

## *Pterocaulon pycnostachyum*

Blackroot, Dense-spike Blackroot

**Family:** Asteraceae



Gainesville, Florida

May

### **Blackroot**

**Synonyms:** *Chlaenobolus pyconstachyus*; *C. spicatus*; *C. undulatus*; *Conyza pycnostachyus*; *C. spicata*; *Gnaphalium undulatum*; *Pterocaulon undulatum*

**Origin:** The Carolinas, Florida, westward to Louisiana

**USDA Zone:** 8a-11; 10°F minimum

**Growth Rate:** Fast

**Flowering Months:** Spring—Fall

**Leaf Persistence:** Deciduous

**Salt Tolerance:** Low

**Drought Tolerance:** High

**Soil:** Well drained to moderately well drained sandy soils

**Nutritional Requirements:** Low

**Potential Pests:** The flower heads are eaten by the larvae of the moth *Eulemma minima*

**Typical Dimensions:** 18-24 inches high

**Propagation:** Seed; self sows freely

**Human hazards:** Contains coumarin, a substance poisonous to humans

**Uses:** Naturalized landscape



Estero, Florida

April

## Natural Geographic Distribution

Blackroot is native to pine flatwoods and sandhills of Florida and on the coastal plains of the Carolinas and westward to Louisiana. It often grows in moist, shady sites to dry areas in full sun.

## Growth Habit and Morphology.

This is an erect or sprawling perennial herb with one to multiple stems. The lanceolate-shaped, alternate leaves are green above with white-wooly hairs underneath. They are approximately 0.4 inches wide and up to 6 inches long. Flowers occur terminally on the stem, clustering to form a spike-like aggregate known as a spiciform. New stems and flower buds are pale pink in color. A distinguishing feature of this plant is its unusual stem. The leaf bases extend onto the stem to form long, narrow wings providing the stem with a striped look. Another characteristic is its tuberous black roots which allows it to store large amounts of food and survive prolonged periods of drought. It is similar to the tuberous roots of dahlia, tuberous begonia, and sweet potato. Propagation is by seeds.

## Uses

Blackroot can be grown for its interesting leaves and stems. It is excellent for a naturalized landscape. The flowers are attractive to a variety of butterflies such as the Gray Hairstreak, Whirlabout Skipper, and Zebra Swallowtail.



The underside of the lanceolate-shaped leaves have many wooly hairs



The leaves are alternately arranged on the stem



The decurrent leaf extends downward from the point of insertion



The tuberous black roots of *P. pycnostachyum* store large amounts of food.



The spike-shaped inflorescence is known as a spiciform