

Nightflowering wild petunia

(Ruellia noctiflora)

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

As the name suggests, Nightflowering wild petunia is a night-blooming wildflower whose flowers open around dusk then shrivel and drop by mid-morning the next day. The bloom's nectaries are located at the base of a 3 inch long flower tube requiring a special pollinator whose tongue is long enough to reach in and take a sip! The pollinators that fit this bill are sphinx moths (family Sphingidae). These nocturnal moths are attracted by the petunia's large white flowers.



Photo by Emily Bell

White flowers up to 4 inches across have five spreading petals and are born on short (12-16 inches) slender, hairy, purplish stems. Sepals are .5-1 inch long and very narrow. The leaves are opposite, oval shaped with pointed tips, and 1-2 inches long. Fruits are .8-inch long oval capsules with a long persistent style.

Found in moist to wet flatwoods and hammocks and even along wet roadsides, Nightflowering wild petunia is rare across its range from South Carolina west to Louisiana. It is considered globally vulnerable and is listed as state endangered in Florida. Its primary threats are fire suppression and habitat loss.

Family: Acanthaceae (Acanthus family)

Native range: Vouchered from Jackson, Gulf, Franklin, Liberty and Wakulla counties in the Panhandle and Nassau, Duval, St. Johns and Clay counties in NE Florida

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

Hardiness: Zones 8A-8B

Lifespan: Perennial

Soil: Loamy sand

Exposure: Full sun

Growth habit: Low-growing herb

Propagation: Seed

Nightflowering wild petunia plants are not commercially available. Visit a natural area to see them.