



FLORIDA
WILDFLOWER
FOUNDATION

planting and care of Blazing Stars in landscapes

Photo by Troy Springer

About this genus



Photo by Peg Urban

Liatris chapmanii

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. tenuifolia* var. *quadriflora*) and Graceful Blazing Star (*L. gracilis*). These species are found throughout Florida. Evergreen Blazing Star can also be used in the Keys.

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

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.

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.



Photo by John Moran

Liatris gracilis



Photo by John Moran

Liatris spicata



The State Wildflower license plate supports Florida native wildflower planting, education and research. Get the plate and help fill our state with wildflowers!



Planting

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



Liatris spicata seedlings at 40 days

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 and Graceful Blazing Star are found in habitats where soil is very well-drained, deep sand. 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.

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 of Blazing Stars is usually needed only because the plants have been over irrigated or fertilized, and thus are weak from having grown too quickly.

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

After flowering, the dead stems shelter insects — an important food source for birds, which use the stems as a place to hang out while hunting insects. Birds will also feed on the seeds.

Other species

You may also find Elegant Blazing Star (*Liatris elegans*) suitable for exceptionally deep, well-drained sand in North and North Central Florida. In October, it presents light lavender flowers.



Liatris spicata

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