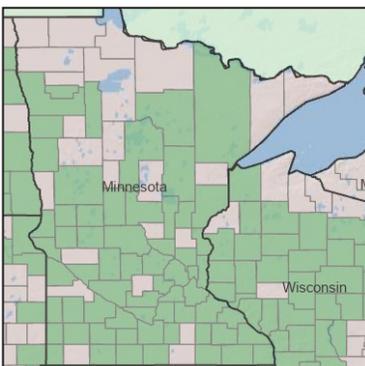


Virginia waterleaf (*Hydrophyllum virginianum*)

Family: Borage (*Boraginaceae*)

DESCRIPTION: Attractive flowers and leaves that appear water-stained make Virginia waterleaf a stunning component of the woodland understory. Found in the partial to dense shade of moist woods and floodplain forests, this early bloomer grows 12 to 20 inches tall. Its elegant flowers provide early season pollen and nectar.

USES: The plant's ability to tolerate disturbance, establish quickly and thrive within a diverse mix of woodland flowers makes it well-suited for restoring woodland understories. It can establish cover on bare areas, such as woodland openings where buckthorn has been removed. At least two specialist pollinators use Virginia waterleaf: waterleaf cuckoo bees and *Andrena* bees. Its nectar and pollen attract many other bees. Tender young leaves are mild-tasting and make a pleasant addition to salads. More mature leaves are edible but bitter.



Range Map Credit: NRCS Plants Database



Photo Credit: Prairie Moon Nursery

STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS: FAC

ID: Lavender, pinkish or white flowers bloom in loose clusters from May to June. The tubular flowers are about a half-inch long, with long stamens. Coarsely toothed, sometimes hairy leaves are deeply divided into three, five or seven lobes, growing up to 6 inches long and 4 inches wide. Leaves' water-stained appearance can fade with age. The main stem is purplish where the leaves attach; it may have flattened hairs.

Planting Recommendations

Partly shaded, rich moist soils are preferred, but Virginia waterleaf can thrive in disturbed areas and woodland clearings. Because it spreads easily, it's often best for larger woodland gardens and may not be suitable for smaller spaces where high diversity is the goal. The species is easily propagated by seed and by clump division; it's also available as containerized plants. Seeds can be spread after they ripen in late spring. Because they require a period of cold, moist conditions, the seeds won't germinate until the following spring. Purchased seed is

often spread onto the soil surface in late fall, and then covered with a thin layer of leaves. Mature plants can be divided shortly after they emerge in the spring, or in the fall when they are dormant. Due to concern about invasive jumping worms, all soil should be washed from the roots of plants moved to another residential property. To prevent stressing plants, exposed root systems must be kept moist during all stages of preparation and planting. Garlic mustard invasions can infringe upon this and other spring ephemerals; it should be controlled as soon as possible.

REFERENCES:

[Minnesota Wildflowers](#)
[Illinois Wildflowers](#)

Pollinators of Native Plants: Attract, Observe and Identify Pollinators and Beneficial Insects With Native Plants; Heather Holm, Pollination Press LLC, 2014

SIMILAR SPECIES: Wild sarsaparilla (*Aralia nudicaulis*) and wood anemone (*Anemone quinquefolia*) grow in similar habitats. Wild sarsaparilla is distinguished by its five leaflets and greenish flowers. Wood anemone has white flowers and smaller, less deeply divided leaves, which are arranged in whorls.