

BWSR Featured Plant

Name: Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*)



A composite flower head with yellow ray flowers and brownish disk flowers

Widely used in gardens and prairie plantings, Black-eyed Susan is a well-known species. In addition to its aesthetic properties it also has many ecological benefits that are often not well recognized. The species is a welcome addition to prairie plantings as it stabilizes soils and provides color while most prairie plants are still small and developing their root systems. The species also provides competition with weeds and is a pollen and nectar source for a wide range of pollinators.

Statewide Wetland
Indicator Status:

- FACU

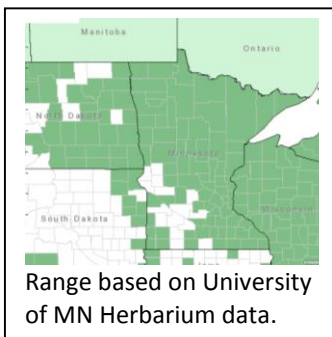


Linear shaped basal leaves

Identification

Fine hairs on the stem and leaves aid in identification of Black-eyed Susan. The leaves are large and oblong (up to 7-inches long) with a stem near the base and smaller and stemless further up the stem. The basal leaves often wither away later in the season. The stems are stout and light green in color, extending up to 2.5 feet tall. Each flower head has around 10-20 yellow ray flowers and numerous dark brown disk flowers. The flowers bloom around mid-summer for about a month and sometimes last into the fall. The plants have taproots and lack rhizomes, as they rely on seed for reproduction.

Range



Being an adaptable species, Black-eyed Susan is found across Minnesota and in 46 of the 48 lower states, as well as most of Canada. It is found in dry and mesic prairies, roadsides, railroads, pastures and in some dry woodlands. It can also colonize a wide variety of disturbed areas.



Linear bracts with dense hairs

Uses

Establishing reliably from seed, Black-eyed Susan is commonly added to native seed mixes for prairies, stormwater ponds, lakeshores and roadsides. Along with other prairie plants such as yellow coneflower and bergamot, Black-eyed Susan can fill a similar niche to thistles and other problematic weeds, providing effective competition. It also provides pollen and nectar to bees, butterflies, native flies, wasps, and beetles. Some insect species that use Black-eyed Susan include carpenter bees, sweat bees, leafcutter bees, long-horned bees, soldier beetles and bee flies. Black-eyed Susan was used historically as a remedy for snake bites, swelling and infection, and to boost the immune system for colds and flus.

Primary Uses:

- Pollinator Habitat
- Weed Competition
- Aesthetics

Planting Recommendations

Planting Methods

- Seed
- Containers

As the species establishes easily from seed it is the most common method of planting. The seeds require cold/moist stratification or planting in the fall to allow winter conditions to naturally break dormancy. The soil should be firm but not overly compacted prior to seeding, and the seed should be broadcast near the surface followed by packing with a roller or cultipacker. Mowing to around 4-6 inches will help plants establish. They can flower in the first season so mower heights should be raised as the plants grow taller later in the season. Some of the taller seedheads may need to be clipped if they are amongst other weedy species that may set seed. Being a biennial or short lived perennial, Black-eyed Susan tends to fade away as other plants mature, sometimes to the dismay of homeowners. Prescribed burning, grazing or mowing can sometimes allow light to reach the ground surface and aid germination from new seeds, particularly in sandy or loam soils where the species is most competitive.



Black-eyed Susan is also available in a variety of container sizes. It is often planted as plugs in raingarden and lakeshore plantings.

Similar Species



Brown-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia triloba*) has more branching than Black-eyed Susan and the lower leaves often have three lobes. The leaves are also pointed compared to the rounded tips of Black-eyed Susan. Image Peter Dziuk, Minnesota Wildflowers

References

Minnesota Wildflowers http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/prairie/plantx/be_susanx.htm

Illinois Wildflowers: http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/prairie/plantx/mdw_anemone.html