

# Eastern false dragonhead

(*Physostegia purpurea*)

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

Eastern false dragonhead is an herbaceous perennial wildflower found in moist to wet pinelands and marsh and swamp edges throughout much of Florida. It blooms late spring through early fall and is especially attractive to bees, although butterflies and the occasional hummingbird are known to visit it. The seeds are eaten by birds.

Flowers are tubular, two-lipped and may be pink, lavender or purple. The lower lip is three-lobed. The center lobe and throat are marked with dark spots or streaks. Stamens number four with noticeably dark anthers. Flowers are born in opposite pairs along terminal racemes. Calyces are five-lobed and lightly pubescent with a purple tinge. Leaves are lanceolate, may be sessile or petiolate, and have toothed, lobed or undulating margins. They are oppositely arranged and diminish in size as they ascend the stem. Stems are square, smooth and may have a purple tinge. Seeds are born in small nutlets.



Pictured with Yellow milkwort (*Polygala rugelii*).  
Photo by Stacey Matrazzo

Members of the *Physostegia* genus were once placed in the *Dracocephalum* genus, from which the common name “dragonhead” is derived. Collectively, they are sometimes referred to as “obedient plants” because the flowers’ orientation on the stem can be manipulated. (In the nursery trade, Obedient plant generally refers to the non-native *Physostegia virginiana*.)

**Family:** Lamiaceae (Mint family)

**Native range:** Nearly throughout

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

**Hardiness:** Zones 8A–10B

**Lifespan:** Perennial

**Soil:** Moist, well-drained sandy soils

**Exposure:** Full sun to partial shade

**Growth habit:** 2–3'+ tall

**Propagation:** Seed

**Garden tips:** Eastern false dragonhead is suitable for moist to wet gardens and naturalistic landscapes. It spreads by way of underground rhizomes and may form small colonies. It does not tolerate extended periods of drought. The plant is short-lived and will die back in winter.

Plants are occasionally available from nurseries that specialize in Florida native plants. Visit [www.PlantRealFlorida.org](http://www.PlantRealFlorida.org) to find a nursery in your area.