

## Dodecatheon meadia (Shooting Star)

Botanical Bytes by Bruner

By Gregory Bruner

Foliage Height: 2-3"  
Foliage Width: 8-10"  
Flower Height: 12"  
Foliage Color: Green  
Flower Color: White, Pink, or Purple  
USDA Hardiness: 4-8  
Moisture: Average – Moist  
Light: Part Shade – Shade



It was the summer of 1845, and the man absently patted the nose of his packhorse while surveying the terrain ahead of him. Hiking for days through the unfamiliar rolling hills and towering hardwoods had been enough to confuse the savvy adventurer. He needed a sign. The prospect of the open plains had been appealing, but getting there was proving to be a challenge. He knelt down and investigated the small white comet-shaped flowers at his feet. The tips of the flowers all pointed in the same direction. Moss grows on the north sides of trees, and the Prairie Pointer flower always points west. He had his sign.

Shooting Stars enjoy a wide growing range from Florida west to Texas, and all the way north to Minnesota and New York. Open woodlands are its preferred locations to roam in the south, while in the north it can tolerate more sunshine if adequate moisture is available. A shade garden in the south with average well-drained soil is fine. Because there are few pest problems other than an occasional slug, this petite beauty is a low-maintenance plant once it is established.

This is one of the “smart plants” that often in the heat of the summer will go dormant and retreat underground to conserve energy and hide from the blistering heat. Then it waits patiently to announce the arrival of another year of spring. Do not worry if it disappears in the summer because it will be back.

Dodecatheon meadia has many colorful entertaining regional names. Some of the more interesting are Roosterheads, Sailor-caps, Mosquito Bill, Star Shower, Prairie Pointer, or the most common name of Eastern Shooting Star. My personal favorite is Prairie Pointer. Legend says that the points of the flowers always lean to the west. The settlers heading to the open plains of the west used the flowers to guide them.

The history behind the name is intriguing. The plant family Dodecatheon received its name from the Greek historian Gaius Plinius Secundus (23–79 AD), who was the author of *Naturalis Historia*. Dodeca means twelve, while Theos refers to God. The members of the Dodecatheon family were so beautiful that it was believed they were protected by the twelve major Greek gods. Meadia refers to Dr. Richard Mead (1673–1754), who was a physician to King George III and a lover of all things botanical.

The plant’s mechanism necessary for insects to achieve pollination is quite ingenious. The pollen is hidden in a long tubular part of the flower. Bees have mastered a technique during which they vibrate their bodies to shake the pollen loose so it falls to where they can access it freely.

Does your garden need a flower that is smart enough to nap through the heat of the summer rather than struggle and cook? If you are always looking for one more unique flower, this delicate, smart leafy critter might be the one for you!