**Gaillardia pulchella**

**Family: Asteraceae** (alt. Compositae)

**Gaillardia; blanket-flower; fire-wheel; Indian blanket; rose-ring gaillardia**

**Synonyms (Discarded Names):** *Gaillardia bi-color; G. bicolor var. drumondii; G. bicolor var. vulgaris; G. drummondii; G. picta*

**Origin:** Most of U.S., northern Mexico

**U.S.D.A. Zone:** 3a-11 (Minimum –40°F)

**Plant Type:** Annual

**Growth Rate:** Medium

**Light Requirements:** High

**Flower Color:** Yellow & red; red; yellow

**Flowering Months:** Year-round but primarily from March to July in South Florida

**Leaf Persistence:** Herbaceous Annual

**Soil Salt Tolerance:** Medium

**Drought Tolerance:** High

**Soil Requirements:** Wide; sandy, well-drained

**Nutritional Requirements:** Low

**Major Pests:** Sweet potato whitefly

**Typical Dimensions:** 1-2 feet by 2-3 feet

**Propagation:** Seeds

**Human Hazards:** None

**Uses:** Borders; cut flowers; flower gardens; butterflies; parking lot islands; roadside beautification

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**Introduction**

There are 23 species of Gaillardia, but only three are commonly grown in the United States. *Gaillardia pulchella* is an annual, *G. aristata* is a perennial, and the hybrid of these two, *G. x grandiflora*, is another perennial

**Natural Geographic Distribution**

*Gaillardia pulchella*, Gaillardia or blanket-flower, is native in all of Florida, much of the southeast and south central states. It is a common dune and coastal scrub plant. It can be found growing at roadsides, in drainage ditch slopes and in open fields.
**Ecological Function**
Gaillardia thrives in sunny, open, well-drained areas, making it ideal for coastal landscapes and sand dune reclamation sites. It has a high tolerance for poor soils and rocky locations. Indigenous people used the roots as tea for gastroenteritis and other uses.

**Leaves**
The leaves are variable depending on their position on the plant. All leaves are simple. The plant usually begins as a rosette with very hairy, multi-lobed leaves, much like dandelions. The rosette expands and produces long stems that will eventually be topped by a single composite flower. The leaves at the bottom of the stems are shaped lanceolate to oblanceolate with lobed or toothed edges and tapering to a petiole. The leaves on the upper stem closest to the flower are spatulate in shape, with toothed or entire margins, and sessile, having no petiole, and often clasping. The leaves alternate on the stem and are hairy. The leaves become increasingly smaller from the rosette to the upper stem. The lower leaves are typically 5 x 0.75 inch. The upper leaves commonly measure 1.5 x 0.33 inches.
**Flowers**

The flower is a showy composite inflorescence consisting of many ray and disk florets. Individual flowers are 1 to 3.0 inches wide on long slender pedicels from 18 to 28 inches long and mostly covered with leaves of varying shapes. The ray florets are the outer longer florets and develop simultaneously with the inner disk florets. A ray floret consists of three petals that are fused together giving a fringed appearance to the flower. Some flowers have tubular ray florets. Ray petals are most often reddish-purple or orange-red with yellow tips, but can also be solid orange, yellow, pink and rarely white. The center disk florets are reddish-purple, orange-red or yellow. Difference in colors and variations in petal shapes are a result of natural hybridization. Each floret produce a single fruit (an achene) with a single seed, and there are more disk florets than ray florets in each flower.

An array of colors and differing petal forms

![Flower with tubular florets.](image1)
![Several flowers with tubular florets.](image2)

**Development and Flowering**

In south Florida, under natural conditions, Gaillardia is an annual of perhaps two generations a year, usually beginning germination in February and again in August. Seeds that germinate in February, often begin flowering in March. Flowering peaks from April into June, depending on the time of germination. At its optimum, a typical plant will have as many as 35 flowers in simultaneous bloom and is approximately 25 inches tall and about as wide. Yet, a particularly large plant at the Lee County Extension office was known to have as many as 185 flowers while in full bloom in May. Once flowering begins, the plant quickly loses symmetry and flops over as gravity dictates. The stem that produces the pedicel branches sparingly. By late May, most early season germinated plants will have become woody at the base. They will have significantly less flowers and are mostly observed as spent flower heads. Plants germinated in February are usually completely spent by August. The plant can be grown throughout the year as long as plants are available. Second generation plants are shorter lived than the early bloomers of spring.

Gaillardia is self-incompatible. Pollination is accomplished by non-specialist insects including bees and a soldier beetle.
February 5, chance germination, the basal rosette form  
February 20  
March 2  
March 24  
April 16, maximum potential  
May 25, decline begins  
June 14  
July 17  
August 3, season completed
The long pedicel of a Gaillardia flower.

What remains of the spent flowers are flower heads that contain small indehiscent fruits known as achenes.

The woody interior portion of a plant.

Between asphalt and concrete, early August.

This single woody plant was counted to have as many as 185 simultaneously blooming flowers early in May. See the YouTube video of this plant.
**Planting and Maintenance Guidelines**

In south Florida, Gaillardia can bloom at any time of the year. It thrives in sunny, open, well-drained areas. It has a high tolerance for poor soils and rocky locations and plants can sprout through cracks in concrete and asphalt. It can be used as an edging plant along a walk or driveway, as an accent in a perennial garden, for coastal landscapes, or in front of a shrubbery border or for roadside beautification.

Gaillardia can be purchased at many native plant nurseries throughout the state. They can also be grown from seeds collected from Florida and other states. There are also numerous cultivars and hybrids available in the trade. However, when grown in low input landscapes, many cultivars and hybrids have shorter longevity than plants of local natural populations. Consequently, purchasing plants from native plant nurseries within proximity to where they will be grown usually result in hardier plants. Plants used for roadside beautification should preferable be of local ecotypes.

February and March are the best months to plant Gaillardia in south Florida. Space the plants two to three feet apart in an area of full sun. Cover the bare spots with 1 to 2 inches of mulch but do not place it up against the stems of the plants. During these dry months, irrigation will be required to get the transplants established. Whenever possible, water in the morning to avoid promoting diseases from late evening irrigation. Overwatering may cause root problems. Little if any fertilizer is needed and if used it is best applied early in the plants growth.

Tall or leggy plants may be cut back to stimulate vigorous new growth. Any dead, faded or diseased parts can be removed as needed. Prematurely dying plants should be discarded as there is little value in trying to save them.

During the flowering seasons, Gaillardia produces many seeds that fall to the ground. If they fall on bare ground, they will germinate with warmth and sufficient moisture. Seeds that fall on mulch will generally not germinate or become viable plants. When used for roadside beautification, mowing three weeks after peak flowering maturity will help to ensure a seed bank to rejuvenate the plant. Gardeners can disperse the seeds from dry flower heads to ensure new plants in the fall and spring. The flower heads can also be stored in a cool dry place for spring sowing.
References


Useful Links
Florida Native Plants Fact Sheets                                   Gaillardia/Blanket-flower YouTube

South Florida Hedges                                                           Florida native palms power point

All pictures taken by Stephen H. Brown except where indicated

This fact sheet was reviewed by Dr. Sandra Wilson, UF Indian River REC, Ft. Pierce; Peggy Cruz, Lee County Extension Service; Niels Proctor, PhD student, UF, Gainesville; Jenny Evans, Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation; John Sibley, Lee County Master Gardener and owner of All Native Garden Center, Nursery & Landscapes, Fort Myers; Douglas Caldwell, Collier County Extension, Naples