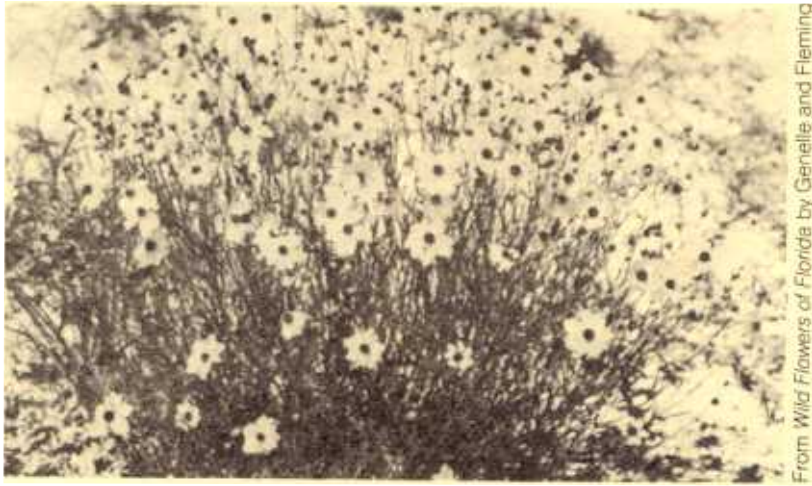


# Florida's Wildflowers

by Mary Ellen Smith



From Wild Flowers of Florida by Genelle and Fleming

Tickseed

Wild flowers, like sunshine, are one of Florida's natural treasures. But they are vanishing.

The trouble is that only a few people actually see wild flowers. Most people can tramp through a field of lace-white fleabane mixed with purple toadflax, or through a riot of golden tickseed, and see only "weeds" to be stepped on, mowed down, or rooted out to make way for pavement.

Yet Florida has a rich variety and vivid palette of wild flowers the year 'round: marsh pinks, blue pickerel weed, yellow tickseed, ivory-white water lilies, pink-to-purple morning glories, deep purple iris, yellow prickly pear, lavender spiderwort, golden-rods. The list is long, and many of these wild bloomers rival cultivated flowers in beauty of form and color.

There are few vast fields of wild flowers here in Florida, rather a sprinkling of color here and there. But sometimes — not always — in early

April, the flood plain of the St. Johns River stages a floral spectacular. Strips of land bordering the bright river turn into twin rivers of gold, stretching from US 192 west of Melbourne northward 20 miles to SR 520 west of Cocoa. Perhaps even farther.

A few years ago I drove out to see this dazzling display. Although I am a native Floridian, the flowers were new to me. I asked at a fish camp what they were.

"Lady wants to know what them yellor flowers are!" a fisherman belloyed to the boaters on the river. The answers were varied: buttercups, mustard, dandelions, goldenrod.

All were wrong. The flowers were, and are, butterweed, or *Senecio glabellus*. By any name, they make a glorious showing.

Almost certainly, Florida derives its name from wild flowers. Surely the purple morning glories and yellow beach sunflowers were blooming on the sand dunes on that historic day in

(Mary Ellen Smith, a former member of FNPS, died in August, 1989, at the age of 84. She was a Brevard County native, an environmentalist, and a free lance writer. We're pleased to be able to publish this article, written several months before her death.

The color photo of the red hibiscus, reproduced on the cover of the last issue of The Palmetto, was incorrectly attributed to Ms. Smith at the end of the hibiscus story. The photographer, as credited on the cover, was Sam Hopkins. The editor apologizes for the inconsistency, which was a result of production difficulties.)

1513 when Juan Ponce de Leon set foot on this new (to him) land. Historiographer Antonio de Herrera wrote of that event: "and it [the land] appeared very delightful, having many pleasant groves and it was all level, as also they discovered it at Easter which the Spaniards call Pascua de Florida."

The likely places to look for wild flowers in Florida today include almost any unpaved area, such as vacant lots, roadsides off the main traffic lanes, state parks, Canaveral National Seashore, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, the Everglades, Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (the red hibiscus blooms there in August), neglected fields and ditches, perhaps even your own back yard.

You don't have to know the botanical names of wild flowers — sometimes the common names are more intriguing — but you will *want* to know them once you become interested in identifying what were — formerly — weeds. The joy of finding wild flowers can be both exciting and relaxing. Join the ranks of those who appreciate native plants, and you may find what Thoreau called "the tonic of wildness."