

Blue vervain (*Verbena hastata*)

Family: Verbena (*Verbenaceae*)

DESCRIPTION: Blue vervain, a perennial AKA swamp verbena, grows 2 to 5 feet tall, blooming July through September in wetlands, rain gardens and roadside ditches. Small blue-violet flowers circle candelabra-like spikes, forming an attractive backdrop in gardens with wet to medium soils in full to partial sun.

USES: A larval host plant for common buckeye butterflies and verbena moths, its seeds are favored by migrating cardinals; juncos; and swamp, field, and song sparrows. Herbivores avoid its bitter taste. Flowers provide pollen and nectar for long- and short-tongued bees. A tea brewed from flowers and/or leaves treated depression, fevers, coughs and headaches. Large doses can interfere with blood pressure medication and hormone therapy, and can cause vomiting and diarrhea.

REFERENCES:

[Minnesota Wildflowers](#)
[Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center](#)
[USDA's NRCS Plants Database](#)



Range Map: NRCS Plants Database



Photo Credit: Paul Erdmann, BWSR

Planting Recommendations

Growing primarily in wetland areas, winter-hardy, drought-tolerant vervain requires little maintenance. This hardy, moisture-loving member of the verbena family can be planted to replace invasive species such as purple loosestrife and foxglove. In home landscapes, a sunny site near a building where rain collects off of a roof offers an ideal planting site. Blue vervain easily reseeds, but is not overly aggressive. With winter stratification, the small seeds contained in nutlets can be collected and sown. Scatter them

over bare ground in late fall just before it snows. Slightly press seeds with hands or a small board to make soil-to-seed contact, but leave seeds uncovered. Pinching off the tops of plants during the growing season encourages more top growth and blooms. Surrounding vervain with wet-meadow species such as ironweed, monarda, purple coneflower, golden Alexanders and mountain mint will establish a colorful, pollinator-friendly landscape to be enjoyed by people and wildlife from spring to winter.

STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS:
FACW

ID: Clusters of quarter-inch, five-petaled blue-violet flowers bloom from the bottom up on spikes 2 to 5 inches long. Narrow, lance-shaped leaves with coarse-toothed edges are rough on the top, with fine hairs on the bottom. Fine hairs cover the square red or green stems.

SIMILAR SPECIES:

Hoary vervain (*Verbena stricta*) has larger, half-inch flowers, but only grows about 2 feet tall. It has short, egg-shaped leaves and prefers dry habitats.

Developed by Bonny Siegford, a volunteer University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardener whose Itasca County pollinator gardens feature 70-plus native species, and who provides plants, education and guidance to encourage pollinator gardens in her community.

