

## PYGMY FRINGE TREE

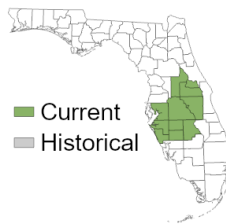
*Chionanthus pygmaeus* Small

**Synonyms:** none

**Family:** Oleaceae (olive)

**FNAI Ranks:** G2/S2

**Legal Status:** US-Endangered; FL-Endangered



Flowers with axillary panicles growing from the previous season. Photo © Gil Nelson

**Field Description:** **Shrub** or **small tree**, usually less than 3 m tall. Upright **stems** often arising from branches that have been buried in sand; **twigs** gray, with conspicuous leaf scars. **Leaves** 5 - 10 cm long, simple, entire, oval, somewhat leathery, yellow-green with maroon leafstalks, opposite or slightly alternate, the leaf scars knobby and slightly offset. **Flowers** less than 1.3 cm long, each with four narrow petals, white, fragrant, in showy clusters. **Fruit** oval, 2.5 cm long, purplish-brown when ripe.

**Similar Species:** The common fringe-tree (*Chionanthus virginicus*) is taller, with thinner, larger leaves; petals more than 2.5 cm long; and fruit 1.3 cm long; it occurs in moist hammocks. Wild olive (*Cartrema* sp.) has leathery, opposite, evergreen leaves with inrolled margins, and tiny flowers borne in dense clusters.

**Related Rare Species:** There are no other closely related rare species in Florida.

## pygmy fringe tree

## *Chionanthus pygmaeus*

**Habitat:** Scrub, sandhills, and xeric hammocks; primarily on the Lake Wales Ridge. May form thickets with evergreen scrub oaks and shrubs.

**Best Survey Season:** Flowers in spring, but may be identified by leaves in the summer and knobby twigs in the winter.

**Range-wide Distribution:** Endemic to central Florida.

**Conservation Status:** While the current population size is estimated to be around 4,000 individuals only half occur on protected Conservation Lands. Many populations have been lost over the last century due to habitat destruction, mostly from the creation of citrus groves, urban development, and fire exclusion. These factors continue to be threats to the remaining populations of this species. These threats are exacerbated given that this species is endemic to Florida scrub where it occurs only on the Florida peninsula.

**Protection and Management:** Preserve scrub and sandhill by purchase or conservation easement; use prescribed fire to maintain sunny gaps, reduce competition, and create a mosaic of xeric habitats.

**References:** Coile 2000, Elfers 1989, Keener Langdon 1984, Nelson 1996, USFWS 1998, Ward 1979, Wunderlin 1998, Wunderlin and Hansen 2000a, Weakley, A. S. and the Southeastern Flora Team 2024.



Petals 7 - 15 mm long; anther tip rounded. Photo © Jay Horne

pygmy fringe tree

*Chionanthus pygmaeus*



Leaves opposite; shrub 0.7 - 2.0 (-5) m tall. Photo © Scott Ward.

