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## Liatris: The Garden's Exclamation Mark

By Lydia Holley, Master Gardener



What does your garden say? Is it full of mounding statements that bore you? Do you need to add a bit of excitement? Add an exclamation mark to your garden by planting liatris.

Liatris stand straight and tall, but are slender, so instead of calling attention to themselves, they punctuate the garden, bringing a spark of joy, prompting you to come into the garden to see the butterflies flitting around their blooms. There are numerous species of liatris, many of which are native to Texas, with at least five species native to East Texas.

Liatris grow from one to five feet tall, depending on the species and the location grown. Most average around three feet tall. They prefer full sun, bloom in shades of purple, pink, or white, and attract hummingbirds and butterflies. Liatris can be grown in almost any style of garden, in containers, and are valued for use in arrangements, either fresh or dried. The form is basically the same, but each species may have different details to their blooms which are more or less attractive to you. For instance, Rough blazing star (*Liatris aspera*) seems to bloom in individual tufts stair-stepped up the stem, while Prairie blazing star (*Liatris pycnostachya*) has more of a resemblance to a bottle brush.

Dormant in winter, most species will return for several years, establishing a large clump with dozens of

blooms. The fuzzy blooms are unique, opening from top to bottom on stems that rise above grass-like tufts. You will need to look close at the individual flowers to see why Liatris is often called blazing star. It may also be called gayfeather, and I can imagine the stalks could be used much like a feather to tickle someone.

If your garden is looking a little dull during this time of the year, consider adding Liatris in a few selected locations. They will give your garden the exclamation point it needs.

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