



## Perovskia atriplicifolia

---

*Perovskia atriplicifolia* (/pəˈrɒvskiə ætriplisiˈfoʊliə/), commonly called Russian sage, is a flowering herbaceous perennial plant and subshrub. Although not a member of *Salvia*, the genus of other plants commonly called sage, it is closely related to them. It has an upright habit, typically reaching 0.5–1.2 m tall (1.6–3.9 ft), with square stems and grey-green leaves that yield a distinctive odor when crushed. It is best known for its flowers. Its flowering season extends from mid-summer to late October, with blue to violet blossoms arranged into showy, branched panicles.

It is native to the steppes and hills of southwestern and central Asia. Successful over a wide range of climate and soil conditions, it has since become popular and widely planted.

Several cultivars have been developed, differing primarily in leaf shape and overall height; 'Blue Spire' is the most common. The species has a long history of use in traditional medicine in its native range, where it is employed as a treatment for a variety of ailments. This has led to the investigation of its phytochemistry. Its flowers can be eaten in salads or crushed for dyemaking, and the plant has been considered for potential use in the phytoremediation of contaminated soil.

### Taxonomy and phylogeny

---

*Perovskia atriplicifolia* was described by George Bentham in 1848, based on a specimen collected by William Griffith in Afghanistan, now preserved at the Kew Gardens herbarium as the species's holotype. The specific epithet *atriplicifolia* means "with leaves like *Atriplex*", referring to its similarity to saltbush. Commonly known as Russian sage, *P. atriplicifolia* is neither native to Russia nor a member of *Salvia*, the genus generally referred to as sage.

### Description

---

*Perovskia atriplicifolia* is a deciduous perennial subshrub with an erect to spreading habit. Superficially, it resembles a much larger version of lavender. The rigid stems are square in cross-

section, and are covered by an indumentum formed by stellate, or star-shaped, trichomes and oil droplets. Especially during autumn, these hairs give the stems a silvery appearance.

The flowering season of *P. atriplicifolia* can be as long as June through October. The inflorescence is a showy panicle, 30–38 cm long (12–15 in), with many branches. Gardening author Neil Soderstrom describes the appearance of the flowers from a distance as "like a fine haze or fog".

Fruits develop about a month after flowering, and consist of dark brown oval nutlets,

## Distribution, habitat, and ecology

---

Widely distributed across Asia in its native range, *Perovskia atriplicifolia* grows in western China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, and parts of eastern Europe. It is found in steppes and on hillsides, and grows at higher elevations in mountainous regions, including the Himalayas. The harsh habitats preferred by *P. atriplicifolia* are comparable to the sagebrush steppe of North America.

## Cultivation

---

Following its introduction to the United Kingdom in 1904, the Irish gardener and author William Robinson was immediately taken with the plant, which he described as being "worth a place in the choicest garden for its graceful habit and long season of beauty."

### Planting and care

*P. atriplicifolia* is a perennial plant suitable for a wide range of conditions. Tolerant of both heat and cold, it is grown in North America in United States Department of Agriculture hardiness zones 3 > 9. It also tolerates a variety of soil conditions. It is also rarely selected as forage by grazing animals, and so is considered both a deer-resistant and rabbit-resistant plant.

### Landscaping

Popular landscaping authors, including Gertrude Jekyll and Russell Page, have praised *P. atriplicifolia* for its usefulness in gardens and landscaping features. It is most commonly planted as an accent feature,

It attracts bees, birds, and butterflies, and contributes color to gardens—both the blue of its late-season flowers, and the silvery colors of its winter stalks.