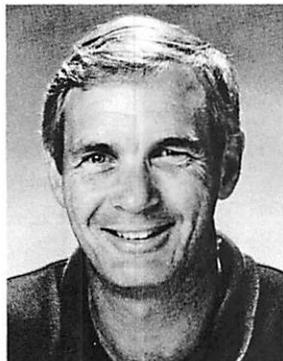


Perennial Verbena

Changes Faster than the Speed of Light

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Verbena consists of approximately 250 species and 6 or 7 are in cultivation. The most common is the annual bedding plant, *V. x hybrida*, the result of hybridization of *V. peruviana*, *V. incisa*, *V. phlogifolia* and *V. platensis*. Demand for the annual is

high and additional species are being incorporated into this stew every year. The annual hybrids so dominated the market that the perennial species were not as common as they should have been. However, a recent plethora of perennial hybrids has occurred and the verbena market is much stronger as a result of these improvements.

The perennial species are generally rose-purple, persistent bloomers, and hardy south of zone 6. Plants generally have opposite, dentate foliage, four-sided stems and terminal flowers. They perform best in well-drained soils in full sun.

Verbena has numerous historical references, *V. officinalis* was the classical name for certain sacred branches and supposedly was used to staunch Christ's wounds on Calvary. Plants were also used medicinally, the term vervain is rooted in the celtic words *fer*, to remove, and *faen*, stone, referring to its use in treating bladder stones.

Quick Reference to Verbena Species

Name	Height (in.)	Flower Color	Upright or Spreading
<i>V. bonariensis</i>	36-48	violet	upright
<i>V. canadensis</i>	8-18	red, pink	spreading
<i>V. rigida</i>	12-24	violet	upright
<i>V. tenuisecta</i>	8-12	purple	spreading

V. bonariensis

<i>-bonariensis</i> (bo-nah-ree-en'-sis)	South American Verbena, Tall Verbena	3-4'3"	
Summer	Rose-violet	South America	Zones 6-9

This is one of the taller verbenas and particularly effective in the middle of the border. It was named for the city of Buenos Aires, where first discovered. It has since become naturalized in the United States from South Carolina to Texas. The 4-inch long elliptical leaves are sessile and clasp the stem. They are sharply serrated above the middle and entire towards the base. The wiry stems are roughly hairy and conspicuously 4-angled. The flowers consist of five petals and a corolla tube nearly twice as long as the calyx. The individual flowers measure only about 1/4 inch across but the entire panicle is 2-4 inches wide.

It is an excellent plant for southern gardens but needs to be massed in groups. If grown in rich soil or overfertilized, it can easily reach 5 feet and require severe pruning. Cutting back the plant results in a many-branched specimen which takes on a shrub-like habit. Once in flower, it remains in bloom until frost. A drawback, however, is the susceptibility to powdery mildew, which should be treated with appropriate chemicals beginning in June. Personally, I prefer not to spray for mildew and, although the white spots are unsightly, the disease does not appear to reduce vigor.

Propagate from root cuttings in the spring similarly to *Anemone x hybrida*. Place seed sown in moist media at 40°F for 3-4 weeks, after which the tray may be moved to 60-70°F temperatures. Germ-ination is erratic and seedlings appear over a 3-5 week period. Two- to 3- inch terminal cuttings of new spring growth may also be rooted and transplanted 3-5 weeks later.

V. canadensis

<i>-canadensis</i> (kan-a-den'-sis)	Clump Verbena, Rose Verbena	8-18"/36"	
Summer	Red, pink	North America	Zones 6-10

This species is usually treated as an annual in most of the country but is native from Virginia to Florida

and west to Colorado and Mexico. The many-branched pubescent stems lie on the ground with the ends ascending (decumbent), and rooting occurs where the lower stems touch the soil. The deeply lobed ovate leaves are 1-3 inches long and about 1 inch wide with a triangular to wedge-shaped base. The rose-red to pink corolla tube is about twice as long as the calyx but each flower is only about ½-inch wide. Up to 20 flowers may be present on each of the stalked spikes.

This species has an excellent clumping habit and may be cut back severely if the stems lose leaves or become too long. A sunny place in the border with excellent drainage is necessary. If drainage is poor, plant vigor declines rapidly and no amount of corrective surgery will improve its demeanor. Like other members of the genus, susceptibility to mildew and spider mites are problems.

Cultivars

All of these are likely hybrids, with *V. canadensis* as an important parent.

Lavender:

'Abbeville' was found near Abbeville, SC, by Richard Berry of Goodness Grows Nursery, Lexington, Ga. Flowers are a cool light lavender with a tiny hint of white. Vigorous.

'Lavender' bears lavender flowers with a trace of white and 'Rosea' has bright rose-red blooms. Both grow 8-12 inches tall.

Pink:

'Appleblossom' has pale pink lightly fragrant flowers. More dwarf than most of the *canadensis* forms. Moderate vigor.

'Pink Parfait' bears handsome pink and white flowers. In our trials, plants weren't as vigorous as other cultivars, but it still enjoys many followers.

'Sarah Groves,' named for Sarah Groves of Oxford, Ga. Bears clusters of soft, pale pink flowers that change to a richer pink with age. Almost a bicolor.

'Silver Anne,' from England, is one of the best warm pinks around. Vigorous and handsome, without being gaudy. I have seen plants of this called 'Homestead Pink' but, to my eye, they are identical to 'Silver Anne' and 'Silver Anne' they should be called. Let's not get carried away with this Homestead thing.

Reds/Pinks:

'Big Red' (formerly but no longer called Homestead Red) from Robbrick Nursery, Fla., also has good red flowers, a little smaller than the previous two. Among this and the other three red cultivars, there is a good choice for red-flowered verbenas.

'Evelyn Scott' is a good true red from Goodness Grows Nursery. Floriferous with moderate vigor.

'Gene Cline,' named after plantsman Gene Cline of Canton, Ga., is about 6-9 inches tall and bears deep rose flowers. An excellent ground cover for sunny well-drained areas.

'Graystone Daphne' produces fragrant pink-lavender flowers on 8-inch tall plants.

'Marie's Rose' bears red-purple flowers on vigorous 8-10 inch plants.

'Pink Sunrise,' introduced by Plants Delight Nursery, has coral-pink flowers on 6" plants.

'Taylortown Red' is a PPAF form from McCorkles Nursery, Ga., and is similar to Evelyn Scott. Good red color, perhaps a little more vigorous and more floriferous than Evelyn.

'Summer Blaze' (formerly 'Clear Red') supposedly has clear red flowers and good vigor. I have not yet trialed this so do not know if it differs from the next three.

Purple/Magenta:

'Batesville Rose,' from Greg Grant, is packed with magenta-rose flowers. Very eye-catching.

'Homestead Purple' really kicked the verbena market in the backside, causing the interest in many



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other cultivars to be rekindled. The dark purple flowers are early and plants are vigorous, eating up all competition around them. The name Homestead came from the Georgia homestead where the plants were found and does not designate a series of colors. Other cultivars with the Homestead name have nothing to do with 'Homestead Purple' in vigor, flower or form.

'Ultramarine' is equally vigorous to 'Homestead Purple' and has a slightly different shade of purple.

White:

'Snowflurry,' from Garden Delights Nursery, Raleigh, NC, is a semi-upright vigorous "virtual flowering machine." White flowers and true from seed. Previously sold as *V. canadensis* 'White.'

Two to Three Tones:

'Carrousel' is an older form with lavender and white flowers. Not as vigorous.

'Lulu Norris' of Mann's Greenhouse fame selected this tricolor form with the top of the flowers purple-violet, the bottom light purple and set off with a clear white center.

'Fiesta,' introduced by Greg Grant, has large bright pink flowers with flecks of purple that intensify with age.

'Texas Form' is one I have not yet seen, but flowers are said to be a blend of medium red on the upper petals changing to a light pink on the lower petals. Moderate vigor.

Related Species:

V. peruviana, Peruvian verbena, hugs the ground and bears bright scarlet flowers. The leaves are not as incised or deeply cut as *V. canadensis*, nor are plants as tall or as winter hardy (zone 7-10).

V. rigida

-rigida (re'-gi-da) (Syn. <i>V. venosa</i>)	Veined Verbena, Rigid Verbena	12-24"/18"
Summer	Purple	Brazil, Argentina Zones 7-10

This South American species has become naturalized from North Carolina to Florida, and Southern gardeners are taking advantage of the heat and drought tolerance and persistent flowering, continuing through mid October in my garden. Tuberos roots are formed, which if mulched heavily in the fall, survive as far north as zone 7. The 4-angled stems, similar to those of *V. bonariensis*, bear oblong, rigid, sessile leaves. Each 2-4 inch-long leaf is roughly pubescent and has wide spreading teeth. The intense purple flowers are about 1/2-inch wide and consist of a 1/2-inch-long corolla tube 2-3 times longer than the calyx. In general, this plant looks like a miniature *V. bonariensis* with similar cultural and propagation requirements. An excellent front of the border species, it requires no pruning to maintain vigor or habit.

Propagate similar to *V. bonariensis*.

Cultivars

'Flame' stands only 6 inches tall and produces an abundance of scarlet flowers. It is more vigorous than the species and spreads more rapidly. It is likely a hybrid between *V. rigida* and another low-growing species such as *V. canadensis*.

'Lilacina' has purple-blue flowers.

'Polaris' bears lavender-blue flowers on compact 12-15 inch tall plants. They are very handsome but can reseed everywhere.

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V. tenuisecta

<i>tenuisecta</i> (ten-you-i-sec'- ta) (Syn. <i>V. erinoides</i>)		Moss Verbena	8-12"/spreader
Spring	Lavender	Southern South America	Zones 7-10

Here is a plant which should be as common in the South as bedstraw in the North. Naturalized from southern Georgia to Louisiana and south to Florida, it flourishes by roadsides and in fields. Many decumbent stems bear triangular leaves about 1-1½" long that are divided into linear segments. The spikes are terminal, solitary and composed of 5-15 small (1/2" wide) lavender flowers. The flowers are about 1 inch long and compactly arranged when they first open, but they elongate to 1½ inches or more as the flowers mature.

I first obtained terminal cuttings from south Georgia. Plants rooted in less than two weeks and eight cuttings carpeted 20-30 square feet in the first six weeks. It overwinters in zone 7b two years out of 5 and thus I take cuttings in the fall and overwinter them. Given sufficient protection, it may be considered hardy in zone 8. If plants become leggy, they may be sheared with a lawnmower to 2 inches tall and they return as fresh as ever. If sheared too close to the ground, it will take a long time to fill in. For gardeners farther north, it makes an excellent annual. Although not as colorful as the annual hybrids, it requires far less maintenance and provides better garden performance.

Propagation is easy from 2-3 inch terminal cuttings taken any time in the season. Rooting occurs in 5-8 days if cuttings are placed in a moist, warm area.

Cultivars

The cutleaf forms resulted from *V. tenuisecta*, *V. tenera* and hybrids between them. They are usually lower to the ground, have deeply cut almost lacy leaves and flower throughout the summer. Cold hardy to zone 7 at best.

White:

'Alba' is the white form sometimes available from seed. Not quite as floriferous or vigorous as the species itself, it does provide a low growing white.

Pink:

'Cotton Candy' ('Texas Cotton Candy') bears medium pink flowers with a white center. Slow growing, but handsome. Raised by Greg Grant.

'Edith' has lavender pink flowers over deeply cut foliage. Compact and floriferous, named for Edith

Eddelman of the North Carolina Botanic Garden in Raleigh, NC.

'Flamingo Border Pink' from Edith Eddelman is a lacy foliaged plant with red violet flowers.

'Sissinghurst' is an excellent cultivar with coral pink flowers and lacy foliage. Likely a cultivar of *V. tenera*, but who cares. Has been sold as 'St. Paul,' 'Rosea,' and 'Tex Tuf Pink.'

'Tapien Pink' is a vigorous cut leaf form which appears to be less susceptible to mildew. Arose from Proven Winners breeders.

Purple:

'Imagination' from Benary Seed is the most well known and one of the few available from seed. Very similar to the wild *V. tenuisecta* of the southeast.

'Maonettii' ('Aphrodite') has purple flowers with white edges. Low grower and not as rapid a grower as many others.

'Michelle' comes from Garden Delights in Raleigh, NC, and produces vivid purple flowers on mats of foliage.

'Royalty,' from Greg Grant, bears dense cutleaf foliage over which dark purple flowers abound. Very low growing, quite vigorous.

'Sterling Star' is a new cutleaf form with lighter lavender blue flowers than 'Imagination.' Also from seed.

'Tapien Blue' is a vigorous lavender-blue flowered form. Relatively resistant to mildew.

'Tex Tuf Purple' has small violet purple flowers over cut foliage. (Also sold as 'Texas Peruviana'.)

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