

A Xeriscape Treasure

Agastache, also known as hummingbird mint, or anise-hyssop is an interesting, scented addition to the xeriscape.

Most agastache falls in a range of pink, orange, and light purple, often with more than one colour on the same flower. For example, the Red Fortune anise-hyssop (*A. mexicana*) pictured is two shades of pink. Apache Sunset (*A. rupestris*) is pink and orange.

All agastache has scented leaves: to me, they smell like licorice; others smell root beer. Fortunately, the deer do not like the scented leaves and prefer to pass by to browse elsewhere.

Agastache is considered a perennial herb; both the leaves and flowers can be eaten. The flowers attract hummingbird, bees and butterflies.

Blue Fortune hyssop (*A. foeniculum*) grows three feet tall and approximately two feet wide so allow plenty of room for it to shine. Although it is a herbaceous perennial and dies back completely during dormancy, it reappears early in the spring and grows rapidly. It has medium green leaves.

Red Fortune is not quite as large, reaching two to three feet high and one and one-half to two feet wide at maturity. Apache Sunset is slightly smaller. Both these species have smallish grayish-green leaves.

Perhaps because of its rapid growth, anise-hyssop in small nursery containers really do not do it justice. Popped in the ground though, they quickly meet your expectations. Consider increasing the mulch over the winter to provide some additional insulation from the cooler temperatures.

Agastache blooms from early summer to early fall. If the first flush of flowers is removed on red or blue fortune anise-hyssop (we actually cut the plant back about one foot on the blue fortune), the plant responds nicely and blooms again – less prolifically, but provides attractive late summer colour nevertheless.

Cultural requirements include a hot, dry and sunny climate. Agastache thrives in a spot exposed to the sun for at least six hours per day and must be planted in well-drained soil. It will tolerate some extra moisture (such as the extra rain we've had this spring and summer), but does best without regular supplemental watering.

It will not survive wet roots during the winter; be sure not to plant it near a downspout or where it may get accumulated snow.

Agastache is easily dividable in the spring and responds well to being transplanted.

If you don't have anise-hyssop in your garden and can satisfy its cultural needs, give it a try. You will not be disappointed.

Toni Boot is the founder and owner of Grasslands Nursery in Summerland, a nursery specializing in sustainable gardening. Comments and suggestions for future Water Wisdom columns may be directed to her at grassnursery@telus.net. Visit www.grasslandsnursery.ca to join our blog discussion.