

Candyroot

(*Polygala nana*)

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

Candyroot is an annual herbaceous wildflower found in wet to moist pine flatwoods, wet prairies and coastal swales. It typically blooms in late spring through summer, but can bloom year-round.

Candyroot's distinctive inflorescence is a compact, thimble-shaped raceme comprised of many tiny pale to lemon-yellow flowers. Leaves are thick, spatulate and curl slightly upright. They are mostly in basal rosettes. Stem leaves are few and alternately arranged. Stems are glabrous. Seeds are borne in capsules and dispersed primarily by ants.

The name *Polygala* comes from the Greek *polys*, which means "many or much," and *gala*, which means "milk." It is so-named because it was once believed that the presence of *Polygala* species in cow fields would result in higher milk production (hence the common name of "milkwort" for both the genus and family). The species name *nana* is from the Greek *nânos* or "dwarf," and refers to the plant's small habit. The plant's root has a licorice flavor when chewed, hence the common name "candyroot." Like other species of *Polygala*, it is sometimes referred to as bachelor's buttons.

Family: Polygalaceae (Milkwort family)

Native range: Nearly throughout

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

Hardiness: Zones 7–10

Soil: Moist to wet well-drained soils

Exposure: Full sun to minimal shade

Growth habit: 3"–6" tall

Garden tips: Despite candyroot's common

presence throughout the state, it is not commercially cultivated and does not persist in the landscape. Look for it in its natural setting.



Photo by Mary Keim



Basal rosette. Photo by Mary Keim