

## Frogfruit, *Phyla nodiflora*

### Introduction

Frogfruit, also known as Turkey tangle frogfruit, Capeweed, and creeping Charlie, is native throughout Florida and the southern United States. Many consider this plant to be a weed since it is known to invade lawns, especially those that are regularly irrigated. However, it is also what makes this a perfect groundcover in the Florida Keys. *P. nodiflora* is an excellent alternative to turfgrass here in Monroe County since our soil conditions and environmental extremes are not conducive to long-term turfgrass maintenance.

*P. nodiflora* is tolerant of many soil types and moisture fluctuations and can be seen growing directly in compacted limestone soils with little organic content, though flowering can be reduced. It needs minimal care once established, but will die-out during long, extended dry periods. *P. nodiflora* forms dense mats and spreads by rooting at the nodes along the stems.

The distinct white and purple flowers, though small, are very showy when planted in mass and attract a wide variety of pollinators including butterflies, bees, and moths. It is also the caterpillar host plant for several butterfly species. Frogfruit can also be used in containers and hanging baskets.

### General Information

**Family:** Verbenaceae

**Origin:** Southern half of United States, West Indies, Mexico, Central America, and South America

**U.S.D.A. Zone:** 6-11

### Description

**Plant Type:** Herbaceous spreading groundcover.

**Plant dimensions:** Can vary depending on compaction of site and wear of location. Typically, 1 to 3 inches in height, up to 6 inches in flower; forms dense mats.

**Growth Rate:** Moderate to fast

**Stems:** Prostrate, with many branches, roots at nodes.

**Leaf Characteristics:** Opposite, to 1 inch long; blades are smooth, widest near the center, with toothed margins near the apex.

**Flowering Months in Monroe County:** All year

**Flower:** White to pinkish petals surround a purple center; flower head is about ¼ inch wide; held on erect stalk about 1 ½ inches long.

**Fruit/Seed and Availability in Monroe County:** Clusters of nutlets available year-round.



*Phyla nodiflora* flowering in Key West wildflower garden. Credit: M. Leonard-Mularz, UF/IFAS

### Cultural Requirements

**Light Requirements:** Full sun to partial shade

**Salt Tolerance:** High tolerance to windborne salt but low tolerance to flooding of salt and brackish water.

**Drought Tolerance:** Moderate to high; tolerant of periods of drought once established. However, may need supplemental water during extended dry conditions.

**Wind Tolerance:** High

**Soil Requirements:** Will tolerate most soil types.

**Nutritional Requirements:** Low

**Propagation:** Cuttings and division. Collect sections with several nodes. For maximum success, include pieces with roots attached and plant in a shallow container until established, then transplant into the landscape.



Lateral stems rooting at nodes. Credit: M. Leonard-Mularz, UF/IFAS

**Turfgrass alternative:** The soils in Monroe County make long-term maintenance of turfgrass challenging due to our alkaline, calcareous soils along with the salt residue found in the easterly sea breezes and flooded soils from king tides and storm surge. These conditions can contribute to stress and decline, and ongoing disease and pest problems that then require management to thrive such as additional inputs of water, fertilizer, and

pesticides. As areas of turf die-out over time, one possible solution is to replace these areas with *P. nodiflora* to create a dense green groundcover. Frogfruit can be mowed at the same height as turfgrass.



Frogfruit mixed in with St. Augustinegrass. Credit: M. Leonard-Mularz, UF/IFAS

**Problems:** Leaves will turn purple in extended cold weather but quickly recover.

**Wildlife:** Larval host plant for common buckeye, *Junonia coenia*, Phaon crescent, *Phyciodes phaon*, and white peacock, *Anartia jatrophae*, butterflies. Nectar source for many other pollinators.

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