

Spiderwort

(*Tradescantia* spp.)

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

Spiderwort is an erect perennial wildflower. Its showy, bluish-purple flowers are three-petaled and born in clusters atop branched stems. Flowers may be blue, purple, pink or even white. Each flower has six dark bluish-purple stamens; the filaments are covered with sticky hairs and the anthers are bright yellow. Leaves are simple, light green and strap-like, giving the plant a grassy appearance, particularly when not in bloom.

Spiderwort is very attractive to bees. And like all species in the dayflower family, it is ephemeral, meaning its flowers stay open only one day. Four species of spiderwort are native to Florida, with hairyflower spiderwort (*T. hirsutiflora*) growing in the Panhandle, and bluejacket or Ohio spiderwort (*T. ohiensis*) being the most common throughout North and Central Florida.

Spiderwort is not only attractive, it is also edible. Try the flowers fresh on a salad or candied for a sweet treat. Stems and leaves can be eaten raw and leaves can also be cooked. The leaves are mucilaginous; the “juice” can be used to soothe insect bites in the same way one would use aloe.

Did you know that the stamens in a spiderwort flower can detect radiation? Low level exposure will turn the bluish filament hairs on the stamen pink!

Family: Commelinaceae (Dayflower family)

Native range: Nearly throughout Panhandle, north and Central Florida

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

Hardiness: Zones 8–9 (occasionally 10)

Soil: Dry to moderately moist, well-drained soils

Exposure: Full sun to light shade

Growth habit: 1–2' tall

Propagation: Seed, division

Garden tips: This perennial is a great addition to any landscape because it can bloom year-round in many parts of Florida. To keep plants looking healthy, cut them back in late summer (or when they appear to stop blooming). They will bounce back in fall. Spiderwort spreads easily, but if kept under control, it can be used as a border plant. It is striking in mass when in bloom.

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



Photo by Stacey Matrazzo