea* is from the Latin *ferrugo* (*ferrum*) or “rust” (“iron”).

**Family:** Ericaceae (Heath or heather family)

**Native range:** Panhandle, north and central peninsula

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

**Hardiness:** Zones 8–10

**Soil:** Moderately moist to dry, acidic sand, loam or clay

**Exposure:** Full sun to minimal shade

**Growth habit:** 6–10'+ tall, spread is about half as wide

**Propagation:** Seed

**Garden tips:** Rusty lyonia is a low-maintenance shrub that is adaptable to both well-drained and poorly drained soils and is highly drought tolerant. Its size and irregular shape make it suitable for naturalistic landscapes and border plantings. It does not spread readily by self-seed, but it does have a tendency to sucker.

Rusty lyonia plants are occasionally available at nurseries that specialize in native plants. Visit [PlantRealFlorida.org](http://PlantRealFlorida.org) to find a native nursery on your area.