

# *Perovskia atriplicifolia: Russian Sage*

**Common Name(s):** Russian Sage

**Cultivar(s):** ‘Longin’, ‘Blue Spire’, ‘Blue Mist’

**Categories:** Shrub, Perennial

**Habit:** Evergreen

**Height/Width:** 3-5 feet tall and 3-5 feet wide

**Hardiness:** Zone 3 to 9

**Foliage:** Opposite, simple gray-green leaves; 1-2 inches long; panicle stems have a whitish down

**Flower:** 9-12 inch panicles of violet-blue flowers in mid to late summer

**Flower Color:** Light blue to purple

**Site/Sun:** Full sun and well-drained soil

**Regions:** Originally from Afghanistan to Tibet; suited for Mountains, Piedmont, and Coastal Plains

**Comments:** The grayish green leaves are pungently scented which becomes apparent when they are crushed. Drought tolerant and can be pruned annually. Russian Sage is low maintenance, has few plant and resistant to damage by deer.



## **Currituck Master Gardeners Plant of the Month – March 2018**

### **When, Where, and How to Plant**

Russian sage is easily grown in dry to medium, well-drained soils. Soil drainage is especially important, so avoid wet or poorly drain soils. They have good drought tolerance and prefer to grow in full sun. Best flowering occurs in full sun locations and stems are more likely to flop if plants are grown in part shade.

### **Growing Tips and Propagation**

If grown individually, they may require support (either by staking or a peony ring) as the branches may flop over. If grown in masses, they more or less support each other. Once established, very little care is needed. Simply scatter a handful of general-purpose fertilizer or compost (no more than 1 inch) around each plant every other year in late fall. Propagate Russian sage plants by dividing the clumps or taking cuttings in spring. Dividing the clumps every four to six years reinvigorates the plants and helps to control their spread.

### **Care and Things to Watch**

The big care concern with these plants is pruning. The time to prune Russian sage depends on what you are looking for in your landscape. If you wish to give your plants a tidier appearance in winter, then in the fall cut plants back to 12 inches tall immediately after the first hard frost. However, if you wish to create winter interest by allowing the silvery stems and seed pods to remain, then wait and prune in early spring. When new spring growth begins to emerge, prune out any dead branches and cut the old stems back to just above the lowest set of leaves. Russian sage can be cut back annually.

### **Companion Planting and Design**

Admired for its silvery gray, fragrant foliage as much as its lavender-purple flowers, Russian sage makes a bold statement in the garden. Used in a mass or as a specimen, Russian sage can serve as a border plant or as a ground cover for open areas. It prefers very dry conditions, making it an ideal plant for xeriscaping. The bluish-purple blooms, contrasts well with both pink (e.g., phlox, mallow or roses) and yellow (e.g., rudbeckia) perennials. Its fine texture makes Russian sage a good choice if you're seeking contrast with plants exhibiting a coarser texture.

### **Bloom Period and Season Color**

The abundant, spiky clusters of flowers bloom from late spring until autumn, almost completely obscuring the leaves. If the plant begins to spread open or sprawl in late spring or summer, shear off the top one-third of the stems to encourage upright growth. Remove the top half of the stems if the plant stops blooming in summer. This encourages new growth and a fresh flush of flowers.

**Sources:** missouribotanicalgarden.org; plants.ces.ncsu.edu; thespruce.com; gardeningknowhow.com