“Favorite Flowers of the Chesapeake Master Gardeners”

Heliotrope by Kathy King

Latin name: *Heliotropium arborescens*
Family: Boraginaceae

I was first turned onto this flower by my sister many years ago. It is an old fashion favorite for a good reason. The scent of it is kind of a mix of vanilla, grapes and cherry pie! It attracts butterflies and pollinators—and fills the garden with sweet perfume. This scent profile made it a suitable contestant for inclusion in perfume and scented products in Victorian times.

Heliotrope is an annual in our area. It produces clusters of small deep purple blooms throughout the summer. It is not tolerant of cold weather since it is a native of Peru. The flower fragrance is the most noticeable at sunrise and sunset and may be enhanced by giving plants some water. Heliotrope does best in rich soil with lots of moisture and sun to partial shade. This plant can grow 1-2 feet tall. Make sure to dead head the spent blooms to encourage constant blooms throughout the summer.

Propagation
Heliotrope generates by seed (annually) and cutting. The cuttings are better to be taken from especially fragrant plants between late spring and early summer. I make sure we always have heliotrope at our spring Master Gardener Plant Sale. (We’re hoping to be back on track for 2021!)

The plant has been shown to be toxic (all parts of the plant) if ingested, but it takes a large quantity over an extended period of time.

Photo by Kathy King
References:
Mason.gmu.edu
Missouribotanicalgarden.org