
Wildflower Spot – September 2015
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

SEA LAVENDER

Limonium carolinianum

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

This plant is easy to recognize, forming a “sea” of tiny lavender flowers waving across the salt marshes in late summer and early fall. A tap-rooted perennial, the large, fleshy, lance-shaped leaves grow mostly from the base of the plant. The stem is thin and bare, and branches many times, carrying small buds and flower that mature from the bottom upwards. Blooming from August through October, the 5 petals are purple to lavender, but the outside base of the flower (sepals) is white, an unusual combination.

Growing in salty soil, Sea Lavender is common in salt or brackish marshes in the coastal counties of Virginia. The range extends along the coast from Labrador south to Florida, west to Texas and northeast Mexico.

Our ancestors’ druggists sold large quantities for use as an astringent. The 18th century botanist Mannasseh Cutler, calling it “Marsh Rosemary,” wrote of a decoction of the roots used as a gargle in cankers and sore throats. The flowers are prized for bouquets and dried arrangements, retaining their color for several years, even when dried. “Leimonion”, the ancient Greek name, is presumably derived from *leimon*, a marsh.

Some nurseries offer *Limonium* Seeds, also known as Perennial Statice. These species are nonnative, originating from Europe, Asia, Russia, and the Mediterranean region. ❖



Photo: Sea Lavender (*Limonium carolinianum*) taken by Phillip Merritt and Jan Newton
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.