

Low growing, mat-forming plants that fill in areas where turf grass won't grow are considered to be ground covers. The powderpuff mimosa, also known as sunshine mimosa, fits that description with some additional favorable characteristics.

This Florida native, *Mimosa strigillosa*, is a rapidly spreading plant with fine textured foliage and pink 'powder puff' ball flowers. The flowers appear from spring throughout the summer and are held up several inches above the low spreading mat of bright green. Even though the leaves look fragile, this plant is tough enough to take some foot traffic.

After becoming established, the powderpuff mimosa needs no additional water and holds up well through drought conditions. It prefers nutrient poor sandy soil in full sun or part shade. Four or five newly planted mimosas can quickly cover a 200 to 300 square foot area in less than one year.

In 2008, this plant was named one of the 2008 "Plants of the Year" by the Florida Nursery, Growers & Landscape Association (FNGLA). Before that date, these plants were specialty plants only grown by a few native plant growers. As the plant increased in popularity and demand, production improved and the powderpuff mimosa is readily available now at most garden centers.

Once established, powderpuff mimosa aids in erosion control with its deep root system. As stems grow along the ground, they take root to help form that dense mat. As a legume, the mimosa has root nodules which contain bacteria that change nitrogen into a form that plants can use. So another function of the plant is adding usable nitrogen to the soil.

I have mentioned quite a few favorable characteristics of this little cheery ground cover. I am welcomed home every evening by the pink puffs blooming in our native garden. What a lovely turf replacement this plant would be except for one thing. It dies down in the winter.

Powderpuff mimosa is also a larval host for the little sulfur butterfly. Learn more about "Attracting Wildlife with Native Plants" on Thursday, July 21st at 5:30. This free class will be offered at the Public Library in Fort White. And visit the new display garden at the library. *(Published 7-17-11)*