

Bitterweed

Description.—Bitterweed (*Helenium tenuifolium* Nutt.) (Fig. 10) is an annual or biennial plant 6 inches to 3 feet tall when in bloom. The green stems are widely branched above the middle but usually simple below. The leaves are about 1 inch long, narrow, strap-like and very numerous on both stems and branches. The flower heads are about 1 inch across, daisy-like in shape and both rays and the disk-like centers are bright yellow. The flower heads are borne on the tips of the branches, forming a flat-topped mass of flowers.

Habitat and Distribution.—Bitterweed is a plant of waste places. Large patches may be found along roadsides in central Florida and westward across northern Florida to the Alabama line. Old pastures are frequently densely populated with it. It does not tolerate shade nor does it occur on swampy soil. It is distributed on both sand and clay soils, well drained or even dry, usually associated with grasses of some sort.

Toxicity.—Cases of poisoning have been reported in horses and mules. All parts of the plant contain a bitter principle. The milk of cows which have grazed on bitterweed commonly possesses an intense bitter flavor.

Hydrangea

Description.—Wild hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia* Bartr.) (Fig. 11) is a shrub or small tree sometimes 15 feet in height. The stems and twigs are usually reddish brown or tan in color. The large leaves, 6 inches or more long, dark green above, grayish and fuzzy underneath, are deeply scalloped or lobed on the margin so that they resemble oak leaves in outline. The tiny white flowers are borne in large pyramidal panicles often a foot long. Their color becomes brownish or purplish with age.

Habitat and Distribution.—Wild hydrangea grows naturally on steep banks of sinkholes, river bluffs and rocky outcrops from Leon County westward. It usually grows in considerable shade, only rarely in full sunlight. However, nurserymen often use it as an ornamental and as such it may be found far out of its natural range.

Related Species.—Another wild hydrangea (*Hydrangea arborescens* L.) is less common in Florida. It is distinguished from the above by oval or elliptic leaves lacking the deep lobes.