
Wildflower Spot – August 2009
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

CAROLINA WILD PETUNIA

Ruellia caroliniensis

By Helen Hamilton, *President of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

Resembling the annual garden petunias, wild petunia produces a single 5-lobed, trumpet-shaped flower, 1-2 inches long and wide, emerging where each leaf joins the stem. Although it superficially resembles a garden petunia, which is in the potato family, wild petunia is a member of the Acanthus family, to which the cultivated “shrimp plant” and “black-eyed-susan” also belong. The flowers of wild petunia vary in color from pale lavender to medium bluish-purple. On some plants the stems and the paired, egg-shaped leaves are hairy. The plant grows 1-2 feet tall, although a little scraggly.

Wild petunia can be seen along roadsides, moist or dry woods across most of Virginia. Although the



species name refers to its occurrence in the Carolinas, the plant is found in the U.S. from New Jersey to Iowa and south to South Carolina, Alabama and Texas. Blooming June through September, the blossoms last only a day or two, but new flowers form in succession.

The plant self-seeds, and new shoots can be seen throughout the garden from a single planting. They are easily transplanted. Germination from seeds is low, but summer stem cuttings will root well. This plant was named for an early French herbalist Jean Ruella (1474-1537). ❖

Photo: Wild Petunia (*Ruellia caroliniensis*) taken by Helen Hamilton and Jan Newton
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