

# Wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*)

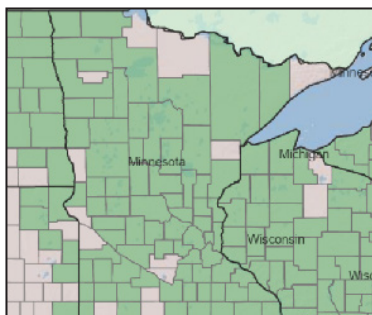
## Family: Mint (Lamiaceae)

**DESCRIPTION:** A widely distributed prairie forb, wild bergamot can tolerate soils ranging from sand to clay. It can grow in dry and mesic prairies, savannas and wet meadows, and can blanket an area in flowers. It is an important species for pollinators and provides a food source for wildlife.

**USES:** Leaves are used in tea and in cooking wild game. The plant's essential oils are used in soaps and lotions. Rhizomes and deep roots make it effective at stabilizing streambanks and shorelines. The species is a seed source for birds, and provides nectar and pollen for hummingbirds, butterflies, long-tongued bees and native flies. The bee balm shortface bee (pictured) relies on wild bergamot.

### REFERENCES:

[Minnesota Wildflowers](#)  
[Illinois Wildflowers](#)  
Strength of the Earth, The Classic Guide to Ojibwe Uses of Native Plants; Frances Densmore, Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2005



Range Map Credit: USDA Plants Database



## Planting Recommendations

The entire seedhead can be collected by hand once it starts turning brown. Seedheads should be dried on screens or tables in rooms with good air circulation. Shake the seedheads in a bag to release seeds. Some seeds will likely remain in seedheads, which can be spread in a field or crushed mechanically or by hand. A screen or a sieve can also be used to help separate the seed from the chaff. Seeds, which do not require cold stratification, should

be broadcast on the soil surface with light harrowing or rolling to ensure good seed-to-soil contact. Bury seeds no deeper than two times their width. Plants also can be grown in flats, and then transplanted into containers. Plants can be moved into the field when their roots fill the containers. Clumps of bergamot can be transplanted in the spring or late fall. Plants can spread aggressively, so they may not be well-suited to small perennial gardens.

Developed by **Dan Shaw**, BWSR senior ecologist and vegetation specialist, and an adjunct professor at the University of Minnesota



Plant Photo Credit: Erin Loeffler  
Insect Photo Credit: Heather Holm

**STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS:** FACU

**ID:** A square-stemmed plant growing up to 5 feet tall. Leaves are opposite and coarsely toothed, somewhat triangular, with a rich oregano-like smell. Leaves commonly develop a white coating of powdery mildew where airflow is poor. Tubular, pink-to-purple flowers are clustered in heads of 20 to 50, blooming from mid-June to mid-September.

### SIMILAR SPECIES:

Like other mint family species, wild bergamot has a square stem and opposite leaves. Minnesota has two varieties of wild bergamot: var. *fistulosa* is widespread across the state, while the shorter var. *menthaefolia* is found in a few western counties. Spotted horsemint (*Monarda punctata*), which is found in dry prairies, has staggered clusters of flowers where leaves attach to the stem.