



Plant Introduction Program – Plant Release Bulletin #56

Amsonia Hybrid 'Blue Behemoth' bluestar *Apocynaceae* (Dogbane family)

Amsonia 'Blue Behemoth' is the second bluestar cultivar to be introduced by the Chicagoland Grows® program, and it arrives with a booming presence. In well-drained soils under full sun, this cultivar will reach 5 feet tall and 9 feet wide! Despite its imposing size, it maintains a domed, upright habit and can be used like a large ornamental grass as a hedge. Beyond screening, 'Blue Behemoth' would do well where a gardener or landscaper wants to swiftly fill space with few plants and minimal effort. 'Blue Behemoth' is believed to be a hybrid between *A. hubrichtii* and *A. tabernaemontana* and sports long, narrow, dense foliage that confers a delicate but full appearance. Shortly after spring arrives, rapid growth is followed by an abundance of narrow-petaled, pale blue flowers for several weeks into early summer. Plants reach their full size in summer before turning pale yellow in the fall. Like other bluestars, 'Blue Behemoth' provides multiple seasons of interest, but on a much larger scale.

[chicagobotanic.org/collections/ornamental_plant_research/
chicagoland_grows_plant_introduction](http://chicagobotanic.org/collections/ornamental_plant_research/chicagoland_grows_plant_introduction)

chicagolandgrows.org



Origin

'Blue Behemoth' was discovered in 2005 as a chance seedling in the home garden of a staff member of The Morton Arboretum in Naperville, Illinois. Based on nearby plants in the garden and its intermediate appearance, 'Blue Behemoth' is believed to be an interspecific hybrid between *Amsonia hubrichtii* and *A. tabernaemontana*. It was brought to the Chicago Botanic Garden in 2013, where it was grown and trialed for ten years before being selected for introduction.

Hardiness

USDA Zones 4-8.

Bloom Season

At the Chicago Botanic Garden (USDA Zone 6a as of 2024), flowers bloom from mid-May through late June, lasting four to five weeks.

Plant Habit

Most stems of 'Blue Behemoth' grow vertically from a dense crown, while those toward the perimeter of the plant grow at an angle, giving plants a vase-shaped profile and domed canopy. Due to their length, stems are weighed down slightly by rain but never lodge and always return to their upright position once dry.

Growth Rate and Size

While 'Blue Behemoth' is a vigorous grower, it takes several years to reach its full size. In the Garden's trials, plants reached a height and width of 2.5 feet after three years and grew to their final size of 5 feet tall and 9 feet wide after seven years.

Pest/Disease Issues

Late season foliar rust has been found on nearly all cultivars in the evaluation program's *Amsonia* trial, including 'Blue Behemoth'. Fortunately, this rust does not occur consistently and does not appear to affect the plant's health.

Culture

Like other bluestars, this cultivar performs best in well-drained soil in full sun. Until plants are established, watering helps to maintain consistent growth and flowering. Minimal maintenance is required, as plants naturally develop their domed, mounding habit and flowers fall cleanly from plants. Vegetative growth resumes after flowering, completely masking spent inflorescences. Cut back dead stems from the previous year to a few inches in early spring.

Propagation

Shoot tip cuttings root and develop best when taken from vegetative growth early in the season before it is a foot tall. To optimize rooting consistency, treat cuttings with 1,000 ppm K-IBA for 5 seconds and place in a medium of two parts perlite and one part peat. Because of their vigor, cuttings are stuck directly in 2.5-inch pots at the Garden and placed in a fog house with a bench heat temperature of 75 degrees Fahrenheit. Plants initiate roots in three weeks and are potted up after five weeks.

Ornamental Characteristics/Landscape Value

'Blue Behemoth' has appeal for the entire growing season, beginning with its flowers in the spring. An abundance of pale blue flowers are borne on large panicles, contrasting well with the cultivar's dark foliage. Between the number of stems and density of leaves, plants cannot be seen through during the summer months. As fall approaches, foliage turns pale yellow with occasional bursts of deep coppery red. 'Blue Behemoth' is highly versatile in the landscape. Its size and opacity make it excellent for hedging and screening. It would be a great focal point or backdrop in a cottage or woodland garden but can quickly fill space in larger settings like business campuses or recreational parks as well.



Chicagoland Grows® is a nonprofit corporation of the Chicago Botanic Garden, The Morton Arboretum, and the Ornamental Growers Association of Northern Illinois (OGA). The Chicagoland Grows® Plant Introduction Program is dedicated to the evaluation, selection, production, and marketing of recommended and new plant cultivars. Plants selected for the program have proven to be adaptable to the Midwest and are made available to the commercial and retail landscape industry through an international network of growers and propagators. ©2024 Chicago Botanic Garden