

# Horticulture Hints

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Hurricane Idalia didn't seem to do a whole lot of damage here in our area. Here's hoping that all of you garnered the same results. We lost a section of fence, but we were kind of expecting it - it had a bit of lean to it for awhile now. We managed to get it mostly cleaned up the next day, while it was still pleasant and breezy outside. Now, our thoughts and prayers are for those a little further north who weren't as lucky.



*S. cayennensis* (commonly sold)

Did you know that porterweed is completely edible? First things first, porterweed is of the family Lamiaceae (mints), and the genus *Stachytarpheta* (verbenas). There are about 50 species native to the warmer climates of Asia, and North and South America. Porterweed is a short- to medium-lived perennial in warmer climates, to about zone 8b. They are often evergreen, depending on winter temperatures, and usually seed well enough to keep a stand going in slightly colder climates. They bloom reliably and

consistently throughout the heat of summer, often well into fall.

The native blue porterweed in Florida is *S. jamaicensis*. This is not the *Stachytarpheta* that is usually sold in stores around here. More on that later. A little more on the basics. They are considered an herbaceous perennial. The genus name *Stachytarpheta* is from the Greek *stachys*, meaning "spike," and *tarphys*, meaning "thick" or "dense." They grow spikes of tiny blue, purple, or corally-red flowers that open consecutively from bottom to top. They seem to need very little rest between flushes of blooms, so seem to bloom fairly constantly throughout the summer.

**Giant** porterweed (*S. mutibilis*) is native to Central America, and bears the coral to red



*S. mutibilis*

flowers. This herbaceous perennial usually grows 3-4 feet tall, but can grow even bigger if it's in happy conditions. The purple

porterweed (*S. frantzii*) is also native to Central America and grows to about the same proportions. Both are great attractors



*S. frantzii*

of all pollinators, and because of the somewhat tubular flowers, is loved by hummingbirds. Another plus to all the porterweeds is that they seem to repel ants! (Yaaa! Something my nemesis hates!) A study has been done on this, so it's a documented fact.

Now for the down side. The native porterweed in Florida is *S. jamaicensis*. As mentioned before, this is not the species usually sold in local stores. That one is *S. cayennensis*, a more tall and upright version. It seems that the *S. cayennensis* is considered a Category II listed invasive species in Florida, as it has escaped cultivation, and has been found displacing native varieties. So therefore, like the Mexican petunia, it should not be used. That being said, if you do have this invasive kind in your yard, it might be advisable to just deadhead when the flowers start to be done with their blooms.

And for the good news, the native variety can be found in native nurseries. It grows the

same beautiful, pollinator attracting blue flowers as the invasive kind, but has a more prostrate habit. The flower spikes tend to



*S. jamaicensis* (Florida native)

'lean' a little, and the height of the plant is more like 1-3' tall, with a 2-3' spread. Almost like a tall ground cover.

Here we get back to where we started. Every part of porterweed is edible. The flowers can be eaten raw, and apparently have a taste similar to mushrooms. The flower spikes can be used as you would a bay leaf, to flavor soups and stews. The leaves can be used to make a foamy tea, and this foamy quality has, in years past, made it useful for making beer. Hence the name 'porterweed'. Both flowers and leaves have been used medicinally, most commonly by infusion or decoction. The flowers and leaves are cooling, with an affinity for digestive and respiratory systems. Topically, porterweed has shown antibacterial and antifungal properties. All in all, a very useful as well as beautiful plant.

I apologize for taking up the entire newsletter with porterweed, but I felt there was a lot to say about this beautiful native flower. It's one of my favorites. And knowing native species from others, I think, is very important.

Happy gardening!