

Some notes on *Phlox pilosa*.....by Carl Amason

One of the most common wildflowers in the Southeast, in one of its subspecies or color forms, is *Phlox pilosa*. It is found along wastelands, disturbed areas, and even in cultivated areas, where it grows in rather rank abandonment. It grows on sunny roadsides where the soil is an acid sandy type in full sun. In Louisiana, such plants are found almost state wide except on the coastal plains of the Gulf of Mexico. Perhaps the reason why it doesn't grow well there is poor drainage.

When the subspecies are considered, that is best left up to the experts. For roadside botanists (amateur) and just plain common gardeners, this is one of the easiest plants to grow and give pleasing results. It is stoloniferous, making sprouts above ground from underground roots. It is a late spring to early summer bloomer in many different color tones, growing from about six inches tall to two feet tall. As such, it is one of the easiest plants to identify at the species level. The stems are upright, bearing opposite leaves, which can be long and narrow to obovate or oval in shape. The entire plant, except for the roots and flowers are downy or hairy, thus the species name from the botanical term, pilose. The term pilose should not be difficult because many fabrics, flannel to be specific, have a pile or are fuzzy. What child has not enjoyed sleeping warm and snug in pajamas or a nightgown of flannel with a pile—the basic word structure is from the same root. The leaves are medium green and sometimes have a reddish color if they are grown in full sun. The distinct pile or fuzz to the leaves and stems makes the identification a simple process. There is where the simplicity ends. The flowers can vary from size in height, flower dimensions and time of blooming. The clusters of individual flowers

consists of a tube that expands into a five-lobed salverform flower that persists for several days in a cluster that is pleasing to just about all forms of life. Upon close inspection, almost every plant colony has a very slight color arrangement to the entire corolla. Some are pure white, or white with a pink eye. There may be several

shades of pink to lavender to almost light purple. They are always fragrant. For all practical purposes this plant blooms only once a year and it is a delight. Each of the erect stems in a clump bears a terminal cluster of flowers and as such, with many stems in bloom, it makes a showing. In fact, it could be said that they make a generous statement in bloom. It is an excellent butterfly nectar plant and many butterflies readily sip nectar from this phlox as well as any kind of phlox.

Phlox is a prime candidate for roadside plantings, as they are one of the most common wildflowers growing with abandonment. It is easily grown from transplants and from seeds. Once it is established, it prospers and persists in spite of weed and grass competition. The plants can receive some benefit from mowing in the summer after the blooming season is over. It does

not adapt to constant mowing. This is one of the very first plants that a gardener can grow and enjoy. The requirements are minimal and it does well in any well-drained soil. Perhaps this wildflower has one of the most unique problems of cultivation and that is it is too invasive for a mixed planting and the roots will send up many flowering stems. This is a wildflower to enjoy. *Carl Amason is a superior plantsman who lives and gardens near Calion, Arkansas.*



Prairie Phlox, *Phlox pilosa*

photo by Rector Hopgood