

Wildflower in Focus

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Pasture Rose (Low Pasture Rose, Carolina Rose)

Rosa carolina L.
Rose Family (*Rosaceae*)



While many of us curse the invasiveness of the notorious multiflora rose, our native roses, which are less prolific, often get overlooked. The pasture rose graces open woodlands, fields and roadsides of Maryland with late spring-early summer flowers. In MNPS member Dr. Sara Tangren's words: "I've seen pasture rose growing in the channery loams under power lines in Baltimore County, on the serpentine site in Potomac, and in moist sandy soils in Charles County. Growing them at the farm I learned that they are fragrant, especially so in the morning. The buds are delicate and beautiful, classic rose buds. They are strongly rhizomatous in coarse soils, really too aggressive for most formal gardens, but in soils like the ones I'm cursed with at home in Takoma Park, they stay put for years on end. I think their spreading nature

suggests they may have some value for soil stabilization."

In response to Sara's remarks, geologist Tony Fleming wrote: "Your observations demonstrate the remarkably wide range of soil conditions this species can tolerate. Yesterday evening we went for a hike [in Indiana] and found it growing together with swamp rose (*Rosa palustris*) on some pretty damp, mucky ground along one of our lake borders." Tony also said he finds pasture rose growing in and near Maryland: "I think this species is adventitious in woodland settings and highly dependent on disturbance. It probably has greatly expanded its range in response to human activity, colonizing edges and clearings. It is fairly common in Rock Creek Park...."

Flowers: Large, pink, usually borne singly, 1 - 2" across, 5 - petaled, with yellow stamens. Rosebuds deeper pink. Flower has a delicate, classic rose fragrance.

Leaves: Alternate, compound, each with several toothed, pinnately arranged leaflets. Leaf size varies. Prickles are slender, straight or barely curved.

Height: 1 - 3'.

Habitat and Range: Open woods, fields, roadsides; eastern U.S. Longtime MNPS board member and *Marilandica* editor Rod Simmons observed: "In my experience, [pasture rose] is a near constant component of diverse oak-hickory forests in the Triassic Basin - especially on rocky diabase soils of the Basic Oak-Hickory Forest - and reappears again with regularity on the floristically similar weathered, heavy clay loams and cobbly soils of the upland colluvial slope forests below oak-heath forests along the fall line in northern Virginia, D.C., and Maryland."

Similar Species: Multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*) is an invasive Asian species that has proliferated throughout Maryland in hedgerows, along roadsides and even in woods. It has smaller, paler blossoms which grow in large clusters and it is a larger shrub. The stipules of multiflora rose are deeply fringed. Swamp rose (*R. palustris*) is a

native rose that favors wetlands. Distinguish swamp rose from pasture rose by its curved prickles and very finely toothed leaves.

Blooming Time: May - July.

Locations: Sugarloaf Mountain trails and roadsides; locations mentioned above; throughout Maryland. Great Falls, Virginia. Quoting Rod Simmons again: "My friend Susan McLaughlin, who's created a very nice public garden in Alexandria, VA (Little Park) with mostly natives, planted a border of Pasture Rose, which is really a showpiece!"

Cris Fleming, Tony Fleming, Kirsten Johnson, Rod Simmons, Sara Tangren, and other MNPS members and friends contributed to this article.

"Wildflower in Focus" is adapted from **An Illustrated Guide to Eastern Woodland Wildflowers and Trees: 350 Plants Observed at Sugarloaf Mountain, Maryland** (Choukas-Bradley and Brown, University of Virginia Press, 2008).