

# Eco-Friendly Native Plant of the Month

APRIL 2017

NC NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

REEDY CREEK NATURE PRESERVE

Photos by Will Stuart



## *Aquilegia canadensis* Eastern Columbine

### Hummingbird welcome

Eastern Columbine is one of the first hummingbird friendly flowers to bloom each spring. The red and yellow flowers often appear in March, and continue the show for over a month.

The common name means dove, and the genus name means eagle in Latin, both referring to the nectaries, which resemble talons. The petal tubes, or spurs, hold large reservoirs of nectar at their tips. Insects whose proboscises are too short to reach the nectar in the conventional way, bite holes in the nectaries. *Aquilegia* is the only food for the larvae of the

**Perfect for the Piedmont**  
...*Aquilegia canadensis* prefers dappled or light shade. It mixes well with Foam Flower, Christmas Fern, Trillium, Green and Gold and Heuchera and Phacelia.

columbine duskywing. Hummingbird beaks fit in just fine, with pollen dusting the bird's head as it feeds.

As the name implies, Eastern Columbine is the only Columbine species native to the east coast.

There are multiple west coast species, and because Columbine has a habit of cross pollinating you are likely to find many color varieties in garden stores.

### Landscape Uses

Eastern Columbine is an excellent woodland plant, happy in part shade, or part sun and well drained soil. In fact, too much water is more likely to kill your plant than drought. Another friendly aspect of Columbine is the semi-evergreen crown of dainty leaves, which go dormant in summer. New leaves begin to appear in fall, and overwinter. In spring, the plant shoots to its full 3 foot height.

Beloved by many gardeners, Eastern Columbine is easy to start from seeds sown fresh onto bare, lightly scraped soil. Simply keep the soil moist and free of leaves for about 2 weeks and seedlings will emerge. Once you get a few plants started, Columbine has a habit of self sowing throughout your garden. It's almost a bit of a game to see where it will turn up next. And, this is also a good clue for what type of habitat it favors. The shiny black seeds are found in tan papery erect seed pods.

### Native uses and history

The shiny black seeds are found in tan papery and dangling seed caps. Native Americans used the crushed seeds to treat headaches and control lice, and treated digestive problems with a tea made from the roots.

For more Eco and Bird Friendly pages visit:

[ncwildflower.org](http://ncwildflower.org)

[ncnpssouthernpiedmont.wordpress.com](http://ncnpssouthernpiedmont.wordpress.com)

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