

## NATIVE PERENNIALS

### Bergamot, Wild

*Monarda fistulosa*

Native. Strong plant with square stems has minty scented foliage. Large pink to lavender flowers are produced mid-summer. Good plant for pollinators and butterflies. Spherical seedheads remain on plant over winter. Mildew may be a problem if not grown with good air circulation. Prefers moderate soil moisture. 2-4 feet tall.

**Description:** Like other members of the mint family, this rhizomatous perennial has square stems and opposite leaves. Foliage has a characteristic minty odor. Stems are smooth, little branched, and 2 to 4 feet tall. Leaves are oval to lance-shaped and sharply serrate. Lavender-pink or rarely white flowers are densely clustered in solitary terminal heads in July and August.

**Distribution/Habitat:** Wild bergamot is native from British Columbia to Quebec, south and west to Georgia, Texas, Arizona, and Mexico. Across South Dakota, as elsewhere, it is found in wood, thickets, and moist to medium dry valleys, usually occurring as small colonies or patches.

**Comments:** Wild bergamot, horsemint, or bee balm is usually rated as fair to poor forage for cattle and game and somewhat better for sheep and goats. Horses make only incidental use of this plant. With grazing, the abundance of wild bergamot generally decreases. The abundance of persistent flowers adds pleasantly to the prairie scene, as does the fragrance of the herbage. American Indians used wild bergamot tea to treat intestinal ailments and skin eruptions. Even today some people make a refreshing tea drink from the leaves. Modern medicine uses an antiseptic drug derived from this genus. Flowers and herbage have been used to scent clothes closets, bureau drawers, and pillows.

**Credit:** James E. Johnson & Gary E. Larson, Grassland Plants of South Dakota and the Northern Great Plains. SDSU, Brookings, SD. B-566 (rev.) August 1999. Page 198.

**Photo Credit:** Big Sioux Nursery, Inc., Watertown, SD

