

## Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery Success Sheet No. 132

### Russian Sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*)

#### History

*Perovskia* was named by the Russian botanist Karelin around 1840 to honor a Turkestani statesman, B. A. Perovski, who was governor of a Russian city. *Atriplicifolia* means “leafed herb.”

The species is native to Afghanistan, the western Himalayas and Tibet. A member of the mint family, it has squared stems, is aromatic and is called sage for its relation to the culinary sages.

#### Description

It is a semi-woody to herbaceous plant that forms a bushy, upright clump of grayish leaves that are lacy and fragrant. This deciduous perennial can be 3 to 5 feet tall and can spread as wide as 2 to 3 feet. Large spikes of small violet-blue flowers appear in midsummer and continue into fall.

Russian sage offers four-season interest in the garden: grey-green leaves on light-grey stems in spring; fuzzy, violet-blue flowers in summer and fall; and silvery-white stems in late fall and winter.

#### Cultivation

Russian sage is an extremely versatile garden plant and is easy to care for. Cold hardy to zone 4, it prefers a location with full sun. Soil should be poor to moderately fertile and well drained, with a neutral to alkaline pH. Too much shade, water and nitrogen make plants sprawl.

When new growth appears in the spring, the plant should be cut back hard to two buds,

maintaining a height of 6 to 12 inches. This will encourage bushy growth. Taller plants can be pinched or cut by half in May to promote branching and reduce flopping. They can be cut back in the fall if the winter interest isn't wanted.

Bare-root plants are best planted in early spring; potted plants should be planted at the same depth as they were in the pot. Planting can be done from spring until one month before a hard killing frost.

The easiest way to propagate is by stem cuttings 3 or 4 inches long. Planting by seed is not recommended as germination is erratic. Russian sage is a sub-shrub that originates from a single stem and cannot be divided.

#### Uses

One of the most heat- and drought-tolerant perennials available, Russian sage is also deer and rabbit resistant, and attracts butterflies. The open growth and blue-violet flowers combine nicely with many other plants.

A striking companion with white phlox, it also blends well with coreopsis, English lavender and gloriosa daisy. It can be used in mass plantings, as a filler in borders, as an accent plant and as a separator between dominant colours.

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#### Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery

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