



# BWSR Featured Plant

**Name: False Indigo (*Amorpha fruticosa*)**

**Plant Family: Fabaceae**

Statewide Wetland  
Indicator Status:

- FACW

Few plant species are as adaptable to varying environmental conditions as False Indigo. This native, deciduous shrub works with bacteria to fix atmospheric nitrogen to nodules on their roots and the roots of other nearby plants. In this way, it becomes a highly adaptable species, preferring wet, nutritionally rich soil, but able to adjust to infertile, dry and sandy soils. With an ability to grow from an extensive root system, *Amorpha fruticosa* is a great species for stabilizing shorelines.



*Individual flowers are grouped into flower spikes up to six inches long*



*Leaves with many small leaflets*

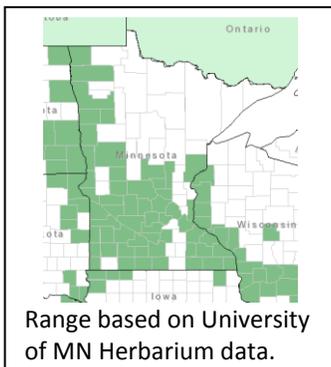
## Identification

False Indigo grows up to sixteen feet tall from multiple stems. It often has an open, spreading growth form that can be too wild for smaller plantings. Older stems have relatively smooth, gray bark with scattered lenticels while young stems have light green bark. The leaves are compound, four to eight inches long and in groups of eleven to twenty five toothless, oval leaflets. The deep purple to reddish brown fragrant flowers have orange anthers and are grouped into flower spikes up to six inches long.



*Late fall image showing growth form with multiple gray stems (photo by Dave Hanson)*

## Range



The species is found along riverbanks, soggy thickets, marshland edges and wet prairie habitat throughout Minnesota's southern and western counties, but also is found across the United States from the foothills of the San Bernardino and the lower mountain valleys of San Diego to south California, Texas, Florida, and the Atlantic coast. Population decline is most often due to habitat destruction as the species is resilient to environmental disturbance once established.

## Uses

The flower pollen and nectar of False Indigo is valuable to bee species including Halictid bees, masked bees, Andrenid bees, carpenter bees, and cuckoo bees. The foliage is also an important food source for caterpillars including the Silver-spotted skipper, the Dogface Sulfur butterfly and the Black-spotted Prominent moth. With extensive fibrous roots and a tolerance for a wide range of hydrology conditions including flooding, the species is valuable for shoreline stabilization along streams, rivers, lakes and stormwater basins. An insect repellent, amorphin, can be derived from False Indigo. Indigo pigment from its flowers have also been used to make blue dye.

### Primary Uses:

- Shoreline Stabilization
- Pollinator Habitat
- Natural Insecticide

## Planting Recommendations

The species is most often installed as seed or containerized plants. The seed pods can be collected in fall when they are drying and turning brown. The seed can be hand broadcast over sites in the fall after collection (followed by harrowing and/or packing) to allow seeds to naturally stratify over winter. They also can be stored and prepared for spring seeding by scarifying (scraping) the seed to help break the seed coat and then soaking the seeds in hot water for ten to twelve hours prior to seeding. Even after treatment the seeds may take a couple months to germinate. Containerized plants will establish most successfully in areas of moist soil and full sun, and may require some weeding until they are well established.

### Planting Methods

- Seed
- Containerized Plants

## Similar Species



Lead plant (*Amorpha canescens*) has similar flowers and the general form of False Indigo, however, it is much smaller, only growing to a maximum of three feet. Its leaflets are also smaller in size, more numerous and compact.

## References

Minnesota Wildflowers: <https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/shrub/false-indigo>

USDA Plants Database: [http://plants.usda.gov/plantguide/pdf/pg\\_amfr.pdf](http://plants.usda.gov/plantguide/pdf/pg_amfr.pdf)

Illinois Wildflowers: [http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/trees/plants/false\\_indigo.htm](http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/trees/plants/false_indigo.htm)