

Ruellia brittoniana Mexican Bluebell¹

Edward F. Gilman²

Introduction

Mexican bluebell is an upright or spreading perennial that is known as a strong grower under adverse conditions (Fig. 1). This 18- to 30-inch-tall plant has light green leaves that are medium in texture. Blue, violet, red or pink flowers appear on this perennial in the spring, summer and fall. These flowers are showy, and their nectar is appealing to various species of butterflies. Plants can grow into small flowering shrubs in the warmest parts of south Florida where freezes do not occur.



Figure 1. Mexican bluebell.

General Information

Scientific name: *Ruellia brittoniana*

Pronunciation: roo-EL-lee-uh brit-TOE-nee-uh

Common name(s): Mexican bluebell

Family: *Acanthaceae*

Plant type: perennial; herbaceous

USDA hardiness zones: 8B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 8: year round

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: ground cover; mass planting; attracts butterflies

Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: 2 to 3 feet

Spread: 1 to 2 feet

Plant habit: spreading; upright

Plant density: moderate

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: fine

1. This document is FPS513, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date October 1999. Reviewed February 2014. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

2. Edward F. Gilman, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: linear

Leaf venation: parallel

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

Leaf blade length: 8 to 12 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: blue; violet; red; pink

Flower characteristic: spring flowering; summer flowering; fall flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: unknown

Fruit length: unknown

Fruit cover: unknown

Fruit color: unknown

Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems

Current year stem/twig color: reddish

Current year stem/twig thickness: thin

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in the shade

Soil tolerances: occasionally wet; acidic; sand; loam; clay

Drought tolerance: moderate

Soil salt tolerances: poor

Plant spacing: 24 to 36 inches

Other

Roots: sprouts from roots or lower trunk

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management

Mexican bluebell may be used as ground covers and in perennial borders. They are attractive when massed

together or planted in a container where flexible stems droop over the pot.

Place *Ruellia* in an area of the landscape that receives full to partial shade. These species will grow best in well-drained soils and are very drought and salt tolerant. *Ruellia* species will be frozen to the ground in the winter but regrowth should occur from the roots.

These plants may be propagated by seed or cuttings. *Ruellia* can become invasive, as it readily reseeds itself.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.