
Wildflower Spot – October 2008

John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

BLUE VERVAIN

Verbena SPP.

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Blue Vervain, *Verbena hastata*, occurs broadly in piedmont and mountain areas of Virginia and in a few counties in the coastal plain. Growing 2-6 feet tall, clusters of many pencil-like spikes of small five-petaled flowers grow at the ends of the branches. The flowers bloom a few at a time, advancing toward the pointed tip. The stem is grooved and four-sided. This species can be found in moist thickets, meadows and roadsides, growing best in well-drained soil. The Narrow-leaved Vervain, *Verbena simplex*, is not as showy as Blue Vervain because it grows only about half as tall and its spikes of flowers occur singly (or in threes) at the tip of the stem or branches. As its name implies, this species also has narrower leaves. It occurs more commonly in the coastal plain than does the Blue Vervain.

White Vervain, *Verbena urticifolia* is common in nearly every county in Virginia. Its spikes of small white flowers are very slender; the stems are usually hairy, with egg-shaped and coarsely toothed leaves.

Blue, White, and Narrow-leaved Vervains are tall and/or erect species. In contrast, *Verbena canadensis* (*Glandularia canadensis*) has a prostrate and spreading growth form. It has been found growing



wild in only 3 counties in Virginia: James City, Surry, and Virginia Beach. In nature, the color of its flowers typically ranges from pink to purple, but red and white-flowered variants are available in garden centers. These showy flowers are borne in wide, rounded clusters.

All verbenas are heat and drought tolerant, attractive to butterflies and hummingbirds. Non-native verbenas such as *V. bonariensis* can be invasive.

Native Americans and 19th century physicians brewed a leaf tea from *V. hastata* as a “female tonic”; Cotton Mather recommended a decoction with honey as a remedy for consumption. ❖

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