

School-to-Nature



Bergamot / Bee Balm

Bergamot, commonly known as Bee Balm, actually has many names depending on the color and local tradition. It is a member of the Mint family and is a perennial. Its petals, leaves, and stems are fragrant, and have been used to brew a calming tea for stomach aches for centuries. The red-flowered version of wild Bergamot has been called Oswego Tea, named for the Native Americans who introduced it to explorers and settlers.

It is native to Wisconsin and grows naturally in southern Canada and all of the U.S. east of the Rocky Mountains. It is often cultivated for home perennial gardens in shades of lavender, pink, white, or red. You can spot it in late summer on highway medians.

Wild Bergamot grows to be 2-4 feet tall. It is found in sunny or partly sunny areas of open lands such as prairies, woods edges, along ditches, and on the edges of moist lands. The plants grow in colonies that can become large, sending rhizomes, underground sprouts, to make new plants. It also makes seeds.

The flowers look like fluffy pompons or exploding fireworks. Bee Balm got that nickname for a reason. The flowers are a great favorite of hummingbirds, bees, bumblebees, butterflies, and other insects who seek its very sweet nectar. Flowers of this minty plant are sometimes used in salads and can be sampled out on the prairie.

Bee Balm blooms on Conservancy lands in July and August, and is found at King's Corner and Trout Ponds Prairie. If you find it, pick a single leaf, crush it, and rub it in your hands- it is said to be a good mosquito repellent!

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