# BWSR Featured Plant

**Name: Obedient Plant (*Physostegia virginiana*)**

**Plant Family: Mint**



*Clustered spike of Obedient Plant flowers*

Producing large, tubular flowers irresistible to bees and hummingbirds, Obedient Plant is a showy species in the mint family. The common name refers to the fact that its flowers can be repositioned manually without moving back in place. In natural conditions Obedient Plant is commonly found in floodplain forests or wet meadows where it can form large masses. The species is best used in larger stormwater, lakeshore, or wetland plantings where its aggressive nature is not a problem for overall diversity.

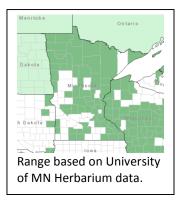Statewide Wetland Indicator Status:
- FACW



*Obedient Plant prefers moist, organic-rich soils.*

## Identification

Obedient Plant can grow up to four feet tall. It usually grows in clumps and spreads by shallow rhizomes. The stems are square (a characteristic of the mint family), smooth, and have nodes that are slightly swollen. Its leaves, however, are laceolate in shape (up to five inches long) and have serrations along the edges. The flowers are clustered on a long spike at the end of the stem. They are similar to Snapdragon flowers in shape and have five distinct parts: two making up the top lip and three making up the bottom lip. Obedient Plant blooms during the late summer and its flowers are long lasting.

## Range



Range based on University of MN Herbarium data.

Obedient Plant is found in the eastern half of Canada and across much of the United States with the exception of the far western states. Within Minnesota it is most common in the northern and southeast counties. It prefers wet soils that are rich in organic matter and is generally found in floodplain forests, shorelines, seeps, wet prairies, and wet meadows. There is also a Narrowleaf Obedient Plant (*Physostegia angustifolia*) that is sometimes sold by nurseries. It is found in Illinois and several southcentral states, but it does not naturally range into Minnesota.



*Lance-like leaves with serrated edges*

Developed by Elizabeth Eshenaur, Andrew Papke-Larson and Dan Shaw

## Uses

Obedient Plant is tolerant to both drought and water saturated conditions, making it well suited to many types of stormwater projects. As it can aggressively spread it may not be appropriate for smaller rain gardens.  It also has a tap root and fibrous roots that make it effective at stabilizing shorelines. The flowers are a source of nectar for bumblebees and other long-tongued bees that can access the nectar, as well as sweat bees that are small enough to climb inside the flowers.  Like other species of the mint family, Obedient Plant is not preferred by deer and other mammals, making it less susceptible to grazing.

**Primary Uses:**
- Shoreline stabilization
- Pollinator Habitat
- Aesthetics

## Planting Recommendations

**Planting Methods**
- Seed
- Bare Root Plants
- Containerized Plants
- Transplants

Planting can be accomplished with seed, bare-root plants, containerized plants, or by transplanting. The tiny seeds (11,000 seeds per ounce) are typically broadcast on the soil surface in areas with part shade to full sun and moist soils. The seeds require a cold, moist stratification, so they are commonly dormant seeded in late fall to allow winter conditions to naturally break dormancy. The species can be transplanted in early spring or late fall. Dividing plants every two to three years will help control the rhizomatous root system and encourage flower development.
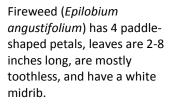


## Similar Species



Large-flowered Penstemon (*Penstemon grandiflorus*) has up to six 2” long tubular flowers, and waxy, oval shaped leaves that lack teeth.



Fireweed (*Epilobium angustifolium*) has 4 paddle-shaped petals, leaves are 2-8 inches long, are mostly toothless, and have a white midrib.



Showy Tick Trefoil (*Desmodium canadense*) has pea-shaped, ½ inch long flowers with 2 yellow spots near the base of the upper lobe, leaves are compound with three leaflets that lack teeth.



Wild Lupine (*Lupinus perennis*) has pea-shaped blue purple flowers with darker blue veins, and compound leaves with 7-11 leaflets.

## References

Minnesota Wildflowers https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/flower/obedient-plant
USDA Pants Database:  http://plants.usda.gov/core/profile?symbol=phvi8