

Pectis linearifolia

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Pectis linearifolia (Asteraceae) is a small, overlooked annual endemic to southern peninsular Florida characterized by foliage that emits a pleasant lemon-citrus scent when crushed or otherwise injured. Its ornamental qualities, cultivation, and propagation are discussed.

KEYWORDS: *Pectis*, Asteraceae, annual, endemic, Florida, native plant, wildflower.

Florida has an abundance of small herbaceous plants in various plant families, with the daisy family being particularly rich in such species. *Pectis* is a genus in the daisy family whose Florida members are all small, taprooted annuals. They are members of that vast league of plants that are scarcely noticed, often trod upon, and charitably referred to as being, “of botanical interest only.” Although very different in outward appearance, this genus is closely related to our common garden marigolds. Like the latter, *Pectis* is endowed with oil glands on the leaves that release various aromatic substances when the plants are cut, bruised or otherwise injured. Depending on the species, the fragrance may vary from distinctly unpleasant to fruity or refreshingly spicy.

Three of the Florida species, *Pectis humifusa*, *leptocephala*, and *prostrata*, are all malodorously fetid and have very little indeed to recommend them horticulturally. They are all somewhat weedy and *Pectis prostrata*, especially, is frequently found as a minor weed in lawns. However, a fourth species, *Pectis linearifolia*, has one redeeming feature. Its leaves release a powerful and refreshing lemon-citrus scent when injured. In spite of this striking characteristic, this plant, like a great many other obscure and low-growing herbaceous natives, has no common name.

The plant forms loose, prostrate, diffusely branched mats on sandy soil and is frequently found on disturbed sites along roadsides. The flowers consist of little yellow daisies about 0.4 cm across. Although not spectacular, a well-grown plant studded with these tiny golden jewels is attractive in a subtle and charming manner. Although the plant exhibits the ecology of an introduced non-native plant, it is known with certainty only from south Florida and



Figure 1. *Pectis linearifolia* forms a small groundcover studded with tiny yellow daisies.

must be regarded as native in view of current distribution data. It has also reputedly been found in Jamaica, but the Jamaican reports are evidently somewhat doubtful.

The culture of this plant is simplicity itself. Seeds scattered in pots or on the ground will start a colony. In spite of this, I have never been able to germinate the seeds indoors under controlled conditions. However, when sown outdoors and exposed to abundant fresh air and the natural rhythms of rain and sunshine, they have never failed to germinate, although they do so only when some sixth sense tells

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them that conditions are right. As they are slightly weedy, I limit my plants to pots where they may be controlled more easily.

Like many annuals, the plants have a tendency to flower and seed themselves to death. Thus, as soon as I am certain that some self-sown seedlings are coming along, I remove the worn-out mother plants to be replaced by their fresh, young progeny. In this manner, I have kept a colony going in the same pot for nearly two years. For best growth, they require abundant sunshine and moist, but well-drained soil. Except for aphids, which are easily dealt with, no pests have bothered my plants.

It may seem odd to expend even a little energy to grow a plant of such improbable horticultural merit. Yet I am always amazed that this small plant has, through some photosynthetic alchemy, stored within itself the essences of oranges and lemons. It serves as yet another example of Florida's rich and diverse botanical heritage.

UPDATE TO THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Pectis linearifolia is now known to be endemic to southern Florida and to Alachua County in north Florida. Since the Alachua County records are disjunct from the southern Florida records, it is possible that they may represent an introduction from further south. The original article stated that *Pectis linearifolia* may be doubtfully native to Jamaica; however, the plant does not occur in Jamaica and "reports of *Pectis linearifolia* from Jamaica were based on misidentifications of diminutive, short-peduncled individuals of *P. glaucescens*" (Keil 2006:226.)

REFERENCES

- KEIL, D.J. 2006. *Pectis linearifolia*. p. 226. In Flora of North America Editorial Committee (eds.) *Flora of North America: Volume 21*. New York: Oxford University Press.

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, pagination, and imagery. 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:

Osorio, R. 1990. *Pectis linearifolia*. *The Palmetto* 10(4):4.

This PDF version may be cited as:

Osorio, R. 2009. The Wildflower Garden: Showy Milkwort. Internet: http://www.rufino-osorio.com/articles/pectis_linearifolia.pdf.

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