

Spigelia marilandica (Indian pink)

Botanical Bytes
By Gregory Bruner

Foliage Height: 12"-18"
Foliage Width: 12"-18"
Flower Height: 12"-18"
Foliage Color: Green
Flower Color: Red / Yellow
USDA Hardiness: 5-9
Moisture: Average - Moist
Light: Part Sun - Shade



Spigelia marilandica is a rare jewel of the woodland. Those of us here in the southeastern part of the United States might get to see this ruby-colored wonder in the wild if we are lucky. These leafy firecrackers roam from northern Illinois and southeast into South Carolina and northern Florida, as well as southwest into Arkansas and Louisiana.

The name Indian pink is a little misleading. The first impression of this leafy family member is fairly normal. Dark green foliage emerges and happily flushes out. The flower stems begin to rise above the foliage, bearing bright red flower buds. Now we are getting somewhere! Sometime in April or May the bright red firecrackers pop open, exposing glowing yellow petals that sharply contrast with the rest of the vibrant, red flower. I dare any gardener to walk by a clump of these beauties in flower and not be impressed.

So here we have just another pretty face. Right? Those are easy enough to find in any local garden center. However, this woodland critter is more than just a pretty face. When the flowers explode into color, it is like placing a bull's-eye on your garden for hummingbirds. The little speed demons will be buzzing around before you know it if they are in the neighborhood. Butterflies will also frequent Indian pinks while in bloom, but the aerial dogfights of the hummingbirds pay the rent for the garden space.

I think we have now established the awesomeness of this leafy critter. The next decision is obviously where to plant this wonderful adopted family member. These plants normally grow in areas possessing fertile well-drained soils with decent moisture where the sun generally filters down through the tree canopy or in a woodland edge in morning sun. Placement is important for this one; depending on the site, some soil amending may be necessary. The work will be an investment in future enjoyment.

Spigelia marilandica was used for medicinal purposes by the Cherokee and Creek Native American tribes. Infusions or decoctions were made from the roots and used as a vermifuge to help expel parasitic worms from the intestines.

The Indian pink plant is a gem that will give years of enjoyment to gardeners and hummingbirds alike if given a chance to show off its dazzling fireworks display. The only disruption to this horticultural awesomeness will be the miniature winged aerial acrobats diving and weaving to claim the nectar inside those colorful firecrackers.