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.

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 light-to bright-lavender flowers in October and November.

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.

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.

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.