



2–4 ft

Nectar



Dense blazing star

Florida gardeners will find four native *Liatris* species on the market: Chapman's blazing star (*Liatris chapmanii*), Dense blazing star (*L. spicata*), Evergreen blazing star (*L. laevigata*) and Graceful blazing star (*L. gracilis*). These species are found throughout Florida. .

Blazing stars have long been a favorite in floral bouquets. Flowers start opening at the top of the stem and continue to bloom after cutting.

Native Americans used these plants to treat a variety of illnesses, and researchers have discovered anti-cancer substances in various species. Modern herbalists use the plants for homeopathic remedies and in potpourris and insect repellants.

## Description

Blazing stars are among our taller perennial wildflowers, generally standing 2 to 4 feet. One or more flowering stems rise from basal rosettes in the summer, with blooms appearing anywhere from late summer through fall, depending on the species. This is a deciduous wildflower — it overwinters underground and sends up stalks from thickened, cormlike rootstock, which resembles underground bulbs. Foliage tends to be thin or not particularly noticeable. However, Evergreen blazing star does maintain a visible basal rosette in the winter.

Chapman's blazing star blooms as early as August and into September, with light-lavender-colored blooms. Dense blazing star, the most commonly available and typically tallest of the species, has bright lavender-colored blooms from October into early November. Evergreen

blazing star has lavender-colored flowers anywhere from September through October. Graceful blazing star has light-to bright-lavender flowers in October and November.

## Planting

Blazing stars require little ground space and can be used even in small gardens. While you can plant anytime of the year, you may be most successful planting in spring after plants emerge from dormancy. To provide seasonal color and vertical interest, place plants in clusters in beds of mixed wildflowers and ornamental grasses. To lengthen your blooming season, plant more than one species. Blazing star's thin, stiff, upright silhouette is complemented by plants with rounder or spreading forms, wide strappy leaves, and different flower shapes and sizes.

## Seeds

Seeds are commercially available. To collect your own, wait until the flowers are light tan in color and fluffy, then shake or lightly brush the flowers into a container. The brown achenes are the seeds.

## Plants

Blazing stars are available in 4-inch and gallon containers. Space plants 12 to 15 inches apart. Keep them watered until you see new growth or seasonal rains begin.

## Care

Staking is only needed when plants have been over-irrigated or -fertilized and are weak from having grown too quickly.

Cut stems only if necessary, and carefully, because plants pull up easily. For this reason, be very careful when weeding around them. You may want to mark your plants so you will remember where they are in the spring.

After flowering, the dead stems shelter insects — an important food source for birds. Birds will also feed on the seeds.

## Site conditions

All the plants listed here need full sun for best flowering and well-drained soils. Some blazing stars are especially sensitive to persistent moisture in the soil. Chapman's blazing star prefers dry, very well-drained, deep sand. Graceful and Evergreen blazing star are found in dry

to moist sandhills and dry to mesic flatwoods. Do not plant these species where the ground remains moist or wet. Dense blazing star prefers a moist-wet situation, but is fairly adaptable and surprisingly drought tolerant.

## Butterflies and bees

Blazing stars are excellent nectar plants and will reliably attract numerous butterflies, moths, bees and other insect pollinators. Hummingbirds may also nectar on the flowers.

## Hardiness zones

Chapman's, Dense, Evergreen and Graceful blazing star can be grown in Zones 8A–11.

## Other species

You may also find Elegant blazing star (*L. elegans*) suitable for exceptionally deep, well-drained sand in North and North Central Florida.



Graceful blazing star

Non-native blazing star plants are often sold in large retail stores and garden centers. Blazing star seed sold by out-of-state vendors is typically not Florida native ecotype.

**CAUTION**