Educational Garden Plant of the Month

New York Ironweed

Irene S.
RMG of Hunterdon County

New York Ironweed, Vernonia noveboracensis, is a native perennial wildflower in the Asteraceae family. Its natural habitat includes wet meadows, floodplains and riverbanks. It grows well in rich to average, moist soils and needs six to eight hours of sun per day. In the home landscape, New York Ironweed can reach five to eight feet in height with large clusters of deep purple to magenta flowers at the top of the stems. It would be a good choice for the back of a perennial bed or border and would be striking as a specimen plant. It could be used in rain gardens, pollinator and native plant gardens and other naturalized areas. New York Ironweed is a clump-forming perennial so propagation by division every three or four years would keep the garden from becoming too crowded. The plant produces many seeds. To limit self-seeding, some of the flower heads can be removed before they mature into seeds. Cut flowers can be brought indoors to enjoy. The recommended propagation method for this plant is by seed. See FS1329: Native Plant Seed Propagation (Rutgers NJAES).

As the plant matures, the sturdy, hollow stems, fading flowerheads and fluffy seeds turn a rusty color which may be the origin of the ironweed common name. After seed dispersal, the hollow stems can be used as perches for birds or trimmed to 12 or f4 inches to provide cavities for nesting bees. The stems are beautiful in dried flower arrangements. This easy to grow, low maintenance plant is ecologically important, providing seeds, nectar and pollen for butterflies, specialized native bees, honeybees, moths and other insects, hummingbirds and songbirds in the transition from summer to fall. Deer don't seem to like the texture of its vegetation.

The bright purple flowers of New York Ironweed paired with showy Goldenrod, New England Asters, Cardinal Flower and other late bloomers present a cheerful spectacle to the end of summer.

Photos: *Eric B.*, RMG of Hunterdon County