

PINELAND SCURFPEA

Orbexilum virgatum (Nutt.) Rydb.

Synonyms: none

Family: Fabaceae (pea)

FNAI Ranks: G1/S1

Legal Status: US-none FL-Endangered

Wetland Status: US-FACU+ FL-FACU



Orbexilum virgatum flowering (Hanna Rosner-Katz; taken at Jennings State Forest).

Field Description: **Perennial herb** to 0.5 m tall. **Stems** slender, appressed-pubescent, arising from well-defined ovoid or globose tubers. **Leaves** unifoliolate, 0.1–3.5 cm long; petioles 0.1– 3.5 cm long; blades elliptic to narrowly lanceolate, mostly 2–9 cm long, 0.3–1.2 cm wide. **Inflorescence** an ovoid to ellipsoid spike 1–4 cm long; peduncles 2–13 cm long. Calyx 3–5 mm long, appressed pubescent, glandular, 10-veined. **Flowers** mostly 5–7 mm long; petals purple; banner 5–7 mm long, 4–5 mm wide; wing petals 6–7 mm long; keel petals 6–7 mm long. **Fruit** round-obovate, ca. 4 mm long, 4 mm wide, rugose, glabrous, glandular; seeds obovate, ca. 2 mm long. Turner (2008).

Similar Species: While the three other species in this genus occurring in Florida also have purple flowers, the leaves of these other species have 3–7 leaflets while *Orbexilum virgatum* has simple leaves.

Related Rare Species: Sampson's snakeroot (*Orbexilum pedunculatum*) and Eastern Sampson's snakeroot (*Orbexilum psoralioides*) are both fairly rare species in Florida, the former only occurring in the panhandle and the latter in the panhandle and northern peninsula. However, both of these species are common in parts of their global range further north in the Southeastern U.S.

Habitat: This species grows in mesic flatwoods and longleaf pine sandhills.

Best Survey Season: *Orbexilum virgatum* flowers in the late spring to early summer.

Range-wide Distribution: This species occurs in northeastern Florida. There are historical records of it in Georgia and South Carolina, but has not been observed in either of these states for several decades.

Conservation Status: *Orbexilum virgatum* is a very rare plant species that occurs only in a small area of northeastern Florida in longleaf pine sandhills and mesic flatwoods. Many populations have been lost to conversion of these habitats to silviculture and further loss is possible where these populations are not protected on managed lands, which constitutes about half of remaining populations. There are thought to be fewer than ten populations remaining in the state and many of these are small in size.

Protection and Management: The two habitat types that this species occurs in, longleaf pine sandhill and mesic flatwoods, are both fire dependent and should be burned according to the appropriate, historical fire regime.

References: Grimes 1990, Isely 1998, Turner 2008, Weakley 2023



Orbexilum virgatum inflorescence and leaves. (Brenda Herring taken at Jennings State Forest).