



Baptisia -Building a Collection!
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Have you ever just looked a group of related plants and thought I need to have them all? Baptisia is one of those plants that growing one variety, cultivar or species just won't do. Our current collection displays 15 different varieties but that hasn't begun to reach the diversity within this plant group.

Baptisia is a large group of plants native to the United States. Commonly known as false indigo, it resembles the indigo plant that produces a dye but with much larger flowers. Belonging to the pea family, new growth emerges in spring, almost like spears of asparagus that give rise to blue-grey leaves followed by spikes of pea-like flowers. Most species have spikes of flowers, some have flowers that cascade below the leaves and some have a single flower borne in the axil of the leaf. Most bloom in spring, while some bloom in summer. It's an easy plant to grow, does best in full to part sun, grows in poor soils and should be staple plant in every garden. They range in size from 12" tall and wide to 4' tall and 6' wide and are possibly deer resistant.

A few species have stood out as mainstream but in recent years, hybrids offering a grand color palette and superior habits have taken the market by storm. Thanks for some nature hanky panky as well as experts in our industry for making incredible plants. Tony Avent, owner of Plant Delights Nursery in Raleigh, NC has dubbed Baptisia as the redneck lupine. Because lupines do not like the heat and humidity but has found Baptisia to be the best alternative. If you would like some extra reading, visit their website and read the article on "Baptisia, Revenge of the Redneck Lupine".

Our collection currently consists of several early spring bloomers. A wonderful perennial, *Baptisia sphaerocarpa* (photo on right) can be found growing along roadsides natively in Texas and Louisiana, north to Oklahoma and Missouri. It has also found a home growing in the Patio Terrace Gardens since 2011. B. 'Wayne's World' (photo below) was discovered growing in Wayne County, NC. Probably one of the tallest of native false indigo, it reaches 4 feet tall and gives rise to bright white spikes of flowers. The North Carolina Botanical Garden have introduced a fair number of cultivars including B. 'Purple Smoke' and B. 'Carolina Moonlight' (photos below). 'Purple Smoke' false indigo was introduced back in the 1990's with its smoky blue-grey stems and flowers. 'Carolina Moonlight' false indigo showcases a stunning display of soft yellow spikes of flowers.





B. 'Wayne's World' (far left)
B. 'Purple Smoke' (middle)
B. 'Carolina Moonlight' (above)

Newer varieties include B. 'Cherries Jubilee' and B. 'Chocolate Chip' both resulted from the wonderful trials at Plant Delights Nursery and Walters Garden. Cinnamon colored flowers adorn 'Cherries Jubilee' while 'Chocolate Chip' has smoky purple flowers.



B. 'Cherries Jubilee' (l) & B. 'Chocolate Chip' (r)

I also wanted to share some unusual false indigos. *Baptisia arachnifera* (photo above, left) is nothing like the previous ones mentioned. This indigo is known as the woolly indigo and with a name like arachnifera, you know it's something special. The stems are grey with white hairy leaves. Growing to just 2' tall and wide, and flowers in summer with yellow flowers held close to the stems and leaves. Our specimen has been growing in our scree beds since 2009. This plant is currently listed on the federally endangered list. Thanks to the works of Plant Delights Nursery, they found a way to grow seedlings making it available to you.

Visit the gardens throughout the months of April and May to find a lot more of false indigos in bloom. You can say that I'm in my Baptisia stage and rightfully so. It's native, tough as nails and performs well in the garden, need I say more?