

Hoary vervain (*Verbena stricta*)

Family: Verbena (Verbenaceae)

DESCRIPTION: With colorful flowers that supply insects with a steady food source from late July into September, hoary vervain thrives in dry, sandy soils and full sun. It grows in upland prairies, roadsides, railroad corridors, abandoned fields and dry, open gardens.

USES: This drought-tolerant perennial is popular in dry prairie restorations and gardens, where it provides pollen and nectar to a variety of insects including skipper butterflies, bumblebees, leafcutter bees, bee flies and **verbena bees** (pictured), which are specialists of hoary vervain and blue vervain. The plant is also a larval host for common eupithecia and fine-lined sallow moths.

REFERENCES:

[Minnesota Wildflowers](#)
[USDA Plants Database](#)
[Illinois Wildflowers](#)



Range Map Credit: USDA Plants Database



Planting Recommendations

Hoary vervain thrives in well-drained soils and full sun. The plant reproduces abundantly by seeds, which can be collected and scattered in fall or cold-moist stratified (refrigerated in damp sand) for two months before sowing in flats. The seeds are tiny and need light to germinate, so they should be pressed lightly into the soil or growing mix but not covered. To prevent hoary vervain from dominating a garden, remove

the flowers before they go to seed or plant it with other species that cover the ground. The plant grows in disturbed areas, which can be managed to encourage or limit its spread. Established plants have deep taproots that make them drought-tolerant but difficult to transplant. Suitable companions include butterfly milkweed, prairie coreopsis, anise hyssop, purple prairie clover, side-oats grama and yellow prairie grass.

Developed by Susan Nelson, botanist and author/curator of [Larkspur Plant Resources](#)

Plant Photo Credit: Susan Nelson
Insect Photo Credit: Heather Holm



STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS: None

ID: Hoary vervain has densely hairy, square stems and hairy, opposite, coarsely toothed, oval leaves with short or no petioles. Elongated spikes of small, five-petaled, light purple flowers develop atop 2- to 4-foot stems. Flowers bloom from the bottom of the spike up.

SIMILAR SPECIES:

Blue vervain (*Verbena hastata*) has narrower, longer, lance-shaped leaves. Its spikes are slender with smaller, darker purple flowers. It prefers wet habitats. White vervain (*Verbena urticifolia*) prefers woodland edges; it has tiny, white flowers.