Calico Beardtongue

Penstemon calycosus



Calico Beardtongue flowers
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

Height: 3 feet

Spread: 24 inches

Spacing: 18 inches

Sunlight: ○ ◐

Hardiness Zone: 4a

Other Names: Longsepal Beardtongue, Smooth Beard Tongue

Description:

A graceful variety, presenting clusters of bugle shaped flowers in shades of mauve and lavender; ideal for beds, borders and containers; eye-catching blooms contrast nicely against the shiny green foliage; plants are vigorous and very drought tolerant

Ornamental Features

Calico Beardtongue has masses of beautiful spikes of lavender tubular flowers with violet overtones and white throats rising above the foliage from late spring to early summer, which are most effective when planted in groupings. The flowers are excellent for cutting. Its glossy narrow leaves are forest green in color. The foliage often turns scarlet in fall. The deep purple stems are very colorful and add to the overall interest of the plant.

Landscape Attributes

Calico Beardtongue is an herbaceous perennial with an upright spreading habit of growth. Its medium texture blends into the garden, but can always be balanced by a couple of finer or coarser plants for an effective composition.

This is a relatively low maintenance plant, and is best cleaned up in early spring before it resumes active growth for the season. It is a good choice for attracting bees and butterflies to your yard, but is not particularly attractive to deer who tend to leave it alone in favor of tastier treats. It has no significant negative characteristics.

Calico Beardtongue is recommended for the following landscape applications;

- Mass Planting
- Border Edging
- General Garden Use
- Container Planting

Planting & Growing

Calico Beardtongue will grow to be about 3 feet tall at maturity, with a spread of 24 inches. When grown in masses or used as a bedding plant, individual plants should be spaced approximately 18 inches apart. It grows at a fast rate, and under ideal conditions can be expected to live for approximately 10 years. As an herbaceous perennial, this plant will usually die back to the crown each winter, and will regrow from the base each spring. Be careful not to disturb the crown in late winter when it may not be readily seen!

This plant does best in full sun to partial shade. It prefers to grow in average to moist conditions, and shouldn't be allowed to dry out. This plant does not require much in the way of fertilizing once established. It is not particular as to soil type or pH. It is somewhat tolerant of urban pollution. This species is native to parts of North America. It can be propagated by cuttings.

Calico Beardtongue is a fine choice for the garden, but it is also a good selection for planting in outdoor pots and containers. With its upright habit of growth, it is best suited for use as a 'thriller' in the 'spiller-thriller-filler' container combination; plant it near the center of the pot, surrounded by smaller plants and those that spill over the edges. It is even sizeable enough that it can be grown alone in a suitable container. Note that when growing plants in outdoor containers and baskets, they may require more frequent waterings than they would in the yard or garden.