

A common flowering plant in the sunny edges of the lowlands and swampy areas of southern and eastern Louisiana is *Pontederia cordata*, commonly known as pickerel weed. It has a wide native range, from Nova Scotia, Canada, along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts well into Texas, up the Mississippi River lowlands and major streams and lakes. It grows well in St. Louis, Missouri and has become a major plant of edges of ponds and bogs. It is much appreciated in European gardens, also. In its native range, it is beautiful in flower though in parts of South Louisiana, can be invasive, especially where it competes with Louisiana irises and other bog plants. The common name, pickerel weed, implies that it is hardy as far north as the region the fish, pickerel, is common. Maybe its growth is a favorite habitat for that fish.

It is a plant always of wet, marshy places and while it must be easily grown from seed, it is most frequently transplanted, very easily from divisions. Pickerel weed can grow in water up to one foot deep, or there about. This is not a plant for dry borders, or places that will dry out in the heat of summer.

There are two leaf forms. The wide leaf form with broad, heart-shaped leaves gives the plant its species name, *cordata*. The narrowed-blade type is listed as variety *angustifolia*. Both grow equally well, perhaps too well for some people who keep a garden that shows that man(or woman), is in control of growing things. For a large area with little care, it is truly a show of green foliage and blue flowers throughout the warm growing season, and it does grow! With regular deadheading, it will continue to bloom well into the season when it does not grow. Freezes will turn the green leaves to a brown broken leaf and stem border of wet areas, but with spring weather, it quickly resumes its growing and blooming. Since pickerel weed is usually grown for its blooming ability, it is not a disappointment. It has tall dense spikes of morning flowers that quickly wilt by afternoon on hot summer days. The spikes have many flower buds that give a continual show in much of the warm weather. Flowers are generally described as blue, but with purplish overtones. Not a true-blue color perhaps, but is more blue than so many other blossoms called "blue." It has about equal segments of six parts, common to most monocot plants. Since the flowering spikes are well above the foliage, it makes a delightful show in the garden, or more so in large natural areas. In the garden, it is usually grown in large sunken pots in pools, where it is contained or in larger natural ponds, where it can be controlled. In such natural areas, it is a favorite hiding spot for so many forms of wildlife, some desirable and some undesirable. There is a white flowered form that grows equally well and while the white flowers cannot be described as pristine or radiant white, it is well worth growing. The seeds of both forms germinate readily in the muck of pond edges. The white flowering forms do not always come true to white, giving some bluish colored forms, so it is best grown where the bluish flowered plants can be removed. The seeds and leaves are eagerly eaten by wildlife. Again, some wild animals are welcomed and others are not. Generally in a yard or garden that is not a big control problem.

Pickerel weed is so easily grown, perhaps that virtue is also its downfall. It must be grown as an aquatic plant and that keeps it from many dry gardens. As its relatives, the two invasive water hyacinths of tropical origin are the better known. Where winters are cold enough to kill or keep water hyacinths under control, it is appreciated, also. In the rice growing areas of the mid-South, there are several annual species of relatives. Relationships are obvious to those who have eyes for seeing such things. Pickerel weed is a very beautiful native suitable for growing in a wetland, bog, or pond condition in the garden. Carl Amason is a superior plantsman who gardens near Calion, Arkansas.