

Liatris spicata (Dense Blazing Star)

Botanical Bytes
By Gregory Bruner

Foliage Height: 24"-48"

Foliage Width: 12"-18"

Flower Height: 36"-48"

Foliage Color: Green

Flower Color: Purple

USDA Hardiness: 3-8

Moisture: Average - Wet

Light: Sun - Part Sun



Liatris spicata is a butterfly-attracting magnet that no butterfly-loving gardener should be without. It covers a reasonable area of the eastern half of the United States. The area range spans north to Wisconsin and Massachusetts while stretching south to Louisiana and Florida.

The list of common names connected to this leafy beauty is fairly short. Most of them begin or end with Blazing Star or Gayfeather. Either of these titles is descriptive. Whether you believe it looks like a purplish blazing comet streaking down toward your beloved garden or an incredibly cheerful feather waving in the breeze and advertising itself to the butterflies, it's hard to ignore when in bloom.

The Cherokee Indians used this leafy critter for a variety of medicinal purposes. The roots were prepared in a number of different ways to create carminatives, sudorifics, diuretics, and expectorants. Decoctions could also be prepared to help with pain in the back or limbs. There was also a decoction for helping colicky babies. Need a pick-me-up? The Cherokee used the roots as a stimulant.

Blazing star is like a magic wand being waved in the air of your garden from late spring to early summer. The blooms will last for 3-4 weeks and will attract a wide variety of visitors. This wonderful plant is literally a butterfly magnet. You might as well hang a sign over it saying "Butterfly buffet" or "Butterfly Fuel Station" because if they are in the area they will visit. You will also see skippers and bees to add to the fun. One of the more interesting *Liatris* facts is that the stalks of flowers bloom from the top down; most flowers with spikes bloom from the bottom up. When the butterflies are not using them, the sturdy stalks of flowers are excellent for cut or dried flowers. Unfortunately, not all of the critters attracted are good ones. Deer and livestock like mature plants, while groundhogs and rabbits like to dine on the tender new growth. Moles and voles add to the mayhem by loving to eat the underground corms. There may be a bit of a struggle between good and evil here, but it is worth it in the long run.

This wonderful leafy family member will thrive in a full to partial sun site possessing average well-drained soil. Moisture should be average to moist. Once established, the plant can tolerate short periods of drought. Extended periods of hot dry weather may cause the lower leaves to yellow and drop. This is normal and most likely the plant will be fine. It may enjoy moist sites, but keep it away from areas that stay overly wet during the winter months because the corms will rot.

Liatris spicata is definitely a must for every butterfly garden. Its ability to attract clouds of butterflies far outweighs the minor inconveniences of a few of the unwelcome visitors. Its vertical presence allows the gardener to use it in smaller beds where space is at a premium. There is always space for one of these beauties.