Miniature Native Plants

Lindernia grandiflora

by Rufino Osorio

On the coastal plain, in eastern Georgia and Florida, is found a dwarf herbageous plant that belongs to a small group of Florida native wildflowers that have achieved a singular distinction. This small plant 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 diminutive charms can best be appreciated. 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 seven or eight inches. Also, 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 vine-like. 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. 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, pre-rooted sections are easily removed from wild plants without harm to the mother plant. Unrooted sections of stem will root in about seven days when placed in a pot of moist soil. 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.

Note: Cultivated plants set seed capsules, but the fine, dust-like seed is extremely difficult to gather. As far as is known to the author, this species is unavailable from native plant nurseries. If not found growing naturally in your area, it is available from houseplant nurseries in northern states. One example is Logee's Greenhouses, 141 North Street, Danielson, Connecticut 06239 (their catalog costs $3.00). In many catalogs, it is listed under the genus Ilysanthes a genus now regarded as synonymous with Lindernia.

Rufino Osorio, awards registrar for the American Orchid Society, is a devotee of miniature plants.