

Blue Vervain

Verbena hastata L.

Look for Blue Vervain in open areas, along the west side of Shakespeare, on the west side of the wetlands, and around the retention basin near the Lodge.

Blue Vervain has been use useful to herbal healers for many centuries. Its healing properties are attributed mainly to its bitter taste and stimulating effect on the liver and other organs, as well as its relaxing effect on the nervous system.

While it is used primarily as a pain reliever, Blue Vervain is also considered by herbalists to be especially helpful in treating depression related to chronic illness. As a poultice, Blue Vervain is good for headache, earache, and neuralgia. In this form it colors the skin a fine red, giving rise to the idea that “it had the power of drawing the blood outside.” Tea brewed from the root, leaves or flowers is helpful for fevers and throat & chest congestion with headache. Acting as an expectorant, Blue Vervain was used to treat chronic bronchitis.

Also known as wild hyssop, and simpler’s joy, Blue Vervain is sometimes called herb-of-the-cross or Devil’s bane because legend has it that the plant was used to stanch Jesus’ wounds after he was removed from the cross.

Cardinals, sparrows, and juncos eat the plant seeds, and rabbits will sometimes feast on the foliage. The plant is valued in butterfly gardening because it attracts several species; its leaves are the larval host for the common buckeye butterfly. Hummingbirds and numerous species of bees are fond of the nectar.

Blue Vervain is a native perennial wildflower that grows 2’-5’ high with a hairy, square stem that can be either green or red. In late summer through autumn, its small purplish-blue flowers (1/4”) bloom in showy spikes up to 5” long. Blue Vervain grows with wild abandon in the Great Plains section of America, and can be found elsewhere on prairies, in meadows, and open woodlands. The Dakota tribe’s name for it translates as “medicine.” Blue Vervain is an excellent landscaping substitute for several invasive species of plants including purple loosestrife and purple foxglove.

Blue Vervain blooms June through September.

