

2010 Perennial Plant of the Year Announced

Baptisia australis

The Perennial Plant Association has announced the 2010 Perennial Plant of the Year--Baptisia australis. Read on to learn more about this outstanding perennial and to find out which plants were the runners up.

2010 Perennial Plant Association Perennial Plant of the Year:

Baptisia australis (Blue False Indigo)

Description

This showy native species has been popular with gardeners for many years because it is easy to grow and offers four seasons of interest in the landscape. In mid to late spring, foot long spires of intense indigo blue flowers rise above the foliage, commanding attention in the spring landscape. After the flowers have faded, the trifoliate, soft blue-green foliage takes center stage, forming a sturdy, upright, shrub-like clump to 3-4 feet tall and wide at maturity. It makes a terrific backdrop for other perennials and groundcovers growing at its feet.

Taking the place of the spent flowers are 2-3 inch long, puffy seed pods which emerge green and then turn charcoal black when they ripen in late summer or early fall. They remain well into winter, providing that much sought after winter interest in the landscape.

Baptisia is a very long-lived perennial. Over time, it expands to form a large clump with a deep, extensive root system. It is best left undisturbed and tends to resent transplanting.

Landscape Uses

Because of its commanding size, this shrub-like perennial makes a beautiful specimen on its own or in small groupings. It is commonly used as a backdrop in perennial borders, but also works well in native or meadow plantings. Deer usually do not bother Baptisia, and it attracts butterflies.

Origin

Baptisia australis is a native species of North America commonly found in prairies, meadows, streambanks, and open woods. Early Americans used this plant as a substitute for true indigo from the West Indies which was used to make blue dye. It was the first agricultural crop ever to be subsidized in America.

Culture

Baptisia australis is very easy to grow and requires little maintenance if sited properly. It grows best in full sun, but will tolerate light shade. If it is planted in too much shade, it may not flower and may require staking. Average to poor soil is suitable, as long as it is well-drained. Once established, Baptisia is drought tolerant due to its tough, deep tap root. No serious pests or diseases are known to afflict this plant.