

***Pontederia cordata* Pickerel Weed¹**

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Introduction

This native, eastern American aquatic plant is well adapted to Florida habitat. It can be found in the wild from Nova Scotia through the entire state of Florida in shallow wetland areas around the edges of ponds and lakes. It grows in water no more than about 12 inches deep. Foliage emerges each spring from below the water surface and stands several feet above the water surface. Beautiful purple-blue flower spikes follow several weeks later and are held slightly above the foliage.



Figure 1. Full Form—*Pontederia cordata*: Pickerel weed.
Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS



Figure 2. Flower—*Pontederia cordata*: Pickerel weed.
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General Information

Scientific name: *Pontederia cordata*

Pronunciation: pon-tee-DEER-ree-uh kor-DAY-tuh

Common name(s): pickerel weed

Family: *Pontederiaceae*

Plant type: aquatic plant

USDA hardiness zones: 3B through 10 (Figure 3)

Planting month for zone 7: year-round

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Planting month for zone 8: year-round

Planting month for zone 9: year-round

Planting month for zone 10: year-round

Origin: native to Florida

Invasive potential: aggressive, spreading plant

Uses: water garden; attracts butterflies

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant



Figure 3. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: 3 to 5 feet

Spread: depends upon supporting structure

Plant habit: upright

Plant density: open

Growth rate: fast

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: saggitate (arrow)

Leaf venation: bowed

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

Leaf blade length: 12 to 18 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: purple-blue

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: not applicable

Current year stem/twig thickness: thick

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in full sun

Soil tolerances: acidic; grows submerged in water

Soil salt tolerances: poor

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: not applicable

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding plant: plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

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

Use and Management

Plants are propagated from divisions of the root system, or more efficiently in tissue culture. They can be purchased containerized in media. Plant them in about 12 inches of water at the edge of a standing body of water. Deeper water will kill them. To prevent the plant from spreading and invading the entire pond or lake, keep plants in a container without drainage holes. Plants can be placed about 4 feet apart to form a nice stand several years later.

Pickerel weed grows best in a sunny location. Its aggressive habit can help stabilize a pond bank, and it is nicely suited for planting in a water retention pond. It can complement the waterlilies in a water garden by adding height, texture, and blue flower color.

Pests and Diseases

Few important problems trouble this marginal plant.