Ruella brittoniana

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Introduction

Mexican Bluebell is an upright or spreading perennial that is known as a strong grower under adverse conditions (Fig. 1). This 18- to 30-inch-tall plant has light green leaves that are medium in texture. Blue, violet, red or pink flowers appear on this perennial in the spring, summer and fall. These flowers are showy, and their nectar is appealing to various species of butterflies. Plants can grow into small flowering shrubs in the warmest parts of south Florida where freezes do not occur.

General Information

Scientific name: Ruella brittoniana  
Pronunciation: ruo-EL-lee-uh brit-TOE-nee-uh  
Common name(s): Mexican Bluebell  
Family: Acanthaceae  
Plant type: perennial; herbaceous  
USDA hardiness zones: 8B through 11 (Fig. 2)  
Planting month for zone 8: year round  
Planting month for zone 9: year round  
Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round  
Origin: not native to North America  
Uses: ground cover; mass planting; attracts butterflies  
Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

Description

Height: 2 to 3 feet  
Spread: 1 to 2 feet  
Plant habit: spreading; upright

Figure 1. Mexican Bluebell.

Plant density: moderate  
Growth rate: moderate  
Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite  
Leaf type: simple

1. This document is Fact Sheet FPS-513, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: October, 1999 Please visit the EDIS Web site at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu.

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: linear
Leaf venation: parallel
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous
Leaf blade length: 8 to 12 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: blue; violet; red; pink
Flower characteristic: spring flowering; summer flowering; fall flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: unknown
Fruit length: unknown
Fruit cover: unknown
Fruit color: unknown
Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems
Current year stem/twig color: reddish
Current year stem/twig thickness: thin

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in the shade
Soil tolerances: occasionally wet; acidic; sand; loam; clay
Drought tolerance: moderate
Soil salt tolerances: poor
Plant spacing: 24 to 36 inches

Other

Roots: sprouts from roots or lower trunk
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: not known to be invasive
Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests
Use and Management

Mexican Bluebell may be used as ground covers and in perennial borders. They are attractive when massed together or planted in a container where flexible stems droop over the pot.

Place Ruellia in an area of the landscape that receives full to partial shade. These species will grow best in well-drained soils and are very drought and salt tolerant. Ruellia species will be frozen to the ground in the winter but regrowth should occur from the roots.

These plants may be propagated by seed or cuttings. Ruellia can become invasive, as it readily reseeds itself.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.