

PURPLE FALSE FOXGLOVE

Agalinis purpurea

By Helen Hamilton, *Past-president of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

These rose-purple tubular flowers grow along shores and salt marshes, from early to late fall, August through October. Purple False Foxglove is a sprawling annual about 3 feet tall, carrying very narrow leaves with smooth edges, mostly opposite on somewhat wiry stems. An inch or more long, the bell-shaped flowers have yellow lines and purple spots within and open out into 5 rounded lobes. The flowers are followed by rounded capsules which split, releasing numerous tiny seeds into the wind.

Preferring sunny areas, these plants occur in swamps and marshes, wet to moist open habitats, including old fields, clearings and roadsides. They are found in eastern and central U.S. and Canada, and throughout Virginia. Salt Marsh False Foxglove (*A. maritima*) is a similar species with flowers half as large and fleshy leaves. Occurring only in the coastal counties of Virginia, this plant is common in salt meadows with Saltmeadow Cordgrass (*Spartina patens*) and Saltgrass (*Distichlis spicata*).

While the narrow leaves photosynthesize, these false foxgloves are considered partial plant parasites. Their fibrous roots establish a connection with those of a host plant, usually a grass. Using specialized roots called haustoria, sugars and proteins are transferred from the host plant.



Purple False Foxglove is host to the Common Buckeye butterfly, as the caterpillars feed on the foliage. The tubular flowers attract bumblebees and other long-tongued bees that visit the flowers for nectar and pollen.

Other false foxgloves have yellow flowers, and are classified in the genus *Aureolaria*. Both *Agalinis* and *Aureolaria* were formerly included in genus *Gerardia*. Purple Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*) is not native to this country, but is widely sold in nurseries and grown as an ornamental plant in home gardens. The flowers of all these plants show similar characteristics. ❖

Photo: Purple False Foxglove (*Agalinis purpurea*) taken by Helen Hamilton
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.