

## ASK A MASTER GARDENER

# The charm of clarkia



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Master Gardener

**Question:** I just learned about hummingbird moths. They are so amazing! What can I plant in my garden that would be non-invasive, pretty, and also attract hummingbird moths?

**Answer:** For this purpose, I recommend clarkia amoena. It is a captivating, native, heat-tolerant, well-behaved flowering annual and also a known host for white-lined sphinx (Hyles lineata), our locally native species of hummingbird moth.

When we invite a new planting into our garden, we don't always know how the added notes will harmonize with our familiar players. We hope the new chords will be dulcet rather than dissonant, that the newcomer plays well with other sections, not overpowering, but also not afraid to perform a brief solo.

Planting native clarkia amoena in my garden last spring was a singing success.

Clarkia amoena, formerly goedetia amoena, received its scientific name after William Clark of the Lewis and Clark expedition, who was so captivated by the plant, he collected seeds to share.

An annual wildflower, native to the Pacific Northwest from Canada to California, clarkia lives up to the Latin "amoena," meaning beautiful or pleasing. Clarkia flowers are cup shaped, four petaled, ranging in color from white to light pinks to deep magenta, most having a scarlet or purple blotch on each petal.

Mature plants reach 12-18 inches tall. Clarkia is also descriptively known as satin flower, farewell to spring and herald of summer.



PHOTO BY JULIE BURCHSTEAD

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I came upon the plant researching how to attract and support native moths and bees in my own garden. In a 2022 study conducted at OSU, Clarkia amoena was found to be in the top 10 native plants for attracting a diversity of native bees, as well as having a significant specific relationship with short leaf-cutter bees.

To my delight, I discovered clarkia is also a known host for white-lined sphinx moths (hyles lineata) one of several species often called hummingbird moths. These moths are both astounding and magical in their

size and similarity to hummingbirds. I had only ever seen one in video until last summer while my clarkia was in bloom and some visited my garden.

Clarkia is easy to grow. I started mine by Oregon grown seed in February, placing the flat trays into my tiny patio greenhouse. When they got their first true leaves, I hardened off the seedlings, transplanting them into my flower border at the end of April.

First blooms arrived mid-June and were prolific into late July. They did



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White-lined sphinx moths are our locally native species of hummingbird moth.

equally well in semi-shade and full sun, tolerating a particularly cold spring and summer heat.

I love to share bouquets with neighbors and friends. The sturdy multi-bloom flower stalks are a lovely long-lasting addition to cut flower arrangements. Though clarkia is known to reseed itself, I collected some seed last year just in case. Clarkia seeds are tiny, but prolific, and easy to shake out of matured pods in late summer.

If you want to venture out and try a native planting, clarkia amoena is an easy way to start with great reward. It would still not be too late to plant your own from seed this year. Doak Creek Nursery outside Eugene often has some plants available in the spring.

And if you are lucky, one summer night, you might find you have enticed a unique flying visitor.

Whatever you decide, don't forget to take a moment and notice the wonder unfolding in your garden this week. If March growth were music it would be a rising symphony these days of early spring.

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*Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at [douglasmg@oregonstate.edu](mailto:douglasmg@oregonstate.edu) or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the Oregon State University Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.*