

Mertensia virginica

North American Native



Mertensia
(mer-ten-see-a)
Named after Franz Karl Mertens (1764-1831), a German botanist.

virginica
(vir-jin-i-ka) meaning of or belonging to Virginia.



Zones: 5 – 8 **Flower Color:** Blue **Height:** 2' **Spacing:** 18"

About the Species:

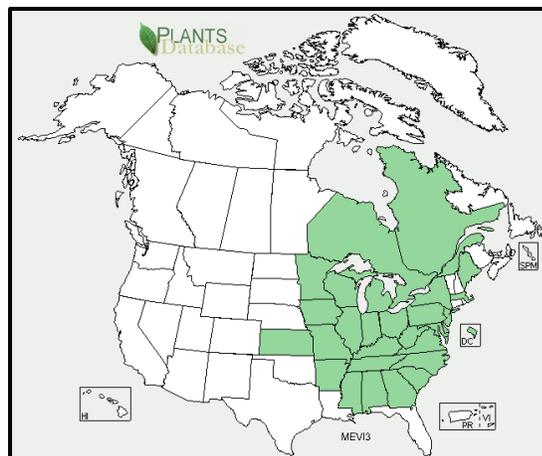
Common Name: Virginia Blue Bells

Family: Boraginaceae

One of the most exquisite of spring's ephemeral plants, Virginia Blue Bells heralds the start of the spring season. The leaves are a lovely purple like "mouse ears" when emerging in the spring and expand to a bluish green. The stems and leaves are sub-succulent (fleshy) and will crush easily. The upright leafy stems will grow to a 1-2 feet high clump and if happy will spread to form a nice colony. The pink buds will open to sky-blue flowers in loose, nodding, terminal racemes, resembling clusters of blue bells. The individual flowers are tubular, 1 inch long and will bloom in April and early May. The pastel colors of the foliage and flowers are soft and soothing. Due to the depth of the flower tube, butterflies, long tongued bees, hummingbirds, and moths are among the few pollinators. A moist humus rich soil is best and a cool root zone is desirable. Avoid planting where water collects for extended periods of time or in soils with poor drainage.

Habitat: Virginia Blue Bells can be found in their native habitat of upland forests, rich wooded bottomlands, floodplain forests, low wooded hillsides, along streams, and in wooded valleys.

In the Garden: Use this spring blooming perennial in the shade border, woodland, perennial border, shaded areas of rock gardens, and native gardens. Virginia Blue Bells are most effective when planted in mass. Ephemerals are the kind of plants that will go summer dormant so it is important to mark the spot where they are planted to keep from digging into them. Plan to plant ferns or other spreading perennials to fill in the space that *Mertensia* will leave vacant.



USDA Plants Database

A Special Place in Time
William Robinson (Ireland, 1838-1935) published 'The English Flower' in 1883. It was illustrated with etchings and contained an encyclopedia list of the best flowers, including *Mertensia*, and ideas on garden design and features. William was an avid gardener & horticulturist, whose ideas were instrumental in the English cottage garden movement. His garden, Gravetye Manor in East Grinstead, England near London is still being visited today by garden enthusiasts.