

Blue Star Blue Dogbane Woodland Blue Star
Amsonia tabernaemontana



We all love blue flowers. Why is it that the colour blue is so rare in the world of plants? Studies have shown that blue pigment is difficult for plants to produce. They may only have evolved to do so when it brings them a real benefit such as attracting bees or other pollinating insects. Studies also show that the scarcity of blue flowers is partly due to the limits of our own eyes. From a bee's perspective, attractive bluish flowers are much more common.

It is interesting to learn through these studies that among flowers which are pollinated without the intervention of bees or other insects (abiotic pollination), none were blue. Also, despite the apparent rarity of blue flower colours in nature, it was observed that under harsh conditions in the Himalayas, blue flowers were more common than expected. In tough environments plants may have to invest a lot to attract the few available and essential bee pollinators. These blue flowers appear to exist when competition for pollination services is high.

Whatever we know or don't know about the colour blue in flowers, there is no doubt that Blue Star (*Amsonia tabernaemontana*) is thriving in the open woodlands and plains of eastern North America. Blooming in mid-spring, this adaptable medium-sized perennial tolerates different soil and light conditions. And it attracts various long-tongued insects, including the large carpenter bee and hummingbird moths. A long-living plant, Blue Star has one more plant strategy that keeps it going. It is resistant to damage by deer and other herbivores. Its foliage contains a toxic white latex.

One of the most beautiful native species, its light blue flowers are followed by elongated, pod-like fruits containing hard, black seeds. Another plus is its narrow, willow-shaped leaf turns yellow in fall. The pictures are of the Blue Star in VanDusen right near the floating bridge in the Eastern North American Garden.



<https://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/PlantFinderDetails.aspx?taxonid=276088&isprofile=1&gen=Amsonia>

<https://phys.org/news/2021-01-mystery-blue-nature-rare-bee.html>