

**KNOW THE DIFFERENCE****Native & Non-Native Wild Petunia**

There are five native species of *Ruellia* in Florida and three non-native. The most commonly available native is *Ruellia caroliniensis* and the most commonly available non-native is *Ruellia tweediana* (usually listed in the trade under the older name, *Ruellia brittoniana*), unfortunately an invasive pest plant.

**Native Wild Petunia***Ruellia caroliniensis*

Found throughout Florida's flatwoods, sandhills, and hammocks, our most common native wild petunia, sometimes called Carolina petunia, is a lovely flowering perennial for woodland gardens and planted flowerbeds. This drought-tolerant native adapts well to dry or moist, well-drained soil conditions, full sun or partial shade, and is an excellent replacement for impatiens. The plant generally ranges from 6-16" high, but there may be some variability across the state. The short-lived delicate flowers last no more than a day (sometimes just a morning), but new ones appear daily through the blooming season (spring-summer). Blossom color ranges from a strong to pale lavender, with white forms occasional. Wild petunia will seed in the garden but is not invasive. This plant is an occasional host for the common buckeye butterfly. Other native wild petunias that may be rarely seen in the trade include *Ruellia ciliosa*, naturally occurring in Central and North Florida sandhills, and *Ruellia succulenta*, found in South Florida rocky pinelands. Generally not available are *Ruellia noctiflora*, an extremely rare native of wet flatwoods and bogs in North Florida and the central Panhandle, and *Ruellia pedunculata*, another rare native of wet flatwoods and bogs in a few North Florida counties.

**Non-native Mexican Petunia***Ruellia tweediana* (synonym: *Ruellia brittoniana*)

This non-native perennial, called Mexican petunia or Mexican bluebell, has become wildly popular for its abundant large, deep bluish-purple flowers, heat and drought tolerance, and adaptability to a wide range of conditions, including full sun and shade. Unfortunately, this species has rapidly invaded natural areas throughout the state (proving especially problematic in wet areas) and displaced native flora. As a result, it is listed as a Category 1 invasive pest plant by the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council ([www.fleppc.org](http://www.fleppc.org)). The plant seeds profusely and will spread from seeds, rhizomes, stem sprouts, and cuttings. Flower color can vary to pale pinkish-blue. Dwarf forms have been reported to be invasive.

Photos by S

