Available in an array of sizes and colors, verbena can rock any spot in the garden during the hottest days of summer. Verbena are known for withstanding the pressure of hot, dry conditions. Luckily for all of us, there are many new hybrids that have been bred just for this job!

Verbena is a member of the Verbenaceae family, which is comprised of 800 species in 32 genera, many of them native to the Americas and Asia. This family is characterized by clumps or spikes of flowers on heat-loving herbs, shrubs, trees or vines. Other notable members of this family include Lemon Verbena (Aloysia spp), Lantana, Porterweed (Stachytarpheta spp.) and Sandpaper vine (Petrea volubilis). For purposes of this article, we are focusing only on the annual verbena types for successful home gardens.

Pollinators love verbena! Hummingbirds, butterflies and moths are all frequent visitors. Bees of all types love verbena, too.
VERBENA VARIETIES

- Big clusters of vibrant flowers on the Aztec verbena provide an eye-catching display in containers, beds and hanging baskets. Free-flowering through heat and humidity on a mounding trailing plant.
- The Empress series includes both trailing and semi-trailing types of verbena with eye-catching flower colors that stay a compact 8-10" tall but can spread up to 18" wide.
- EnduraScape™ Pink Bicolor is a 2017 All-America Selections winner. This vigorous and spreading, long-flowering plant can be considered a hardy annual (zone 7) since it thrives in the heat and can taking some chilling temperatures as well.
- Firehouse™ Purple Fizz is top performer at many university flower trials. This medium-vigor purple and white bicolor verbena has a beautiful mounded habit perfect for hanging baskets and landscapes. This variety, and the others in the Firehouse series, have superior powdery mildew tolerance and prolonged summer flowering.
- Lanai Verbena have distinct color patterns that remain strong and stable (and powdery mildew resistant) throughout the growing season. Lanas come in three types: regular, compact and upright.
- The Twister series is popular because of its unique tricolor blooms and long-flowering periods.
- Known for bold colors and a twister pattern, Obession Verbena are one of the few verbena still available from seed.
- Superbena® Imperial Blue™ is a new-to-market variety with an attractive and truly unique blue color on large flowers. This Superbena boasts exceptional branching on a tidy, manageable habit. It’s tough as nails and will continue blooming late through the summer.
- The Beats™ series is a fun, new compact size of verbena. Purple+White is a bicolor bloomer that is a great option for small patio pots and will keep its eye-catching mound of color all summer long.
- Temari® trailing is a range of broad-leaved verbena, which produce vigorous branches that quickly form mounds of color via large bold blooms.
- Tapien® is a fined leaved series of verbenas known for their spreading habit and good cold and heat tolerance and mildew resistance. Tapien makes an excellent ground cover plant and is constantly in bloom.
- The Tuscany verbena, also from seed, have an upright habit perfect for small or medium-sized containers. Big blooms and sunny colors add a bright interest to the garden.
- Cake Pops™ is fun and functional. These verbena have a cute globular flower shape and will not flush. Cake Pops are available in two pleasing soft colors: Pink and Purple.
- Homestead Purple has been around for over two decades. It’s known best for its determination to continuously flower through summer, and it’s a perennial in zones 7-11. It makes an excellent drought-tolerant groundcover.

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GARDENING TIPS

While verbena seed is available, many of the newer varieties that have the desirable traits are vegetatively propagated and can be found as young plants at your local garden retailer in the spring.

Verbena look their best when their soil is kept moist, but not wet as they do not like soggy feet. If the growing medium dries down too much it can cause flushing. Flushing is commonly known as cycling out of color where the plant loses blooms but remains green and leafy.

Verbena plants should be placed in sunny locations, aiming for 6+ hours of direct light. Most species perform well in the ground or landscape. They can also be displayed in hanging baskets and patio containers. For the compact-growing verbena, those work best in pots and do not have the root vigor for garden bed applications. For prolonged flowering, deadhead verbena by cutting or pulling off spent flower heads.

Powdery Mildew (PM) is an unfortunate occurrence on some verbena. The best practice is to look for newer varieties that have a built-in resistance. If PM does appear (it will present as white patches of fluffy fungus on leaves or stem) treat with a neem spray or your favorite fungicide. Catching PM early is the best solution, as this disease can spread quickly and its fungus block sunlight to the plant’s nutrition system, making the plant unable to produce food, which will ultimately cause the plant to perish.

Gardening with verbenas can elevate your landscape design and add texture and color to your patio containers. You'll appreciate their colorful branches and how well they play with other flowers in your garden. Whether you live in northern climates and enjoy them for a single summer season, or watch them return year after year in warm, southern climes, verbena is an excellent choice for plant lovers of all levels of garden abilities.

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