

Keys ageratum, *Ageratum maritimum*

Introduction

Keys ageratum, also known as seashore ageratum, or Cape Sable whiteweed, is an attractive, sprawling native wildflower, with delicate pastel blue flower heads that are held high above the plant on long stems. It is a rare element of coastal hammocks and beach dunes in the Florida Keys and is in danger of extinction due to seaside land development, and a more recent contributing factor, sea level rise. It is highly attractive to butterflies and can be planted singularly or in mass to add beautiful year-round color. It can also be used in containers and alongside canals and other waterways due to its extremely high drought and salt tolerance.

There are two other *Ageratum* species, both non-native, that occur in Florida, *A. conyzoides* and *A. houstonianum*. Both have escaped cultivation and can be distinguished from *A. maritimum* by the long, soft hairs covering the stems and leaves. *A. maritimum* also closely resembles the native blue mistflower, *Conoclinium coelestinum*, but it can be distinguished by its glossy, succulent leaves.

Keys ageratum has long been known as *Ageratum littorale*, and it is on the [Florida Endangered Plant List](#) under that name. Some botanists regard *Ageratum littorale* and *Ageratum maritimum* to be distinct species, but the [Atlas of Florida Plants](#) and the [Flora of North America](#) treat them as synonymous, with the name *A. maritimum* having taxonomic priority.

General Information

Family: Asteraceae

Origin: Florida Keys, Cuba, Hispaniola, Grand Cayman, Belize, and the Yucatan Peninsula (Quintana Roo state) of Mexico.

USDA Zone: 10-11

Status: Endangered



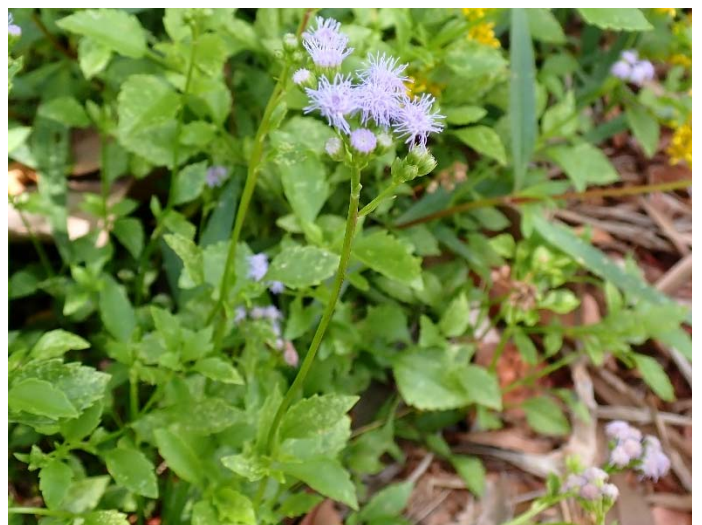
Ageratum maritimum flower head. Credit: M. Leonard-Mularz, UF/IFAS

Description

Plant Type: Semi-succulent herbaceous perennial with horizontal underground stems that form colonies overtime. Generally short-lived, but self-seeds readily.

Typical Dimensions: 10 to 20 inches tall, often sprawling to 3 feet wide.

Growth Rate: Moderate



A. maritimum flower head held on long, erect leafless stalk. Credit: M. Leonard-Mularz, UF/IFAS

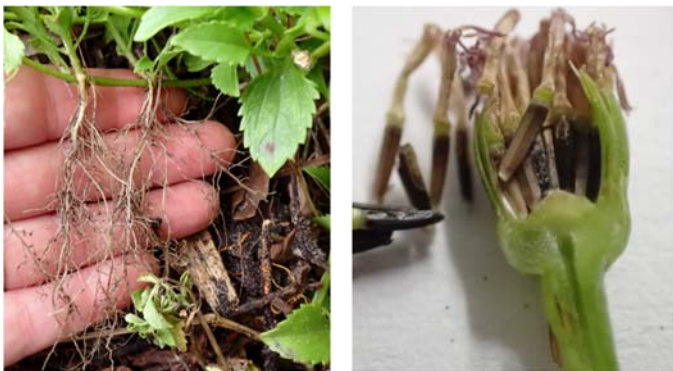
Stems: Decumbent (reclining on the ground with the tips ascending) to erect, branching from the base, sometimes rooting at the nodes, and hairless.

Leaf Characteristics: Opposite, ovate-shaped leaves $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1.5 inch long, with toothed margins; hairless upper and lower surface.

Flowering Months in Monroe County: All year

Flower: Lavender to blue, sometimes white; held on long, erect stems.

Fruit/Seed and Availability in Monroe County: Tiny fruit, 1 to 2 mm long, dark brown, prismatic achenes (a dry fruit with a hardened wall surrounding a single seed). The tip of the fruit has 5-6 scales forming a crown-like structure called a pappus, which aids in wind dispersal of the seed. Available year-round.



Left: lateral stems rooted at nodes. Right: Spent flower head split open to show pappi and achene-type fruit attached. Credit: M. Leonard-Mularz, UF/IFAS

Cultural Requirements

Light Requirements: Full sun

Salt Tolerance: High tolerance to windborne salt; will also tolerate saline soils and brief inundation to salt water. Will not tolerate long-term flooding.

Drought Tolerance: High once established.

Soil Requirements: Well-drained sandy to limestone-based soils.

Nutritional Requirements: Moderate to low; does not require supplemental fertilization. However, plants will thrive in soils with some organic content.

Propagation: Cuttings, seed, or division.

Sow seeds over a well-draining potting media. Cover lightly, if at all. Germination occurs in 2 to 4 weeks.

Wildlife: Nectar source for bees and butterflies and other pollinators. Excellent addition to pollinator and butterfly gardens. Not a known food source for iguanas.



Single *A. maritimum* plant growing alongside native yellowtops, *Flaveria linearis*, in Key West. Credit: M. Leonard-Mularz, UF/IFAS

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