

## ***“Favorite Plants & flowers of the Chesapeake Master Gardeners”***

### ***Monarda didyma* by Toni McKenna**

Common name: Bee Balm

Family: Lamiaceae

*Monarda didyma* is a favorite in my garden as it towers above all other sun perennial attracting bees, hummingbirds, and butterflies. A native to eastern North America and a member of the mint family.

*Monarda didyma* grows in Zones 4-9, prefers a well-drained rich humus soil, in full sun. In hot climates some afternoon shade is appreciated. Bee balm spreads by rhizomes. It will also self-seed and form colonies. To avoid self-seeding, you must dead head flowers after the bloom is spent.



*Monarda didyma* is an herbaceous perennial that grows two to four feet in height, featuring a scarlet red tubular, two-lipped flower. Each flower head has a very showy, red tinged, whorled leaf bracts. The leaves are a deep green, opposite, ovate (3-6" long) with serrated edge on a square stem. The leaves are very fragrant when crushed. Typical bloom time for Monarda is July and August however, my bee balm began blooming June 5<sup>th</sup> of this year.

Monarda gets its common name *bee balm* because the plant resins were used to sooth bee stings. Another common name is Oswego tea. This name is referenced to the plant leaves which were once used by the Oswego Indians in New York State to make tea. Today the leaves are still used to make tea. Also, the leaves of Monarda can be added to a fresh green salad for a cool minty flavor.

Monarda requires some maintenance to keep it healthy. Powdery mildew is a common fungal disease that appears on the leaves as a grayish white powder. Powdery mildew can be a serious problem when monarda is planted in a crowded garden or if planted in too much shade.



It is recommended that you divide every 3-4 years to prevent overcrowding and limit the spreading habit. This will also increase air circulation too which helps to prevent powdery mildew. Remove and destroy disease-infested plant debris in the fall. If all best cultural practices have failed, you can use fungicides. Be aware there are varieties that are resistant to powdery mildew such as Marshall's Delight, Jacob Cline, Grand Marshall and Raspberry Wine.

Photos by Toni McKenna

References:

Missouri Botanical Garden /Plant Finder

Wikipedia

Iowa State University [hortnews.extension.iastate.edu](http://hortnews.extension.iastate.edu)

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