

***Stachys byzantina*** K. Koch ex G. Scheele  
(*Stachys lantana*, *Stachys olympica*, *Stachys taurica*)

**Lamb's Ear**

**Other Common Names:** Lamb's Tails, Lamb's Tongue, Woolly Betony, Woolly Woundwort.

**Family:** Lamiaceae (Labiatae).

**Cold Hardiness:** Useful in USDA zones 5(4b) through 8(9a).

**Foliage:** Nearly evergreen to deciduous herbaceous perennial or occasionally biennial; leaves opposite on flowering stalks, tightly clustered with very short internodes in rosettes on vegetative stems; simple; ovate to elliptic; blades 4 to 6 long attached to a petiole that is frequently as long or longer than the blade; the entire dark green colored blade and petiole are covered in densely luxuriant long white hairs resulting in an overall silver-white color and soft velvety feel to the leaf, hence the common name of Lamb's Ear; tips are broadly acute, while bases are acute, cuneate, to nearly rounded; the pinnate veins are indistinct above, but are prominently raised beneath; petioles are long, covered in the same long dense white hairs as the leaf and are concave above and convex beneath resulting in a U-shaped cross-section.

**Flower:** The individual perfect bilabiate flowers are borne in successive whorls of 10 (12) on elongated terminal spikes; each whorl of flowers is subtended by a pair of small leaves; the 1/2 to 1 individual flowers are densely pubescent on the outside, while the throat is less pubescent allowing the splotchy purple or lavender color to be visible; although interesting upon close inspection, the overall effect of the flower spikes generally detracts from the soft luxuriant texture and form of the vegetative portion of the plant, hence, most people will deadhead the flower stalks as they form or shortly after bloom.

**Fruit:** Fruit typically consists of four tiny nutlets in a pubescent pod; not ornamental.

**Stem / Bark:** Stems — the green stems are square in cross-section and covered as is the rest of the plant in long dense white hairs giving them a silver-white overall color; stems seldom branch and arise as clusters of rosettes from the base of the plant; Buds – the tiny foliose axillary buds seldom elongate on vegetative stems; buds are green to yellow-green and covered in dense white hairs; Bark – not applicable.

**Habit:** Lamb's Ear is a herbaceous perennial that slowly spreads 1 to 3 across with rosettes of large coarse-textured leaves covered in downy soft white hairs to form a silver-white carpet 8 to 12 tall; the flower stalks can reach heights of 12 to 18, the velvety softness of the leaves are in direct contrast with their coarse texture, creating a very novel contrast between the visual and tactile senses; the overall visual effect is medium-coarse to coarse.

**Cultural Requirements:** Lamb's Ear is a surprisingly durable plant as long as conditions are not too humid and soils are well drained; avoid overhead irrigation to keep the leaves dry; otherwise, quite adaptable tolerating considerable heat and cold extremes; plants are not particular as to soil pH and with a bit of afternoon shade and irrigation will even tolerate hot arid environments; in other regions, plants grow just fine in full sun; plants thrive in low fertility sites; excellent winter soil drainage and good summer air movement are critical to success; where vigorous, plants may need division every three to four years.

**Pathological Problems:** Crown and root rots and leaf spots can be problematic in humid conditions.

**Ornamental Assets:** Soft velvety silver white leaves that contrast with the generally coarsish form; low growth habit.

**Limitations & Liabilities:** Root and crown rots are common during cool wet weather in temperate climates and during summers in hot humid regions; leaf spots also occur in humid climates.

**Landscape Utilization:** Lamb's Ear is an old-fashioned garden favorite, a classic component of European and American cottage gardens; plants can be grown in mixed perennial gardens, as pockets of silver color or textural contrasts in woody plantings, as a small scale groundcover, as a component of gardens established for the tactile senses, or sometimes as edging plants; neither young or old kids can resist the feel of this plant and it is sure to be a hit in children's gardens.

**Other Comments:** The genus name *Stachys* is Greek, meaning spike or ear of grain, in reference to the shape of the flower spikes of the genus; the specific epithet refers to the origin of the species from an area once commonly known as the Byzantine Empire.

**Native Habitat:** Generally the area that is now Turkey and Iran.

**Related Taxa:** The genus *Stachys* L. contains about 300 species of herbaceous plants and shrubs native to warm temperate and tropical regions; several species are found in Texas with *S. coccinea* being the native Texas species that is most frequently cultivated.

***Stachys coccinea*** C. Ortega

**Texas Betony**

(*Stachys cardinalis*, *Stachys oxacana*)

- C Texas Betony is a Trans-Pecos native that has become popular as a xeriscape plant for semiarid regions; the primary assets are the  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 long scarlet flowers, hence the specific epithet of "coccinea"; the habit is strongly upright, 1 to 2 tall by 1 wide, with rather sparse ovate to triangular gray-green foliage; it is best used in masses and is a hummingbird favorite.
- C Although cultural conditions have not been fully tested, this species is probably suitable for use in at least USDA zones 8 to 9(10); plants perform best where it is not too humid and soils are well drained; once established, colonies often persist and spread.

**References:** Bender, 1998; Brenzel, 1995; Clausen and Ekstrom, 1989; Denver Water, 1996; Diggs et al., 1999; Ryan, 1998; Still, 1994; Welch, 1989.

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