

# Bird Friendly Native Plant of the Month

OCTOBER 2016

NC NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

REEDY CREEK NATURE PRESERVE



Photos by Will Stuart

## *Vernonia noveboracensis* New York Ironweed

### Meadow Magic

From August to late fall, the showy purple heads of New York Ironweed reach for the sky. At 4-8 feet in height, it is tall enough to be visible to migrating hummingbirds, and butterflies looking for nectar sources along their journey. It provides a stunning contrast when paired with Goldenrod, which blooms at the same time. In drier regions, it will establish itself in roadside ditches along with Joe-Pye Weed, another moisture lover that blooms in autumn.

Ironweed is recognized as having special value to native bees by the Xerces Society, as an important source of nectar and pollen. The

strikingly beautiful blossoms also attract many butterflies, including monarchs, American and painted ladies, eastern tiger swallowtails, skippers and sulfurs.



### Aster Family

New York Ironweed is in the Aster family with purple tubular disk flowers found in groups of 20-40 or more per head.

The stems of New York Ironweed may range from rough hairiness to smooth. The alternate leaves are 3 to 10 inches long, lanceolate with serrated edges. This perennial species has a well-developed root system, and the common name Ironweed may have come from the

toughness of the stem and roots. It thrives in most dry-to-moist to seasonally wet soils in full sun, and forms a slowly spreading clump. Another species to consider is *Vernonia glauca*, Upland Ironweed that is shorter and adaptable to drier locations.

### History and Culture

The genus name *Vernonia* is in honor of William Vernon, an English botanist of the late 1600s and early 1700s who traveled widely in North America. The species name refers to New York state, where the plant may have been first collected. This species ranges from Ohio and New York and south to Florida.

American Indians made teas from Ironweed leaves to treat female problems, including relief from childbirth pain, and as a blood tonic. Ironweed root teas were also used to treat loose teeth and stomach ulcers.

Bird Friendly Native Plant of the Month is a joint effort of the NC Native Plant Society and Audubon North Carolina.

