

Dusty Miller

(*Jacobaea maritima*, formerly known as *Senecio cineraria* and/or *Centaurea cineraria*)

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Dusty Miller (*Jacobaea maritima*)

- **Common Names:** Dusty miller, silver ragwort
- **Recommended Use:** Cool-season bedding plant, container plant, mass planting
- **Exposure:** Full sun to part shade, with improved silver foliage with more sun
- **Size:** 1-2 feet high, 1-2 feet wide
- **Habit:** Rounded, low-growing habit
- **Bloom Time:** While not the primary feature of interest for this plant, yellow blooms occur from April into summer.
- **Maintenance Category:** Low
- **Water Use:** Drought tolerant once established in the landscape, but irrigation during excessive heat can be beneficial.
- **Highlights:** The silver foliage of this species provides a pleasing texture to the landscape, offering hues of cool blue that contrast well with more vibrant colors from other plants. The texture of this species (both visually and with its soft-to-the-touch feel) adds an appreciable element to landscape beds and containers.



The yellow blooms of dusty miller are often removed to redirect the plant's resources to the foliage. Photo by Damon Abdi

Summary

Foliage is the defining feature of this species, where the silvery-blue shades harmonize well with the vivid colors of other plants in annual beds, containers or large mass plantings. The foliage color is best observed when these plants are grown in full sun. While it tolerates some shade, the silvery hues of the foliage tend to diminish if sunlight is not sufficient. A low-maintenance plant that maintains a compact size (up to 2 feet in height and width, more commonly around 1.5 feet), this is a reliable selection for areas of the landscape that need a cooler contrast to bright colors found on the flowers of other plants in the garden.



Left: Some growers prefer to remove the flower buds from dusty miller as soon as they start to appear. **Right:** While dusty miller performs well in part shade, more sunlight enhances the silver hues of the foliage. Photos by Allen Owings

As a bonus, the foliage can appear to shine at night, creating an impactful asset to the landscape even after the sun sets.

This plant is typically treated as an annual for the cool season, providing foliar interest even when facing a light frost. Dusty miller's value in the cool season can also extend into the warm season, where this robust, rounded plant is resilient to the heat of a Louisiana summer. As the weather warms, small yellow flowers begin to emerge. The flowers may draw the attention of onlookers; however, many gardeners feel that they detract from the foliage. Removing flower buds as they appear is a practice that can help the plant conserve energy, allowing it to focus on maintaining the feature foliage.

The lobed leaves of this plant possess a soft, velvety feel that contributes texture to the garden. Texture is a unique feature in the landscape, with connotations toward the visual "feel" of the plant and the physically tangible touch of the foliage. This lends this species particularly well to prominent positions in landscape arrangements or containers. Dusty miller placed at the front of a landscape bed will not overpower the rest of the arrangement, given its modest size and more muted tones. In container arrangements, dusty miller can serve as a "filler" plant that can take up space and add texture while complementing more vibrant "thriller plants" or "spiller plants." Dusty miller harmonizes well as a companion planting for pansies, violas and dianthus, bringing foliar interest to make the formerly listed flowers more attractive in the landscape. Popular varieties available in Louisiana include New Look (taller, thicker stems), Cirrus (oak-shaped leaves that mature from white to a silver-green) and Silver Dust (deeply lobed foliage).



The lobed leaves of dusty miller possess a soft, velvety feel that contributes texture to the garden. Photo by Damon Abdi

Louisiana Super Plants are selected for their resilience to our conditions, but also for the aesthetic value they bring to landscape compositions and container plantings. With dusty miller, cool-season foliar color can be provided in a subtle way, accentuating your favorite feature flowers of winter.

Requirements

- Performs well in sun to part shade; however, more light enhances the silver hues of the foliage.
- Soils that drain effectively are important to the health of this plant. Avoid poorly drained soils or excessive irrigation practices.
- Not a heavy feeder, so fertilizer can be applied conservatively, if at all.

Growth Habit

- While it can be perennial, this plant is typically used as an annual in the landscape.
- The rounded, low-growing habit presents an easy-to-maintain feature to the landscape that doesn't overshadow the rest of the garden bed.

- May become leggy (i.e., stretched out, spindly growth) in shady areas, warranting gentle shearing or pruning to maintain form.

Care and Maintenance

- The yellow summertime flowers are seldom considered showy. Removing flower buds helps to focus attention and the plant's resources on the unique foliage of this species.
- While generally considered drought-tolerant after establishment, pay attention to the foliage during extended dry periods. Wilting leaves should signal the need for supplemental water.
- Pruning to maintain a manageable size may be useful if the plant outgrows its place.

For more information on dusty miller and other Louisiana Super Plants, contact your local LSU AgCenter Extension office or visit <http://www.lsuagcenter.com/SuperPlants>



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