

SWAMP ROSE MALLOW OR WILD COTTON
Hibiscus moscheutos ssp. *lasiocarpos* (Cav.) O.J. Blanchard

Description: An upright, perennial that can grow to 6 feet in height with hairy to glabrous woody stems that die back to the ground in the winter. The alternate leaves are triangular to ovate in shape, rarely with two lobes near the base, densely covered with soft hairs; undersides of the leaves are gray to gray-green in color. The flowers, produced from May to September, are held in clusters near the top of the plant; each flower is up to 6 inches across, petals white to pink, with a dark purple spot at the base; stamens are fused together and extend outwards beyond the petals. The fruit is a capsule covered with long, stiff hairs; seeds are rounded and brownish.

Uses: This plant is used mainly for landscape beautification. It has potential for use in water gardens, along ditches, and in other wetland sites. It can also be planted in gardens on non-wetland soils, if additional water is supplied during the establishment year and during times of drought.

Site adaptation: Swamp rose mallow is adapted to areas with fine to medium textured soils that often have standing water during part of the year. In Mississippi, it is most commonly found in the Delta. Plants grow best in full sun, but can tolerate partial shade.

Cultural Specifications

Method of establishment: Seeds or transplanted seedlings.

Planting time: Seeds and transplants are planted in the spring, after all danger of frost is past. On some wetland sites, seed sowing may need to be delayed until early summer, to allow water to recede and expose the soil surface.

Seedbed preparation: Seedbed preparation may be difficult or impossible when sowing seeds in wetland sites. Seeds should be broadcast after water levels subside. For planting on non-wetland sites, a firm seedbed is required and cultipacking or harrowing prior to planting is recommended.

Planting rate and method: Seeds can be broadcast or drilled approximately 1/4 inch deep in the soil. The recommended planting rate is 5-7 grams per 100 square feet (5-7 lb/acre), however, in most instances, swamp rose mallow will be planted in small groupings on specialized sites rather than on large acreages. Cultipacking after broadcast planting is recommended when possible to incorporate the seeds into the soil. Transplant spacing should be 2-3 feet between plants.

Greenhouse production: Seeds should be planted indoors or in a cold frame in late winter. The potting medium should be sterile and well drained. The seeds should be covered with approximately 1/4 inch of potting soil and the medium kept moist until germination. Seedlings elongate rapidly after germination. Transplant the seedlings into larger containers when they have 3-4 true leaves. A weekly application of a soluble complete fertilizer is recommended. Seedlings are ready to plant on the growing site 8-10 weeks after sowing. Prior to planting, seedlings

should be hardened-off by placing them outdoors in a shady location for approximately one week.

Fertilizer requirement: Apply according to soil test recommendations. If not available, a rate of 2.8-3.5 oz per 100 square feet (75-100 lb/acre) of ammonium nitrate on wetland soils and 3.5-5.5 oz per 100 square feet (100-150 lb/acre) of 13-13-13 on normal soils should be applied after the seedlings are established and annually thereafter.

Companion plants: Swamp rose mallow does not begin growth until fairly late in the spring, so it can be combined with spring flowering plants. Some additional species that may be suitable for planting with swamp rose mallow are bur marigold, plains coreopsis, Ludwigias, cardinal flower, and mistflower.

Management

Mowing: The dead stems can be cut back before mid to late March when the plants begin to send up new shoots. Non-selective herbicides such as Gramoxone or Roundup can also be applied prior to shoot emergence to control weeds. Mowing later in the growing season is not recommended.

Seed production: Seeds can be harvested from August to September, after the capsules open to reveal the reddish-brown seeds. Cut the capsules from the plants and allow them to dry before trying to shake the seeds free. Generally, a large percentage of seeds will be infested with weevils and may require treatment with an insecticide (see Phillips, 1985).

Additional information: Phillips, H. R. 1985. Growing and propagating wild flowers. Univ. of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill.

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