



BWSR Featured Plant

Name: Wild Mint (*Mentha arvensis* L.)

Plant Family: Lamiaceae



Recognized world-wide, *Mentha arvensis* is a popular species that possesses an interesting origin story in Greek mythology. Mentha, the name deriving from Mintho, was mistress to Hades. Upon discovery of Mintho, jealous Persephone trampled her until she transformed into a lowly plant to be forever walked on. As one of the few native mint species in the United States, it is a vigorous grower and a favorite of pollinators due to its sweet smell. The sweet smell is reportedly because of Hades attempting to make poor Mintho's fate more tolerable – the more the

plant is trampled, the stronger and sweeter its aroma.

Statewide Wetland Indicator Status:

- FACW



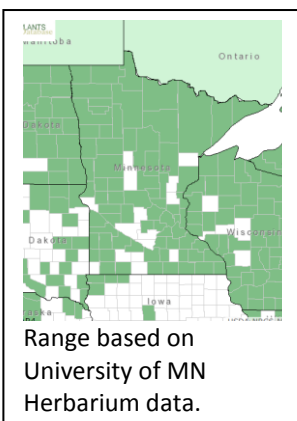
Whorl of tubular flowers

Identification

Sprawling wild mint generally grows between 6" to 18" tall with a square angular stem covered with fine hairs. The stem is stiff with little branching and will vary in color from red to bright green. Its leaves are opposite, egg-shaped and elliptic with a pointed tip and serrated edge. One to two inches long and a half inch to one-inch-wide, these edible leaves are a major reason for the plant's aroma which is only noticeable when crushed. The flowers are tubular whorls that emerge around the axis of the upper leaves. Usually 4 lobed but sometimes irregular, each flower grows to about 1/8" long and can be white, pink or lavender. The bloom period is from July to September in which each flower produces small nutlets containing one 1mm long seed. The root system is vigorous and readily produces rhizomes to create large colonies.



Leaf with serrated edges



Range

This tolerant species can be found throughout Minnesota and much of the United States and Canada thriving in moist locations like marshes, fens, lake borders, moist prairies and grassy areas, but also in highly disturbed soils such as landfills. These plants can easily survive construction operations or other disturbances due to their tough rhizomes, which will produce new foliage as long as they are near the soil surface. As a rhizomatous species, wild mint is considered aggressive when in its ideal location and can be found growing in large colonies when receiving full sun and adequate moisture.

Uses

Mentha arvensis is widely used for flavoring in cooking and for essential oils. The oils are extracted and are used for gastric troubles. In Europe, wild mint is also used for gall bladder issues and coughs. Historically, the Aztec community used wild mint to induce sweating and infusions were prescribed to cure insomnia. Chemical substances like menthol, menthone, isomenthone, neomenthol, limonene, methyl acetate, piperitone, tannin, flavonoids and many others are all extracted from wild mint. Menthol, in particular, is widely used in dental practices as an antibacterial. As a clumping plant, *Mentha arvensis* is successful in providing screening and cover for small mammals and birds with its thick mass, however, the strong fragrance deters most mammals from grazing and ingesting it. The nectar and pollen attract small bees, butterflies, skippers, flies and wasps.

Primary Uses:

- Edible/oils
- Habitat
- Chemical

Planting Recommendations

As long as its preference to sun and moist, rich soil is taken into consideration, wild mint is easily cultivated by rhizomes or seed. Clumps can be separated and replanted in early spring or late fall after the plant is dormant. It's hardy, highly viable, and rarely impacted by disease. Thus the species can easily become more aggressive than desired. Typically, other less aggressive varieties of mint are used in landscaping, or wild mint is planted in independent containers or within borders to keep it contained. It is a desirable species where an aggressive groundcover is needed to compete with weeds.

Planting Methods

- Cuttings
- Seed



Wild mint

Similar Species

Similar wetland species can also have flowers at the leaf axils. Northern Bugleweed and American Water Horehound are very similar in their leaf arrangement and flowers, but they lack a strong mint smell and are less hairy.



American water-horehound



Northern water-horehound

References

Illinois Wildflowers: http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/prairie/plantx/wild_mintx.htm

USDA Plants Database: <http://plants.usda.gov/core/profile?symbol=MEAR4>

Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden:

<http://www.friendsofthewildflowergarden.org/pages/plants/wildmint.html>

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center: http://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=MEAR4

Minnesota Wildflowers: <https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/flower/wild-mint>