

April is Plug Planting Time!

The fastest way to establish a native plant community in a high visibility area is through the installation of overwintered native plugs in April and early May. Planting at this time is highly effective because the plants typically have a surge of root growth right after they break dormancy in early spring. The result is rapid establishment and a reduced need for watering.

When overwintered perennial plants initiate growth in the early spring, they do so with a growth spurt of both top and root growth. If the plants are put into the ground just as this spurt is initiated, the roots quickly grow deep into the soil, rapidly becoming established within a few weeks of planting.

Another great advantage of early plugs installation is the high soil moisture and typically generous rainfall in April and May. Often plants installed at this time may be watered in and require little if any additional watering. Since the rapid root growth is in balance with the top growth, the plants become independent of the need for watering much sooner than plants that already have lush top growth when installed later in the season.

For these reasons, a plug installed in April will often grow larger by July than a gallon plant installed later in the spring. At Spence Restoration Nursery, we over winter around 600,000 plugs every year in preparation for spring sales. We urge our customers to take advantage of this early availability to gain impressive results through April installation.

Plant Feature: Smooth Beardtongue (*Penstemon calycosus*)

An attractive and underused perennial, *Penstemon calycosus* is a rather common plant of open woods and woodland edges here in central Indiana. It occurs in both floodplain and upland situation. It is similar in form and stature to the better known Foxglove Beardtongue (*Penstemon digitalis*), but the flowers are washed with pink or purple rather than the pure white of *Penstemon digitalis*. Smooth Beardtongue typically reaches 18 to 24 inches in height. The flowers are quite variable in the amount of pigment, ranging from pale pinkish to a darker violet color. In cultivation, it grows equally well in dappled shade or full sun, however the flower color is more intense in sunnier locations. In a restoration, *Penstemon calycosus* grows well in upland or floodplain woodland restorations with associates in our [Upland Woodland Mix](#) or our [Forested Wetland Mix](#).

