

## Plants for Birds: **Wild Bergamot** (Bee Balm, Horsemint)

- **Scientific Name:** *Monarda fistulosa*
- **Height:** 2-4 feet
- **Hardiness:** Zone 4
- **Wildlife Value:** Nectar filled flowers attract hummingbirds, bees, butterflies, and other insects.



*Lou Ann Harris*

Wild Bergamot is a widely distributed Montana native perennial plant that, when in bloom, is a favorite of hummingbirds and other pollinators. It has a showy, fragrant lavender flower-head comprised of terminal clusters of tubular flowers, each containing nectar. Since the native plants are fairly drought resistant once established they are good for water-wise gardens, as well as butterfly gardens, perennial borders, and bird-friendly gardens. Both the native plant and numerous *Monarda* cultivars of various colors can be found in local nurseries. The bright red *Monarda* 'Gardenview Scarlet' cultivar is an absolute hummingbird magnet. Luckily deer and rabbits avoid eating the plants, probably due to the oregano-mint flavor of the leaves.

Historically the plant was used as a medicine by many native American tribes. This included boiling the leaves for teas to relieve headache and colds. Some used it in sweat baths and others made poultices or cured stomach pains with it. Early settlers used it as a relief for nausea.

When planting Wild Bergamot with its lovely purple blossoms and fragrant leaves, here are some things to remember. This native plant flowers from June to September, and can grow from 2 to 4 feet tall. It thrives in full sun and moist soil but tolerates part shade, low to medium watering, and poor clay and rocky soils. It spreads by rhizomes and can be divided after 3-4 years establishment. It is somewhat drought tolerant but needs good air circulation due to mildew. Pinching back the flower heads in summer will promote longer flowering. Any of the *Monarda* species are best planted in clusters of several plants.

Watch for hummingbirds to visit your flowers as well as a variety of insects such as long-tongued bees, bee flies, miner bees, cuckoo bees, skippers and certain kinds of moths.

