

Amorpha fruticosa L.
(*Amorpha occidentalis*)

False Indigo

Other Common Names: Bastard Indigo, Desert Indigobush, Dull-Leaf Indigobush, Indigo Bush.

Family: *Fabaceae* (*Leguminosae*).

Cold Hardiness: Highly variable; with proper provenance selection, useful from USDA zones 4 to 10.

Foliage: Deciduous; alternate; odd pinnately compound; 2½ to 8 long; fairly pubescent to nearly glabrous depending upon the variety; leaflets — the number of leaflets reported per leaf vary widely from as few as seven to as many as thirty five depending on the variety and conditions; oblong-ovate to elliptic; ¾ to 1¼ (1½) long; obtuse to shallowly mucronate at the tip; base broadly acute to rounded; petiolule very short; tiny hastily deciduous lanceolate stipules flank the ½ to 1 long petiole of new leaves; blades medium green in summer color with little or no fall color.

Flower: Handsome bottle brush-shaped terminal spike-like racemes; to 10 long; singly or in clusters; the local variety with more slender spikes than are common on the species type; individual flowers with the petals fused; calyx typically dark purple, but paler blues and occasional white flowering forms are reported; ten exerted stamen with prominent golden yellow to orange anthers are present; mid-spring to early summer; attractive; aromatic.

Fruit: A small pod; ¼ long; slightly curved; glandular; late spring to summer.

Stem / Bark: Stems — medium thickness; pubescent to nearly glabrous; green then turning brown; shallowly grooved; vertical lenticels sparse and light tan; Buds — tiny; 1/32 to 1/16 long; green to brown; few bud scales present; Bark — gray-brown to brown.

Habit: The habit is highly variable and site responsive; plants vary from 3 to 8 (10) tall suckering mounds with an equal or greater spread of rather sparsely branched limbs; medium in summer to moderately coarse in winter texture.

Cultural Requirements: Full sun to partial shade; tolerates a range of soils types including those that are alkaline, but False Indigo grows best in a light sandy soils with some available moisture; tolerant of a range of soil moisture conditions as long as the soils are not permanently wet; often found in nature near waterways, but not in soggy soils.

Pathological Problems: None particularly serious; unfortunately this plant is a preferred food by rabbits.

Ornamental Assets: Wide site adaptability; handsome flowers.

Limitations & Liabilities: False Indigo can become weedy under favorable conditions; rather coarse textured in winter; **poisonous** to livestock.

Landscape Utilization: Low maintenance shrub borders; naturalizing; xeriscapes; low water use landscapes; transitions to native plantings; can be treated as if it were a herbaceous perennial with annual pruning; butterfly gardens.

Other Comments: Probably at its best as a good low maintenance plant for transition and native landscapes; may lack year-round appeal for more formal gardens, particularly in winter; the genus name means without form and refers to the petal of the flower; .

Native Habitat: This species covers a large portion of North America ranging from Canada to Florida to Mexico and California.

Related Taxa: Multiple varieties occur in North America, with *Amorpha fruticosa* L. var. *occidentalis* (L. Abrams) T. Kearney & R. Peebles being one of the more commonly encountered forms in West Texas, while *Amorpha fruticosa* L. var. *angustifolia* Pursch, Midwest Indigo Bush *Amorpha*, is more common in the eastern portion of our region ; the cultivar 'Dark Lance' is an handsome improved

flowering form selected by Prof. Benny Simpson; other selections are reported with white flowers, crisped leaves, or a dwarf form; several other closely related species are native to our region.

References: Diggs et al., 1999; Enquist, 1987; Hunter, 1995; Lynch, 1981; Martin and Hutchins, 1986; Miller, 1991; Nixon, 1985; Petrides, 1972; Powell, 1998; Thornton, 2002; Tull and Miller, 1991; Vines, 1960.

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