

Purple Meadow Rue, *Thalictrum dasycarpum*



Purple Meadow Rue is a delightful native perennial, 2-6 ft. high, that features blue-green lacy foliage (somewhat resembling columbine) and wiry-branched sprays of tiny, white flowers which bloom for 2-3 weeks in early summer (late May-July).

The mass effect of the tiny flowers is quite showy! Emerging in loose, large clumps of soft, almost feathery sprays, the flowerheads can be a foot or more long, but have no true petals. Mostly dioecious (male/female flowers on separate plants), the male flowers are more fluffy with numerous yellow, thread-like stamens that droop out and become entangled. The female flowers are pollinated by wind and develop into spindle-shaped seeds that turn brown at maturity.

A member of the buttercup family (Ranunculaceae), Purple Meadow Rue has an upright central stem that is unbranched below, but becomes branched above. The stems are usually purplish. The leaves are hairy beneath, alternate and compound: divided into numerous, three-lobed leaflets which become smaller as they ascend the stems.

In the wild, Purple Meadow Rue is found in deciduous riparian woods, damp thickets and ravines, and moist prairies. Bees are sometimes attracted to the abundant pollen of the male flowers. However, this plant is not cross-pollinated by insects as the female flowers do not have nectar. There are a select few insect species that feed on this plant, including some aphids and caterpillars of certain moths. White-Tailed Deer browse the foliage sparingly.

This species is currently being researched, because its seeds are one of the best sources of thalicarpine, a chemical with cancer-controlling properties. Researchers are looking into the use of thalicarpine for leukemia and ovarian cancer.

Purple Meadow Rue can provide contrast and color to any garden. Easy to grow, it prefers dappled sun, well-drained but moist conditions, and sandy to loamy soil. It provides textural interest in designed beds and can be used in naturalized landscapes, around ponds or as a ground cover. It is also good as a cut flower.

A similar species is Waxy Meadow Rue (*Thalictrum revolutum*). However, the leaf undersides of Waxy Meadow Rue are whitened and waxy. When blooming, the crushed foliage of Waxy Meadow Rue has a skunk-like odor, while Purple Meadow Rue is odorless.

More information and photos at:

<http://plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=THDA>

http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/savanna/plants/pp_md_rue.html

http://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=THDA