

Chicagoland Grows,[®] Inc.

Plant Release Bulletin #45

NEW FOR 2019

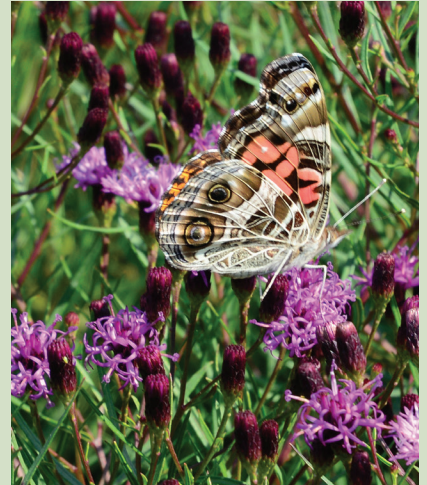
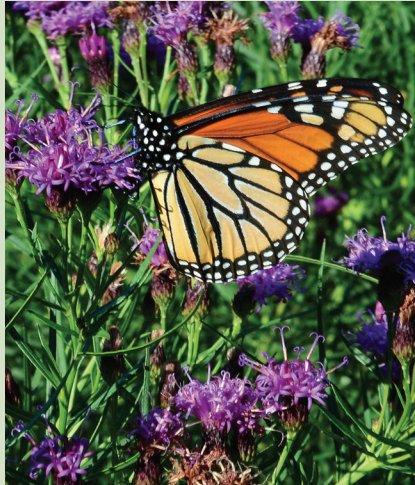
Chicagoland Grows[®], Inc., presents
two new ironweed selections:

Vernonia 'Summer's Surrender'
PP28,475

Vernonia 'Summer's Swan Song'
PP28,556

The native ironweeds (*Vernonia* species) are important pollinator plants in natural habitats throughout the eastern and central United States. They are easy to cultivate, yet relatively few garden cultivars have been developed, no doubt due to their often rangy habits and robust sizes. Dr. Jim Ault at the Chicago Botanic Garden has tamed their wild ways! By combining the best traits of different species, we have developed garden-worthy selections that not only bloom for all of September, attracting a plethora of pollinators, but are more uniform, durable, and disease-resistant than the wild ironweeds. As the heat and humidity of August gives way to the crisper, cooler days of September, how better to celebrate returning to your garden than by growing these new selections? Both cultivars are now in nursery trials. Watch for their availability or inquire about attaining stock for your own production trials.

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***Vernonia* 'Summer's Surrender' PP28,475**

The Summer's Surrender ironweed was selected in 2013 from a 2010 cross of *Vernonia lettermannii* and *V. arkansana*. It inherited the bushy habit of *V. lettermannii* and the more robust plant size, larger foliage, and larger capitula of *V. arkansana*. 'Summer's Surrender' is no shrinking-violet perennial, as it matures into a robust yet uniform and dense broad mound. Three-year-old plants measured 48 inches tall and 83 inches wide and a 5-year-old plant

measured 48 inches tall and 74 inches wide. With excellent resistance to both powdery mildew and rust, the foliage remains clean and attractive all summer and fall. The olive green leaves grow to 5 inches long and half-an-inch wide. Dark purple florets are packed into nearly 1-inch-wide flower heads, which are borne in profusion on airy inflorescences from early September to early October in northern Illinois (USDA Zone 5). A diversity of

butterflies, moths, and bees are attracted to the flowers. Plant in full sun and reasonably well-drained soil. It has proven adaptable to both moist and drier soil. Use this selection in the back of larger perennial or mixed borders, near lake edges and other moist sites, in pollinator gardens, and in any situation that calls for a larger yet attractive and uniform perennial plant.



***Vernonia* 'Summer's Swan Song' PP28,556**

The Summer's Swan Song ironweed was selected in 2012 from a cross made in 2010 of *Vernonia lettermannii* and *V. angustifolia* 'Plum Peachy'. This was the first of our hybrid seedlings to catch our attention, and it never failed to impress in the subsequent trials. Similar in adaptability, bushiness, and fine texture to the popular selection *Vernonia lettermannii* 'Iron Butterfly', 'Summer's Swan Song' grows somewhat larger, has larger capitula, and never lodges due to the elongated and interlocking inflorescence branches.

The stems, leaves, and inflorescence branches also take on a dark red cast in full sunlight, adding to its display. The 1/3-inch-wide capitula with their dark purple florets are borne in profusion for five to six weeks from early September to mid-October in northern Illinois (USDA Zone 5). A diversity of butterflies, moths, and bees are attracted to the flowers. The fine foliage is a moderate-to-dark olive green and measures upward of 5 inches long and less than a quarter inch wide. Three-year-old plants of 'Summer's Swan

Song' measured 28 inches tall by 35 inches wide and 5-year-old plants measured 31 inches tall by 43 inches wide. It has proven adaptable to both moist and dry soil, and has also exhibited excellent resistance to rust and powdery mildew. Use this selection individually or massed in perennial or mixed borders, in pollinator gardens, near lake edges and other moist sites as long as well-drained, and in any situation that calls for a midsized attractive and uniform perennial plant.



General Name

Hybrid ironweeds

Family

Asteraceae (Aster family)

Origin

The Chicago Botanic Garden's plant evaluation program initiated an evaluation of *Vernonia* in 2006, ultimately examining the garden performance of 17 taxa. In 2010, the Garden's breeding program initiated a controlled crossing program focusing on the better-performing taxa to date from the evaluation trials. Parent plants were selected based on plant habits (no lodged stems), attractive foliage, excellent floral displays, and, crucially, excellent resistance to rust and powdery mildew, which were prevalent on many of the taxa under evaluation. All the parent plants and subsequent hybrid selections were grown in-ground at the Chicago Botanic Garden (USDA Zone 5) during the breeding and selection process. Developed by Dr. Jim Ault.

Hardiness

Both selections are likely cold-hardy to USDA Hardiness Zones 4 to 9 and heat-tolerant to AHS Zones 4 to 8.

Bloom Season

Summer's Surrender ironweed bloomed for four to five weeks from early September to early October, and Summer's Swan Song ironweed bloomed for five to six weeks from early September to mid-October in northern Illinois (USDA Zone 5).

Plant Habits

Both selections grow wider than tall, with upright-rounded, dense habits. Fine textured from the fine stems and narrow linear foliage.

Growth Rates and Sizes

Their sizes are listed under the individual selections. Plants may be a bit sparse their first year in the ground, but will produce multiple stems the second year and attain their mature sizes and habits in year three.

Ornamental Characteristics and Landscape Value

Both selections provide multiple seasons of interest, from their excellent uniform habits and attractive foliage all summer, to their five weeks and more of vibrant purple blooms in September and October, when relatively few other perennials are blooming. The winter stems are very sturdy and are an interesting rust-brown color. Both selections attract a plethora of pollinators. Also selected for their excellent disease-resistance to powdery mildew and rust, which can beset other ironweeds.

Culture

Most ironweed taxa are native to mesic and even wet habitats. One of the parents (*V. lettermannii*) used in developing these selections is less typically found in rocky, upland habitats. Our selections seem to have inherited both tolerances, withstanding both high soil moisture and periods of drought. Best to provide a well-drained soil with reasonably uniform moisture availability. Cultivate in full sun and with good air circulation. Both selections form robust fibrous root systems. Utilize mulch around the plants to preserve soil moisture on drier soils. Staking isn't required if properly grown. Only a few stems have ever been observed to lodge on 'Summer's Surrender'. 'Summer's Swan Song' has never been observed to lodge under our trial conditions. The winter stems are upright and rarely break off and become wind-blown. Clean up the old stems in early spring.

Pest and Disease Problems

Both selections were specifically selected for their high resistance to powdery mildew and rust, which beset many of the ironweed taxa evaluated at the Chicago Botanic Garden. Occasionally browsed by rabbits.

Propagation

Both selections can be readily propagated by shoot tip cuttings taken in early June in northern Illinois (USDA Zone 5). Adjust propagation date accordingly for different growing zones. Mid-stem cuttings may work as well, if not too mature. Provide a five-second treatment with 1,250 or 1,500 ppm K-IBA, and stick the cuttings in a standard well-drained rooting medium. Resulting root systems are robust growing, so utilize a larger cell such as an SVD 2.5-inch pot for rooting. Rooted cuttings can be transplanted to SVD 4.5-inch or one-gallon pots for growing on and overwintering.

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.

For more information about Chicagoland Grows®, contact the Plant Introduction Department, Chicago Botanic Garden, 1000 Lake Cook Road, Glencoe, IL 60022, (847) 835-8301, or visit chicagolandgrows.org.

Cover photos: *Vernonia* 'Summer's Surrender' with Monarch Butterfly
Vernonia 'Summer's Swan Song' with American Painted Lady Butterfly
Vernonia 'Summer's Swan Song' (front) and 'Summer's Surrender' (back)