

# BWSR FEATURED PLANT

## VIRGINIA MOUNTAIN MINT

### *Pycnanthemum virginianum*

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Midwest Region  
Wetland Indicator  
Status: FACW



Family: Mint

Virginia mountain mint is sometimes noticed by hikers before it is even spotted, as the leaves and stems release a strong mint odor when they are crushed under foot. Growing in areas of full to partial sun, plants spread by underground rhizomes and form dense masses. The genus of the plant *Pycnanthemum* comes from the Greek words *pyknos*, meaning “dense” and *anthos*, meaning “flower” referring to the plant’s dense clusters of flowers that provide a rich source of nectar for pollinators including honeybees, beetles, bumblebees and native bees.



White flower clusters of Virginia Mountain Mint

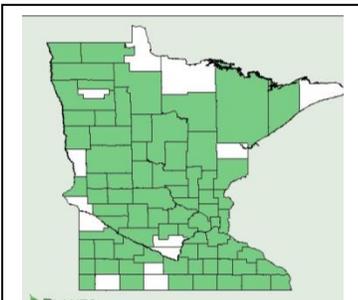
## Identification

Individual plants grow to 2-3 feet tall depending on moisture levels. Stems are green or reddish in color, four sided and have small white hairs on the edges. The hairs along the stem distinguish this species from slender mountain mint (common in the eastern United States) that lacks hairs. The leaves of Virginia mountain mint are linear and without teeth, and attach directly to the stem. The flowers are white with purple spots and are clustered at the tips of stems with 5-50 flowers per cluster. The flowers on the outside of the cluster bloom first around mid-summer, followed by flowers closer to the center. Individual flowers have an upper lip with two lobes and a lower lip with three lobes.



Leaves attach directly to the square stems

## Range



Range based on University of Minnesota Herbarium data

Virginia mountain mint can tolerate a wide range of soils from sands to clays. It is widespread across Minnesota where it found in mesic and wet prairies, wet meadows, fens, roadsides, ditches, and wooded meadows. Across the United States the species is found in the eastern half of the country with the exception of Texas, Florida and South Carolina. In Canada the species is found in Ontario and Quebec.



Fine white hairs are located on the edge of stems

The name “Virginia Mountain Mint” is somewhat deceiving, as the plant does not tend to grow in mountain habitats.

## Uses

Virginia Mountain mint provides good habitat structure for a variety of birds and animals with its dense growth form, and the flowers are an important nectar source for many types of pollinators. The plants are effective at stabilizing soils due to a combination of strong rhizomes near the surface and deeper fibrous roots that provide moisture and nutrients for plant growth. Its aggressive nature allows it to compete with reed canary grass and other weeds in moist soils.

### Primary Uses:

- Pollinator Habitat
- Grassland Bird Habitat
- Shoreline Stabilization
- Invasive Species Competition



The species thrives in mesic prairie and wet meadow plantings

Some pycnanthemum species contain pungenone, a compound that can be toxic to the liver, but Virginia mountain mint contains little or no pungenone and its tea has been used for indigestion, mouth sores, gum disease, colic, colds, chills, and fever, but is not recommended for pregnant women. The buds and leaves of the plant can be also be eaten by humans.

## Planting Recommendations

Each flower produces four tiny seeds that are often dispersed by wind. Due to the size of these seeds it can be difficult to establish plants from seed in field situations. The seeds need to be planted near the surface of the soil, so they should be broadcast seeded. Light harrowing or rolling can be conducted to promote seed to soil contact if doing so will not bury the seeds too deep. The seeds should be stored in cool and dry conditions prior to planting, but do not require pre-treatment such as cold-moist stratification, so they can germinate in the spring without going through winter freeze and thaw cycles.

### Planting Methods:

- Broadcast seeding
- Containers
- Transplanting

The seeds can be started in flats, transplanted into containers, and then planted after they are fully rooted in their pots. For smaller project sites such as lakeshore restorations and bioretention areas plants are usually installed from containers. Clumps of Virginia mountain mint can also be effectively transplanted in the spring or late fall from large clumps on-site. Transplanting often helps improve the vigor of existing clumps. Like other mints, herbivores such as deer tend to avoid the plants as a food source.

The seeds of Virginia mountain mint do not require pre-treatment.

## Additional References

UW-Steven's Point Freckman Herbarium <http://wisplants.uwsp.edu/scripts/detail.asp?SpCode=PYCVIR>  
Minnesota Wildflowers: <http://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/flower/virginia-mountain-mint>  
Illinois Wildflowers: [http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/prairie/plantx/cmt\\_mintx.htm](http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/prairie/plantx/cmt_mintx.htm)