

Yellow Blooms of the Sunshine State

Florida Greeneyes

by Suzanne Blakeman

Berlandiera subacaulis, or as it is much more commonly known, Florida Greeneyes is an endemic (native to Florida only) and endearing little flower. It may be found in most counties and prefers drier sites, such as sandhills, pine flatwoods, upland mixed forests, and disturbed areas. It will tolerate very light shade and prefers full sun. From spring through summer you can see its cheery yellow ray florets and green-yellowish disc florets atop a hairy stem about a foot tall. Distinctively lobed, mostly basal leaves are most likely the basis for Greeneyes' less common name of Florida dandelion. The seed heads are conspicuous green achenes (one-seeded, nonsplitting, hard fruit having a thin wall separable from the seed) which give the appearance of being a little green flower. Although germination is usually low, Greeneyes will in time form sizable clumps by means of self-sown seed.



Greeneyes bring yellow blooms and green leaves to dry areas.



Although naturalized, rather than native, Mullein is a welcome addition to our Florida roadsides.

on the bottom of the inflorescence first and blooms progress upward. The petals show a brown hairy blotch on the inner base. It has been added to other "rabbit tobaccies" and smoked by the Am. Indians for lung congestions. One common name is Cow's Lungwort. It has been used as a demulcent soothing to mucous membranes, diuretic, anodyne (drug that allays pain), antispasmodic, astringent, and pectoral (something worn on the breast or chest) in the treatment of colds, coughs, pulmonary complaints and as a treatment for hemorrhoids (Alma R. Hutchens, 1973).

Mullein

by Sid Taylor

Verbascum virgatum is the tall elongated spike (to 3 or so feet) we see along the roadsides in early March before the mowers mulch it. The genus (300 spp.) is native to Europe (Wunderlin, 1998) or Eurasia (USDA, 1971) but so well established in the US that we'd be amiss not to tell you about it. Dr. W. K. Taylor reports that recent molecular work shows it isn't truly a figwort (*Scrophulariaceae*) as it has always been classified. Perhaps we will see it listed as *Verbasceceae* in the next text. Mullein has 5-parted flowers with yellow flowers that bloom



As ground covers go, Oxalis is a lucky choice.

Considered a pest weed in some circles, the Yellow Wood Sorrel can grow almost anywhere, year round. Usually found next to sidewalks and even in the sidewalk cracks, the mature plant makes a great groundcover growing up to a foot in diameter. It prefers moist conditions with some shade, but if given enough moisture it can grow in full sun. The whole plant is edible and goes by the name sourgrass.

When the pod is dry and caused to burst open, the seeds can spread up to ten feet away.



Primroses of Florida

by Cindy Liberton

When you start talking primroses, you're talking about several common, but different plants. The native Seaside Primrose Willow or Rattlebox (*Ludwigia maritima*) is similar in habit to the introduced Common Primrose Willow (*Ludwigia peruviana*) in that both tall weedy plants occur in swamps, pondsides, wet pinelands and marshes throughout the state. They have showy yellow flowers with 4 petals, which begin their long bloom period in spring carrying on until the fall.

There are lower growing look-a-likes in the evening primrose family, such as *Ludwigia arcuata* and *Oenothera laciniata* (which isn't a *Ludwigia* at all!) that also have 4 petals and occur in wet areas, but are more likely to occur in disturbed areas and roadsides. Despite the weedy habit of the entire primrose collection, they are prolific bloomers and a favorite of pollinators. They often occur as volunteers in the garden; keep a few around for year long color.

Dwarf Dandelion

by Suzanne Blakeman

If you see cute, tiny little dandelions in dry woods, pinelands, or a dry disturbed site, let's hope you have Taylor's Guide to Florida's Wildflowers handy. That's the only reference I consulted that had an entry for this sweet little flower. Dwarf Dandelion (*Krigia virginica*) is truly a miniature version, with leafless stems only about 6 inches tall, and yellow-orange ray florets that are around 1 cm across. Stems exude a milky sap if broken. Leaves are lobed or toothed, mainly in basal rosettes, averaging 2-3 inches in length. Found in central and north Florida, *Krigia* flowers in winter and spring.



Not even a lawn fanatic would pull this tiny beauty.

Yellow Jessamine

by Bruce Vanderveen

Each February Florida's woods come alive with yellow. The casual observer might think that the very trees are flowering as the yellow blossoms are often way up in the treetops. A closer look, however, would show that the beautiful aromatic yellow blossoms are on thin-stemmed vines. What we are seeing here, of course, is the Yellow Jessamine, *Gelsemium sempervirens* (L). As the name suggests the leaves are evergreen and not deciduous.



The appearance of Yellow Jessamine in the treetops means Spring is on its way.

Since the Yellow Jessamine blooms in February at the same time as the wild Chickasaw and Flatwoods Plums it is the harbinger of the start of the early Florida Spring. Every winter I look forward to this visual feast!

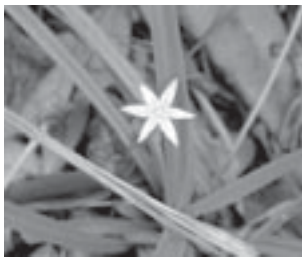
Be aware that all parts of Yellow Jessamine are poisonous if eaten due to the presence of alkaloids compounds in this family. Indeed, strychnine and curare are derived from other members of the same family as Yellow Jessamine.

Yellow Jessamine is in the Loganiaceae plant family, which is taxonomically close to the Oleaceae (Olive) family. The Loganiaceae can be herbs, shrubs, vines or trees and are gamopetalous (united petals) and have opposite leaves. Members of this family are pantropical and are well represented in Central in tropical America. Another well know member of the family is the famous Butterfly Bush (*Buddleja*).

Yellow Jessamine makes a good landscape plant as the vines can be trained up trellises much the same way they go up trees in the wild. It does best in a well-drained area but not too dry.

Now, a quick quiz: Without looking above, what does gamopetalous mean?

Florida Daffodil



The tiny Florida Daffodil makes a pleasing addition to the lawn.

placed in the Amaryllis family, but is now assigned to Hypoxidaceae. The flower stem is leafless and hairy. Blossoms are solitary. They feature 6 tepals (sepal and petal combinations) and 6 stamens. Seed capsules are narrow and seeds black. *Hypoxis* bulbs are the preferred food of Florida Sandhill Cranes.

Have you seen the tiny (never over 10", usually about 3") Yellow-star Grass (*Hypoxis juncea*) blooming in the moist to wet flatwoods and pinelands? I think it is deserving of a more "flowering" common name, thus Florida Daffodil.

Basal leaves are 3-veined and slender (1 mm) or grass-like. The color is rich yellow. It is one bloom you are likely to see any time of the year throughout the State. Previously it has been

Prickly-pear Cactus

by Mikel Renner

Not many folks in Florida consider growing a prickly-pear cactus as a landscape amenity but maybe they should reconsider. This plant, *Opuntia humifusa*, is endemic to dry and sandy sites, like much of our Hernando Chapter area, and requires virtually no water. It is a primary food for gopher tortoises also. This desert-like plant has large beautiful yellow flowers, 3-4 inches, during the spring and summer (March through August). These flowers occur singly and occasionally have reddish centers.

Folks in the know use the flowers in their cooking. They are light and delicate and can be lightly breaded and fried or even stuffed, with a concoction of your choice, and sauteed. The fruit that follows their bright yellow show, called tunas, are egg-shaped, pulpy, reddish, 2-3 inches, and many-seeded. They are edible raw (a little like watermelon, try them chilled) and can make a delicate jelly or marmalade. The dried seeds can be ground to use as flour or a soup thickener. The tender pads, called nopales, can be peeled and are a popular vegetable in Mexico and Central America. They are usually cooked but can be eaten raw. They taste a little like green beans and are used in omelets, beef 'stirs' and many other dishes.

Opuntia is a very popular food everywhere except the United States. In fact, annual world-wide commercial production of prickly-pear is more than twice that of strawberries, avocados, or apricots! There are over 200 species of prickly-pear cactuses. Most are found in south-western North America, Mexico, Central America and South America.

The bright green cactus that produces all this useful fare is a perennial with fleshy, jointed stems which are flattened pads. It's spiny, just like you would expect, but sometimes the spines are absent. But even the spines can be useful if you need a safety buffer under a bathroom or bedroom window. Useful in mixed borders and natural areas, hardy prickly-pear is low-growing and its brilliant yellow flowers and meandering pads are most effective at the front of mixed plantings. It thrives in rock gardens and containers.

Prickly-pear is easy to grow, rooting readily from pads stuck in the ground, or even just lying on the surface. It prefers full sun, is drought tolerant, and hardy all the way to zone 5.

WARNING: Prickly-pear spines are easy enough to avoid, but watch out for the glochids, those tiny hair-like bristles that occur in little tufts. They are barbed and treacherous!



Prickly-pear is an under-appreciated addition to the landscape and a culinary delight.

This flyer was produced by the Hernando Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society. Please share it!

The Florida Native Plant Society's purpose is the preservation, conservation, and restoration of the native plants and native plant ecosystems of Florida. The Hernando Chapter's goal is to share information with those citizens interested in learning about native plants, their ecosystems, as well as all aspects of biological diversity. For more information about us, visit our Website at hcfmps.org. Or attend our public meetings the first Monday of the Month at the Hernando County Extension Service Office next door to the fairgrounds at 6:30 p.m.

