

Miniature Native Plants

Lindernia grandiflora

by Rufino Osorio



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On the coastal plain, in eastern Georgia and Florida, is found a dwarf herbaceous plant that belongs to a small group of Florida native wildflowers that have achieved a singular distinction. This small plant is one of the very few Florida natives to have become established as a houseplant in the United States, especially in the northern states where its charms are appreciated to a greater extent than in its own home states.

This plant is *Lindernia grandiflora*, known in the horticultural trade as Angel's Tears. The name does not appear to be a legitimate common name, but instead seems to have been made up as a marketing tool.

Lindernia grandiflora belongs to the Scrophulariaceae, a cosmopolitan family with about 65 native species in Florida and perhaps another dozen introduced species. The family is renowned for its wealth of ornamental species and includes the genus *Penstemon*. But for one species which crosses the Bering Sea into Asia, *Penstemon* is the largest genus of flowering plants restricted to the North American continent. Other members of this family with which the general public may be more familiar include snapdragons (*Antirrhinum*), monkey flower (*Mimulus*), and foxglove (*Digitalis*).

Lindernia itself is a genus of about 80 species found mainly in the warm regions of Asia and Africa, but with

representatives nearly throughout the world. Five species are recorded in Florida, one of which, *L. crustacea*, is introduced from the Old World.

The "large-flowered" *Lindernia* is a trailing perennial with opposite light green leaves about the size and shape of a dime. The flowers are solitary in the axils of the leaves and are borne year round except in the very coldest weather. The flowers resemble small purple trumpets with five white petal lobes. The lobes are markedly unequal, the top two tiny and nearly vestigial, the lower three much enlarged and each conspicuously marked with two purple spots. The unusual pattern of two contrasting colors makes the small perky flowers eye-catching and attractive. Although the species epithet means "large-flowered", the blossoms must be measured in millimeters; they are large relative to other species of *Lindernia*.

This species is found in moist depressions, the banks of slow streams, pond borders, poorly drained lawns, and other wet areas, nearly always in full sun. It is an easy grower that will flourish in nearly any soil and in any container so long as it gets ample water, bright light, and plenty of fresh air. For maximum flower production, regular but weak doses of fertilizer are helpful. It will grow well in half-shade but it will not reach its full flowering potential under such conditions.

Like many trailing plants which root as

they grow, it adjusts its size to its surroundings. At the edge of a small pond, undeterred by competition, it can carpet many square feet along the pond shore. However, in a small pot, its growth is less exuberant and the longest stems scarcely reach seven or eight inches. Also, its growth form will vary according to the container. In a shallow, wide container, it forms a flat, green carpet. In a pot with less surface area, the long stems will hang down from the sides and it could be described as vine-like. Indeed, it is sometimes grown as a hanging basket plant, where, hung at eye level, its diminutive charms can best be appreciated.

When grown in a pot, the plant will eventually look worn. Renewal does not mean starting over with fresh cuttings. Simply trim back the old stems severely, give a little extra fertilizer and stand back. With this procedure, a plant may remain in the same pot indefinitely. Cultivation in the open ground is not recommended because, while no means a weed, this plant can spread rather exuberantly when happy.

Propagation is a simple matter. Since the stems root wherever they touch the ground, pre-rooted sections are easily removed from wild plants without harm to the mother plant. Unrooted sections of stem will root in about seven days when placed in a pot of moist soil. Newly rooted cuttings should get subdued light and then be gradually introduced to full sun. Because of the ease by which it is propagated, selected cultivars could easily be established in horticulture. Since natural populations are variable, it pays to scrutinize them carefully for new and interesting clones. For example, some forms are very pale with muted, pastel tones, while others have particularly dark and distinct purple spots on the petal lobes.

Note: Cultivated plants set seed capsules, but the fine, dust-like seed is extremely difficult to gather. As far as is known to the author, this species is unavailable from native plant nurseries. If not found growing naturally in your area, it is available from houseplant nurseries in northern states. One example is Logee's Greenhouses, 141 North Street, Danielson, Connecticut 06239 (their catalog costs \$3.00). In many catalogs, it is listed under the genus *Ilysanthes* a genus now regarded as synonymous with *Lindernia*.

Rufino Osorio, awards registrar for the American Orchid Society, is a devotee of miniature plants.