

Amsonia!

I studied plants for many years before I had a space to plant them, and there were certain plants I was itching to grow. The perennial at the top of the list was *Amsonia hubrichtii* (Arkansas blue star). I'd read so much about its stunning fall foliage and blue flowers I couldn't wait to see what it would do! But... after I planted it and watched it grow, I found myself disappointed. I knew amsonia could take a while to establish, but even years in my plants weren't as magical as the pictures I saw online. 😞

As time went by (and I got over my disappointment(!)), I ended up adding other amsonia species and I tried Arkansas blue star in different situations where it performed better... Over and over, I've run into (uncommon) problems with these plants – but in spite of these hiccups I've found myself liking them more and more – and now I'm back to my fan girl status! <3

Even in a yard like mine where they don't quite live up to the hype – they still have a pile of positive traits that make them exceptional garden plants! 😊



Amsonia hubrichtii with *Packera tomentosa*, *Penstemon digitalis* 'Husker Red', *Callirhoe alcaeoides*, and *Muhlenbergia capillaris*

All the amsonias have charming blue flowers in spring that attract pollinators. They have great texture during the growing season, are an easy height for general garden use, can grow happily in the same spot for years without a lot of fussing and division, and they're deer resistant! They are also all known for sporting yellow fall foliage... but in my yard both *Amsonia ciliata* and *Amsonia tabernaemontana* are usually eaten in late summer (possibly by coral hairstreak caterpillars?) so usually only *A. hubrichtii* has foliage left to show off. 😊

Amsonia hubrichtii (Arkansas bluestar) has the finest texture of the Amsonias. Though I've seen some sources say that this plant can take some shade – the difference between my successful later plantings and my original meh planting is light - so I wouldn't recommend growing this in anything less than full (blazing parking lot level) sun. Not only is the form better on plants growing in full (full!) sun, the fall foliage is better too; and all of the other amsonias do just fine with lower light levels – so you can just plant one of them instead. 😊

A. hubrichtii is supposed to be drought tolerant when established – so it would be the best choice if you're looking for this trait. The other amsonias are adapted to wetter conditions and though they do well in regular garden soil – they'll probably need some additional water during dry spells or you can site them in a wetter spot (e.g., rain gardens).

Amsonia ciliata (Fringed blue star; pictured right) has a texture between *A. hubrichtii* and *A. tabernaemontana*. In my yard, it grows happily in part sun & unamended soil.

I've never cut these plants back and they've never flopped, but many people recommend cutting amsonia back after flowering for denser growth and this may be a very smart tactic depending on your growing conditions and personal preferences. 😊 (If you do, be cautious of the milky sap they produce ← which irritates some people).

My kitchen window looks out on these plants and when I'm washing dishes this time of year I watch for bumblebees (and in early winter I look for cardinals that sometimes stop by to eat the seed pods).



Amsonia tabernaemontana (Eastern bluestar) blooms



quite a bit earlier than *A. ciliata* or *A. hubrichtii* (and since all these pictures were taken on the same day, I'm not showing you how pretty this plant is in bloom)!

There's a great "Know Your Natives" article available on this plant – so be sure to check out:

<https://anps.org/2018/04/23/know-your-natives-eastern-bluestar/> for more info.

In my yard – this species has had intermittent issues with rust (whether it's related or not – it's fared better the longer I've had it). If you do end up with rust, you can just cut off and toss the impacted growth – and it should bounce back without too much difficulty.

Amsonia illustris (Shining blue star or Ozark blue star) is another central Arkansas native that's supposed to be quite similar to *A. tabernaemontana*. (I planted it for the first time this year).