

Miniature Native Plants: *Lindernia grandiflora*

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Lindernia grandiflora (Linderniaceae, formerly Scrophulariaceae) is a small, creeping, herbaceous perennial of wet areas with relatively large, ornamental flowers. Its horticultural attributes, cultivation, and propagation are discussed.

KEYWORDS: *Lindernia*, Linderniaceae, Florida, native plant, groundcover, perennial, wildflower.

On the coastal plain, in eastern Georgia and Florida, is found a dwarf herbaceous plant that belongs to a small group of Florida native wildflowers that have achieved a singular distinction. It is one of the very few Florida natives to have become established as a houseplant in the United States, especially in the northern states where its charms are appreciated to a greater extent than in its own home states. This plant is *Lindernia grandiflora* and is known in the horticultural trade as *angel's tears*. The latter does not appear to be a legitimate common name, but instead seems to have been made up as a marketing tool.

Lindernia grandiflora belongs to the Scrophulariaceae, a cosmopolitan family with about 65 native species in Florida and perhaps another dozen introduced species. The family is renowned for its wealth of ornamental species and includes the genus *Penstemon*. But for one species which crosses the Bearing Sea into Asia, *Penstemon* is the largest genus of flowering plants restricted to the North American continent. Other members of this family with which the general public may be more familiar include snapdragons (*Antirrhinum*), monkey flower (*Mimulus*) and foxglove (*Digitalis*). *Lindernia* itself is a genus of about 80 species found mainly in the warm regions of Asia and Africa, but with representatives nearly throughout the world. Five species are recorded in Florida, one of which, *Lindernia crustacea*, is introduced from the Old World.

Lindernia grandiflora is a trailing perennial with opposite light green, rounded leaves up to about the size of a dime. The flowers are solitary in the axils of the leaves and are borne year around except in the

very coldest weather. The flowers resemble small purple trumpets with five white petal lobes. The lobes are markedly unequal, the top two tiny and nearly vestigial, the lower three much enlarged and each conspicuously marked with two purple spots. The unusual pattern of two contrasting colors makes the small perky flowers remarkably eye-catching and attractive. Although the species epithet means *large-flowered*, the blossoms must be measured in millimeters and they are large only relative to other species of *Lindernia*.

This species is found in moist depressions, the banks of slow streams, pond borders, poorly drained lawns and other wet areas, nearly always in full sun. It is an easy grower that will flourish in nearly any soil and in any container so long as it gets ample water, bright light and plenty of fresh air. For maximum flower production, regular but weak doses of fertilizer are helpful. It will grow well in half shade but it will not reach its full flowering potential under such conditions.

Like many trailing plants which root as they grow, it adjusts its size to its surroundings. At the edge of a small pond, undeterred by competition, it can carpet many square feet along the pond shore. However, in a small pot, its growth is less exuberant and the longest stems scarcely reach 7 or 8 inches in length. Also, its growth form will vary according to the container. In a shallow, wide container, it forms a flat, green carpet. In a pot with less surface area, the long stems will hang down from the sides and it could be described as vinelike. Indeed, it is sometimes grown as a hanging basket plant, where, hung at eye level, its diminutive charms can best be appreciated.

When grown in a pot, the plant will eventually look worn. Renewal does not mean starting over with fresh cuttings. Simply trim back the old stems severely, give a little extra fertilizer and stand back.

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With this procedure, a plant may remain in the same pot indefinitely. Cultivation in the open ground is not recommended because, while no means a weed, this plant can spread rather exuberantly when happy.

Propagation is a simple matter. Since the stems root wherever they touch the ground, prerooted sections are easily removed from wild plants without harm to the mother plant. Unrooted sections of stem will root when placed in a pot of moist soil in about seven days. Newly rooted cuttings should get subdued light and then be gradually introduced to full sun. Because of the ease by which it is propagated, selected cultivars could easily be established in horticulture. Since natural populations are variable, it pays to scrutinize them carefully for new and

interesting clones. For example, some forms are very pale with muted, pastel tones while others have particularly dark and distinct purple spots on the petal lobes.

UPDATE TO THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Lindernia, described as a member of the Scrophulariaceae in the above article, is now usually relegated to the family Linderniaceae, a small family of 17 genera. The only other Florida representative of the family is *Micranthemum*. Although the article does not recommend cultivating *Lindernia grandiflora* in the open ground, further experience with the plant shows that it makes an ideal low groundcover for sites with wet or continually moist soil.

NOTE: This is the author's PDF version of an article published in *The Palmetto*, the journal of the Florida Native Plant Society. The PDF and print versions differ substantially in formatting and pagination. Additionally, the content of the PDF version has been slightly modified from the print version in order to correct minor grammatical errors and an update to the original article has been provided. The original print version may be cited as:

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