
Wildflower Spot – July 2014

John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

AMERICAN GERMANDER

Teucrium canadense

By Helen Hamilton, *Past-president of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

This native mint has the typical square stem and aromatic leaves. Lavender-pink flowers are in terminal spike-like clusters; each flower as a long, flattened lower lip, a good landing platform for pollinating insects. The plant grows 3 feet tall on stiff stems, producing a good-sized clump of leaves, which are opposite each other on the stem, and pointed. The stem and undersides of leaves are often silvery and somewhat hairy.

While the flowers have no scent, the leaves are bitter-tasting and most mammals will avoid them. In the home garden this plant could be used in a border to discourage browsing deer. But like many mints, the plant spreads by rhizomes and can become weedy if not controlled.

American Germander is common throughout our area, growing in moist thickets, shores, salt marshes and disturbed areas. The range extends throughout most of the U.S. and southern Canada. Flowers bloom from June through August.

The most important pollinators are bees with long tongues, such as bumblebees, miner bees, leaf-cutting bees. Hummingbirds and hummingbird moths also seek nectar from these tubular flowers.

The genus name is derived from *teucrion*, a name used by Dioscorides for some related plant. The common name *germander* was originally altered from a Greek name for ground oak, *chamaidrys*. Leaf tea from this plant has been used traditionally to induce menstruation, urination, and sweating, and also as an antiseptic dressing. ❖



Photo: American Germander (*Teucrium canadense*) taken by Helen Hamilton
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.