
Portrait of a Florida Treasure

Frederick B. Essig

One of my favorite Florida natives is *Clematis reticulata*. This is one of the species of *Clematis* with colorful, bell-shaped flowers, related to *C. crispa* and *C. baldwinii*, which can also be found growing wild in central Florida. Its flowers are a light purple on the outside, dark purple on the inside, and are pollinated by bumblebees.

The reason I like this species so much is that it is extremely drought-tolerant and easy to grow. I have a colony of it growing along my front fence, where it sometimes intertwines with my Himalayan azaleas. It's been there

for nearly 20 years now, surviving every extreme of weather, with no irrigation, fertilization, pruning, or any other care. It even mocks the other wilted plants in my yard by blooming during the height of the spring dry season. Unlike other vines, including its relative



Clematis reticulata is one of 6 species of *clematis* native to Florida.

Clematis virginiana, it never becomes a nuisance because it is a perennial herb that dies down to the ground each winter.

Clematis reticulata can be found growing wild in dry woods, in what is known as the Sandhill Community, i.e. hilly areas dominated by turkey oaks and pines. I have found it along fences adjoining woods in eastern Hillsborough County, in the Chinsegut Hill Area of Hernando County, and in many areas in between.

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