



CHICAGOLAND GROWS[®], INC.

Plant Introduction Program - Plant Release Bulletin #39

Tough Love Spiderwort

Tradescantia 'Tough Love'^{PPAF}

Most of the cultivated spiderworts are developed from eastern species common to semishaded, moist habitats. Not *Tradescantia* 'Tough Love'! Derived from two hardy and rugged, yet showy, species from the Great Plains and the Midwest, this hybrid proves to be more compact, drought tolerant, and sun adaptable than most spiderworts while rewarding gardeners with a profusion of red-purple flowers held above the fuzzy, leathery leaves, all on plants no larger than 9 inches tall. Tough love indeed! Selected in 2009 from a hybrid cross made at the Chicago Botanic Garden in 2006.



Chicagoland Grows[®] is a nonprofit corporation of the Chicago Botanic Garden, The Morton Arboretum, and the Ornamental Growers Association of Northern Illinois (OGA).

chicagolandgrows.org



Tough Love Spiderwort

Tradescantia 'Tough Love' PPAF



Botanical Name

Tradescantia 'Tough Love' PPAF

Common Name

Tough Love Spiderwort

Family

Commelinaceae

Origin

The parents of this hybrid spiderwort are an open-pollinated hybrid seedling of *Tradescantia tharpaii* and *Tradescantia occidentalis*. Both of these species come from dry clay, rock, or sand prairies in midwestern and Great Plains states. As a result, this hybrid has dramatically different adaptability from the cultivated spiderwort hybrids derived from more mesic and shaded habitats of the eastern United States. Selected in 2009 from a cross made in 2006 at the Chicago Botanic Garden by Jim Ault, Ph.D.

Hardiness

This selection is hardy in USDA Zones 4 to 8.

Bloom Season

The nearly 1½-inch-wide, vivid red-purple flowers are produced in profusion for about three weeks from mid-May into June and then are sporadically produced into September, according to trials at the Chicago Botanic Garden (USDA Zone 5b). Like all spiderworts, each flower lasts but one day.

Plant Habit

This herbaceous perennial forms a dense, compact clump of short, thick stems and leathery leaves that are upright to horizontal, smaller and stiffer than the foliage of most spiderworts. At 9 inches in height, it is one of the more compact spiderworts in the market. The plant remains a tight clump over time.

Size

A block of 2-year old plants averaged 9 inches in height and 15 inches in spread at the Chicago Botanic Garden. Older plants have remained the same height with only a slightly greater spread.

Growth Rate

A moderate growth rate in the garden for a spiderwort, as would be expected due to its compact size. However, divisions taken from dormant rootstocks are fast to respond with new growth.

Ornamental Characteristics

The vivid red-purple flowers are conspicuously displayed on the top of each stem of this densely branched spiderwort. At 9 inches of height, this is one of the more compact selections in the market. The leathery, stiff leaves make for an attractive and neat plant. This selection's superior drought tolerance and habitat adaptability ensure that it still remains attractive in situations where other spiderworts would become ragged in appearance. Up close you can appreciate the heavy pubescence that coats the foliage, stems, flower buds, and pedicels.

Culture

Full sun and a well-drained, moderately moist to dry soil is recommended. Drought tolerant once established. This plant has performed equally well on a heavy alkaline clay garden soil and in a raised sand bed at the Chicago Botanic Garden. It should grow very well in rocky soils as well. In a severe summer drought, the foliage may go briefly dormant, to be replaced by fresh foliage with the onset of moisture or cooler early autumn days. Plants that become ragged in appearance can be renewed by cutting to the ground. Mature plants remain in tight clumps, precluding the need for any dividing except to propagate more plants.

Pest and Disease Problems

This selection has exhibited good foliar resistance to rust, especially where the plant is not exposed to undue levels of moisture on the foliage. It can be grown drier than most spiderworts, which enhances its rust resistance. Self-produced seed and seedlings have not been observed, but like many spiderworts, it is possible it will produce viable seed if grown in close proximity to another spiderwort.

Landscape Value

The intense red-purple flowers will definitely get your attention in spring. Plants remain neat in appearance and as the season progresses, don't get the droopy, bedraggled look of taller spiderworts. Use this durable selection in the front of a sunny border, on slopes, in rock gardens, in prairie gardens, or in other equivalent sites. Plant in small sweeps as it is a compact selection; yet pay attention to the possibility it could create a temporary hole in the midsummer garden if it goes dormant.

Propagation

Easy to propagate by division of the creeping rootstock any time the plants are dormant. Division of potted dormant stock in February or March will yield blooming plants the same year.

Chicagoland Grows® is a nonprofit corporation of the Chicago Botanic Garden, The Morton Arboretum, and the Ornamental Growers Association of Northern Illinois (OGA).

The Chicagoland Grows® Plant Introduction Program is dedicated to the evaluation, selection, production, and marketing of recommended and new plant cultivars. Plants selected for the program have proven to be adaptable to the Midwest and are made available to the commercial and retail landscape industry through an international network of growers and propagators.



For more information about Chicagoland Grows®, contact the Plant Introduction Department, Chicago Botanic Garden, 1000 Lake Cook Road, Glencoe, IL 60022, (847) 835-8301 or visit chicagolandgrows.org.