Wild petunia is a low-growing, erect perennial wildflower. Its 5-petaled blooms appear in clusters, are tubular in shape, and range in color from purple to lavender to pale pinkish-white. Flowers only remain open for a day, but plants have a high yield and a long blooming period. Wild petunia leaves are ovate to elliptic, and are oppositely arranged. The leaves and stems are covered with fine hairs.

Wild petunia typically blooms in late spring through late summer/early fall. It occurs naturally in mesic hammocks, flatwoods and sandhills, and along roadsides and in disturbed sites. It is the host plant for the white peacock (Anartia jatrophae) and common buckeye (Junonia coenia) butterflies, but attracts a variety of pollinators.

Although the common name is petunia, the flowers in the Ruellia genus are not true petunias, which are members of the Solanaceae (nightshade) family.

Family: Acanthaceae (Acanthus family)
Native range: nearly throughout, from Central Panhandle to the Keys
To see where natural populations of wild petunia have been vouchered, visit www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu.
Hardiness: Zones 8a–11
Soil: Dry, sandy soils to moist soils
Exposure: Full sun to partial shade
Growth habit: 6–18"
Propagation: Seed
Garden tips: Wild petunia is easy to grow and is incredibly adaptable to a variety of conditions. It is also a prolific self-seeder. It makes a lovely groundcover, particularly when mixed with other low-growing flowers.

Wild petunia plants are often available at nurseries that specialize in native plants. Visit PlantRealFlorida.org to find a native nursery on your area.

Caution: Many big box garden centers sell the highly invasive Mexican petunia (Ruellia simplex). This species is a FLEPPC-listed Category I invasive species, which means it has escaped cultivation and is known to alter native plant communities by displacing native species. (See fleppc.org for more information and to see a list of Category I and II species). Mexican petunia spreads quickly and does not respond well to herbicides. You can help control the spread of this invasive species by not planting it in your landscape and instead planting the native Ruellia species.