

Beggarticks

(*Bidens alba*)

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

Beggarticks, also commonly referred to as Spanish needle, is perhaps one of Florida's most controversial wildflowers both for its weedy aggression in home gardens and its questionable native status. Many botanists do not consider Beggarticks to be native to Florida for the following reasons:

- Most records of its presence do not occur until the 1800s.
- Genetically, it is more closely related to Mexican species of *Bidens* than those native to North America.
- It is most commonly found in disturbed areas.
- It is not considered a natural component of any Florida plant communities.

Currently, both the Flora of North America and Flora of the Southeastern United States list it as introduced. Although the Atlas of Florida Plants still lists it as native, it notes: "The nativity of this species is doubtful (FNA, vol. 21), and, if native to Florida, it possibly is only native to South Florida."

Despite the confusion, this prolific wildflower is not without its merits. Its abundant flowers bloom year-round and attract an incredible abundance of pollinators including a high diversity of bees and butterflies. In Florida, it is also the third most common source of nectar for honey production. Additionally, its young leaves and flowers are edible.

Beggarticks blooms are comprised of five to eight white ray florets surrounding many yellow tubular disk florets. Leaves begin simple and oppositely arranged. As they mature, they become compound with lobed leaflets that have hairy undersides and toothed margins. Seeds have two barb-like bristles on the end that stick to clothing, hair and animal fur.

The genus name *Bidens* comes from the Latin words *bis*, meaning "two," and *dens*, meaning "tooth." The species epithet *alba* refers to the white ray florets.

Family: Asteraceae (Aster, daisy or composite family)

Native range: Throughout Florida

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

Lifespan: Annual

Soil: Dry, well-drained sandy soils to rich, moist soils

Exposure: Full sun to partial shade

Growth habit: 1–4' tall with spread of several feet

Propagation: Seed

Garden tips: Due to its aggressive nature, we don't recommend intentionally adding Beggarticks to the garden. More times than not, it will show up voluntarily and you may choose to let it take up some space. However, a single plant can produce 3,000–6,000 seeds that are dispersed by wind, water, and most often, by becoming attached to fur or clothing. If you don't want them to take over your garden, you must be persistent in pulling the plants before they go to seed.



Photo by Eleanor Dietrich

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