

GIANT IRONWEED

Vernonia gigantea

As its common name implies, giant ironweed (*Vernonia gigantea*) is the tallest and most robust member of this genus. Giant ironweed is deciduous and dies back to the ground each winter. The cluster of tough basal leaves emerges in the early spring. These are oval shaped, rather coarse and decidedly toothed along the margins. By late spring, the central stalk begins to elongate and by late June to early July, the broad and rounded clusters of flowerheads are fully formed. Each plant may stand 4-5 feet tall, depending on growing conditions.

Flowering occurs in July and can extend into August. Deep rich-lavender aster flowers form small clusters across the crown of each plant. These last for weeks and attract a wide assortment of butterflies and other pollinators - making this an excellent choice for a butterfly garden.

Giant ironweed can sucker and self-sow extensively in the garden and will eventually move around to the places that best suit its growing requirements. For this reason, some weeding is often necessary to confine it to the parts of the garden where it is welcome. Because of its size and height, it is best used in the back of the mixed wildflower garden. Plant it in small clusters of 3 or 5, spaced about 18 inches apart and the plants will spread and form a solid cluster in relatively short time. These can be breathtaking in the right setting.

