

Verbena ‘Homestead Purple’, Super Plant

By Susan Camp

After a long, chilly and rainy spring, warm weather finally has arrived and we can enjoy the sunshine and long evenings, especially if we have chosen super plants that provide beauty without a lot of work, like trailing verbena (*Glandularia canadensis* ‘Homestead Purple’), a low-growing, evergreen perennial that makes a terrific groundcover and provides months of electric purple blooms.

Perennial and annual verbenas are native to southern North America and Central and South America. Both erect and trailing or prostrate forms exist, although our hot, humid summers are hard on the annual varieties.

‘Homestead Purple’ was discovered growing near a roadside by two horticulturists from the University of Georgia, who named it for the old farm site where it was found. The plant proved to be remarkably hardy with a long growing season and remains a reliable garden favorite.

I first planted ‘Homestead Purple’ about 20 years ago and was pleased with its attractiveness and care free growth habit. Some plants bloomed right through a cold winter, even in the snow. Like other perennials, ‘Homestead Purple’ won’t live forever, but it will last for three to four years.

Trailing verbena grows well in USDA Hardiness Zones 7 to 11. It requires full sun all day in average, well-drained soil with a pH range of slightly acidic to slightly alkaline. You can plant verbena either in the fall or early spring. Pinch the tips of the branches when planting to encourage fuller growth. ‘Homestead Purple’ reaches a height of 10 to 12 inches with a spread of about 36 inches, so set plants about 24 inches apart.

‘Homestead Purple’ is drought-resistant, although flowering will decrease during dry spells. One inch of water each week is sufficient once the plant’s root system is established. Fertilize lightly in mid to late spring and again in late summer after plants have been trimmed. Trailing verbena makes a beautiful container plant, although it will require more frequent watering.

‘Homestead Purple’ will reward you with masses of bright purple blooms and crinkly, deep green leaves. If blooming slows, cut plants back no more than one quarter to encourage a new round of flowering. Trim lightly in the fall, then more severely in the spring.

Powdery mildew and stem and root rot can occur during rainy periods. Trailing verbena can fall prey to aphids, thrips, whiteflies, leaf miners, and mites, especially during periods of drought. Snails and slugs are a nuisance in wet weather. Clemson University publication HGIC 1175 “Verbena” provides basic information on growing ‘Homestead Purple.’ Other available cultivars include ‘Summer Blaze’, with cherry red flowers; ‘Abbeville’, a lavender variety; and ‘Appleblossom’, with cotton candy pink blooms.

Bumblebees, butterflies, and hummingbirds love 'Homestead Purple'. The plants are enchanting in late afternoon to early evening, when the blossom color appears to change from bright purple to cobalt blue, a psychedelic light show in my garden every evening. 'Homestead Purple' verbena is thriving and requires little work, so now I can do other things besides fuss with the garden.

If you are like me, and always looking for an interesting activity with an opportunity to learn something new, Gloucester Master Gardeners and Gloucester Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism will jointly sponsor two free nature walks in Woodville Park on Saturday, June 18 from 9:00-10:30 a.m. and on Wednesday, June 22 from 7:00-8:30 p.m. The walks will be guided by Gloucester Master Gardeners who are also Master Naturalists. The starting point for both walks is the parking lot near the soccer fields. Please wear rugged, comfortable walking shoes (no sandals, please) and be prepared for mosquitoes and muddy conditions, as much of the woods are wetlands. The guides will point out plants and wildlife found in Woodville Park. Heron, bald eagles, and deer are common sights in the park.

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