Rosmarinus officinalis 'Athens Blue Spires'

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The genus *Rosmarinus* L. (Labiatae Juss., Lamiaceae Lindl.; rosemary) contains two species of evergreen shrubs (Griffiths, 1994). *R. officinalis* L. is native to the Mediterranean region, and has been used for centuries for the aromatic oils it contains and culinary purposes (Bailey, 1976). Rosemary can also be used as an ornamental shrub and is well suited for landscapes with excellent drainage and climates with mild winter temperatures.

Origin

The parent plant of *R. officinalis* 'Athens Blue Spires' was a selection from a random population originating from a commercial package of rosemary seed. This selection was the only plant from a group of 12 seedlings to survive in a landscape setting. All other seedlings died within a year of germination. Plants were propagated from the surviving seedling as shoot-tip cuttings from selected stems.

Description

Rosmarinus officinalis 'Athens Blue Spires' is an evergreen shrub reaching a mature height of 1.5 to 2 m and of equal width (Fig. 1). Stems are roughly square in cross-section, becoming woody with exfoliating bark on old growth. Leaves are linear and about 1.9 cm long and 0.16 cm wide. They are sessile, opposite, entire, and have revolute margins. The adaxial leaf surface is glandular punctate and dark green. The abaxial leaf surface is covered with short white trichomes giving a silvery appearance (RHS 155-C, Royal Horticultural Society, 1966). The upper margins are lighter green. The flowers are held in few-flowered verticillasters, arranged in short axillary racemes measuring 5 to 10 cm long. The calyx is campanulate, two-lipped with the upper lip entire. The lower lip has two lobes with corolla longer than calyx. The corolla is lavender, with prominent darker blue flecks and a white band on the lower lip (Table 1). The two fertile stamens are strongly exerted and the style is long, incurved, and unbranched. The fruit is a glabrous nutlet. Plants of *R. officinalis* 'Athens Blue Spires' differ from other cultivars in color of foliage, flower (Table 1), habit, height, and lateral breaks (Table 2).

Performance

Rosmarinus officinalis 'Athens Blue Spires' has been observed since 1988 and has shown no particular disease or insect susceptibility. Typical insects include spittle-bug (*Aphrophora* sp.),

two-spotted spider mite (*Tetranychus urticae* Koch.), and western flowerthrips [*Frankliniella occidentalis* (Pergande)]. Root rot diseases also have been encountered. Terminal cuttings of 'Athens Blue Spires' were first taken from the mother plant in late Spring 1998. Twenty cuttings were treated with the potassium salt of indolbutyric acid (KIBA, 4000 mg·L⁻¹) and placed in a medium of 3 perlite : 1 peat medium. Cuttings were irrigated as needed with a mist nozzle but were not subjected to intermittent mist. Cuttings rooted in 15 to 20 d and were transplanted to 1.5-L containers. Individual plants grew to about 46 cm in height and width in a 9-month period. Five plants remained in the containers and were placed on a outdoor landscape pad and five plants were transplanted in outdoor beds in The University of Georgia Horticulture Gardens. In 2 years, the in-ground plants attained a height of 1.5 to 1.8 m with equal width. The original seedling of *R. officinalis* 'Athens Blue Spires' has suffered

no cold damage or leaf loss, although exposed to -15 °C in 1994 and 1996. Plants are winter-hardy to USDA hardiness zone 7 (United States Department of Agriculture, 1990).

Availability

Rosmarinus officinalis 'Athens Blue Spires' was granted USDA plant patent #11,552 in 2000 (United States Patent Office, 2000). Plants are available through the University of Georgia Research Foundation, Athens Select program and selected propagators and retailers.

Literature Cited

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Fig. 1. *Rosmarinus officinalis* 'Athens Blue Spires'

Table 1. Royal Horticultural color comparisons for selected cultivars of six *Rosmarinus officinalis* cultivars.

Cultivar	Petals	Lower lip midrib	Foliage
Arp	155D ² with speckles of 91A	155D	141A
Athens Blue Spires	97C with speckles of 97A	155D	137A
Beneton Blue	155D with speckles of 94A	90B	147A
Forrester's	92C with speckles of 97A	155D	137C
Tuscan Blue	154C with speckles of 91A	155D	147B

²Color categories from the color chart of the Royal Horticultural Society (1966).

Table 2. Habit, height, and branching of three *Rosmarinus officinalis* cultivars (5 mo. from rooted cutting, planted in 1.5 L containers).

Cultivar	Habit	Ht (cm)	Lateral branches
Arp	Semi-upright	7.5 ^a	4.0 ^a
Athens Blue Spires	Upright	15.0 ^b	12.5 ^c
Tuscan Blue	Upright	15.0 ^b	7.5 ^b

^aMeans based on five plants per cultivar.

^bMeans separation in columns by Duncan's multiple range test, *P* = 0.05.

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