Favorite Plants of the Chesapeake Master Gardeners

Short-toothed Mountain Mint (*Pycnanthemum muticum*)

Perennial Plant Association (PPA) 2025 Perennial Plant of the Year®

Habitat:	Bogs, fens, wet meadows, low woodland areas and clearings	
Exposure:	Full sun to part shade	Soil: Average, dry to moist, well-drained
Height:	1 – 3 ft.	Hardiness: Zones 4a – 8b
Bloom time:	Mid-June through July	Winter interest: Seed heads and nesting habitat
Care:	Easily divided; once established is drought tolerant; no serious disease or insect pests	
Noteworthy:	Host plant for the gray hairstreak butterfly; can be used in rain gardens	

Short-toothed Mountain Mint is a rhizomatous, herbaceous perennial in the Lamiaceae (mint) family, native to the eastern United States—including Virginia's Coastal Plain. Though it typically stays at or below 3 feet in height, it spreads vigorously under favorable conditions, making it an excellent choice for large garden beds or areas in need of ground coverage. In my own garden, I combine this plant with equally vigorous spreaders such as wild bergamot (*Mondara fistulosa*) or strong clumpers like Hubricht's bluestar (*Amsonia hubrichtii*), black-eyed Susans (*Rudbeckia* spp.), or switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*). If you need to limit the spread of this plant, its shallow rhizomes allow for easy root pruning or pulling.

This species of mountain mint offers more than just utility—it's a visual and sensory delight. Its delicate clusters of two-lipped, whitish-pink flowers are framed by striking silvery bracts that are eye catching when planted en masse. The foliage releases a refreshing menthol-like aroma when rubbed or crushed, adding another layer of sensory appeal. But this same aroma, while it may delight the gardener, serves to make this plant less attractive to herbivore browsing. Adding to the long list of positive attributes of this plant, it can be used in cut flower arrangements.

But its true superpower lies in its ability to support pollinators. From bumble bees to sweat bees to wasps, flies, and butterflies, short-toothed mountain mint draws in a delightful array of pollinators. According to the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, mountain mint ranks among the top plants

for promoting both the abundance and diversity of pollinating insects. Xerces designates *Pycnanthemum* as a pollinator "superfood," serving as a nectar source, host plant, and nesting site for beneficial insects. And, a three-year study conducted by Penn State Extension and Master Gardeners found it to be the single most attractive plant to pollinators among 86 native species and cultivars tested.

As a lifelong gardener, I'm continually amazed by its magnetic pull. I eagerly anticipate its blooming each year so I can witness the spectacle! Whether you're cultivating a pollinator haven or simply seeking a resilient, fragrant groundcover, short-toothed mountain mint is a standout choice that brings life, beauty, and ecological value to any garden.

Sources: NC State Extension plants database; Missouri Botanical Garden Plant Finder; Digital Atlas of the Virginia Flora; Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation; Virginia Native Plant Society; Penn State Extension (extension.psu.edu/mountain-mint-a-pollinator-powerhouse)

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