



***Gaillardia aestivalis* var. *winkleri* ‘Grape Sensation’**

Common Name: Winkler’s White Firewheel (purple selection)

Zone: 8 and beyond

Plant Type: Herbaceous Perennial

Family: Asteraceae

Texas Native: Yes

Origin: Hardin County, Texas

Height: 1’

Bloom: prominent purple centers with lighter purple rays – heaviest bloom in late summer

Water: sandy, well-drained soils

Maintenance: deadhead to encourage repeat bloom

Propagation: seed, division

‘Grape Sensation’ is a pure purple seed strain derived from an endemic Texas wildflower: Winkler’s White Firewheel. The species is currently only found in one county in deep East Texas

and is considered endangered on a global level. It is dependant on fire to reduce competition, and fire suppression measures in the twentieth century have taken a toll on native populations. Current efforts exist to protect the remaining habitat and controlled burns are studied to measure the effects on populations in cultivation and the wild. Without the threat of successive competition, Winkler's Firewheel is a tough, drought hardy perennial. Native to deep sandy soils of long leaf pine savannahs, this gaillardia is perfectly at home in drier situations. Plants prefer lean growing conditions and will produce an over abundance of foliage without flower in rich, moist soils. Plants will spread to form a 2 foot square area, but are not aggressive in the least. Typical flowers have yellow centers and white rays, but color variations including purple and pink exist in the centers as well as rays. Seedlings grown in cultivated settings tend to show more variation in colors.

'Grape Sensation' was selected initially at the SFA Mast Arboretum in Nacogdoches, Texas in honor of the predominant school color – purple. Successive selections through several generations has lent a seed strain that comes true from seed. Centers as well as rays are purple, a rare color in the genus *Gaillardia*. This selection is typical to the species in that it thrives in lean, dry conditions. Bloom is heaviest in late summer when color is scarce in the landscape.

Ultimate hardiness is unknown, but plants have survived at least one winter in Connecticut – a far cry from the mild winters of East Texas.

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