

FIRE SPIKE

Odontonema strictum



Characteristics

- Type: Tender Perennial
- Zone: 8B through 11
- Height: 2 to 6 feet
- Spread: 2 to 3 feet
- Bloom colors: Red
- Bloom time: Late summer through winter
- Flower: Showy
- Sun: Full Sun to Part Shade
- Water: Moderate
- Maintenance: Low
- Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun
- Soil tolerances: acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam
- Drought tolerance: moderate
- Soil salt tolerances: poor
- Plant spacing: 24 to 36 inches
- Attracts: Butterflies, Hummingbirds

Culture

An erect evergreen shrub in frost-free areas that grows 8-12 feet tall by 6-10 feet wide with short rhizomes that send up nearly vertical stems of wavy-margined 10-inch-long smooth glossy-textured leaves. Slender bright fiery red flowers are crowded on erect terminal spikes above the foliage with a few spikes present at a time beginning early summer and continuing through fall into winter - a very long bloomer in frost free areas! This plant grows well in full sun, where plants are more compact and shorter, or light shade with moderate to infrequent irrigation – is surprisingly dry growing for such a tropical looking plant and hardy and evergreen to 28-30 degrees F, but rebounds fast so can be used down to USDA Zone 8 gardens as a large herbaceous perennial that flowers in the fall. This is a great plant for adding a showy tropical look without having to irrigate regularly - flowers over a long period

Noteworthy characteristics

This semi-evergreen shrub, known botanically as *Odontonema strictum*, bears stiff, mostly upright, sparse branches that reach about 6 ft. in height. Its dark, shiny, oblong leaves are pinnate, measuring 4-6 in. in length. Its native habitat is semi-forested. In the coldest places where it is found in the U.S., it dies back to the ground in the winter. This species thrives in moist soils, but they should be well-drained. It can tolerate considerable drought, and in residential settings, watering can be reduced during the winter. It is not particularly salt-tolerant. As presentable as it is out of flower, Firespike is really impressive in bloom. Starting in late summer and extending through the winter, it produces numerous upright 9-12 in. panicles featuring inch-long, tubular, waxy, brilliant red/scarlet, purple, or lavender flowers. Although it is at its best in full sun, *O. strictum* can still put on quite a show in filtered light. The combination of bright flowers and glossy leaves is eye-catching, especially at the time of year when blooming peaks. The plant spreads underground, but can also be propagated easily from softwood cuttings that flower in their first year. *O. strictum* is also very amenable to pruning. You can either cut it back hard or prune it lightly several times during the year to maintain the look that you prefer.

Problems

No pests or diseases are of major concern.

Garden Uses

Cut flowers; mass planting; attracts butterflies; attracts hummingbirds