

Baptisia

Baptisia has a host of common names. From wild indigo, indigo weed, horsefly weed, yellow broom, clover broom, rattle bush to yellow indigo. A native North American wildflower, the false indigo got its common name because the flowers were once used to dye fabric as a substitute for indigo coloring. Some enthusiasts still use them for this purpose today to create homemade blue fabric.



Formal and informal or both

Baptisia lends itself well to both formal and informal gardens; the upright flower stalks have that informal cottage-garden feel, but the plants form beautiful, neat looking, dense clumps, making them easy to add to a formal garden. Great cut flowers, they also work well in a meadow setting or you can plant them in a color theme garden where the pleasing blue combines well with any other plant. Consider these hardy natives for a low-maintenance garden. There are baptisias available in several shades of blue, yellow and a combination of the two. The foliage always looks neat and tidy and is also attractive to butterflies. It has the added benefit of being deer resistant.

Drought tolerant

Baptisia, with its long taproots, is one of the most drought tolerant plants we know. We have planted numerous in a prairie planting. Even after a two-month drought period a couple of years ago, where they didn't get a drop of rain, they were still looking great, though somewhat shorter than in other years. One downside is that it doesn't like to get moved once it is established. As it is also a very long-lived companion, you should decide carefully where you want to plant it.

Seasonal interest hard to beat

Baptisia provides four-season interest. In spring the new growth is interesting and attractive. We get numerous comments from visitors asking about the thick spikes emerging strongly through the topsoil of the bed. In spring and summer the foliage and flowers are gorgeous. Fall and winter interest is maintained through the long green seedpods, which turn shiny black later in the season, creating a dramatic contrast to other plants and winter snows.

Companions

Pair with other late spring flowering plants such as siberian iris, or peonies. Contrast foliage with ornamental grasses. Consider other meadow flowers such as the new yellow echinacea's or asters. For another very pleasing combination try the baptisia variety called 'Purple Smoke' with the attractive yellow blooms of coreopsis planted in front.

Plant for the next generation

Not only does this member of the legume family fix nitrogen in the soil for the future, the dried seed pods of baptisia australis make very satisfactory rattles to amuse the leaders of tomorrow.