

How to Grow Gayfeather (*Liatris spicata*)



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How to Grow *Liatris spicata*

Liatris spicata is an herbaceous perennial that is commonly referred to as Gayfeather or Button Snakewort. Plants are native to the prairies, marsh regions, and meadows of North America.

The *Liatris* genus contains 37 members, other well known species include *Liatris aspera* (Rough blazing star) and *Liatris pycnostachya* (Prairie Blazing Star).

Liatris spicata is a medium-tall plant, with showy spikes of purple flowers, that looks great as part of a border. It is often grown for its deer-resistant properties, and to attract butterflies and hummingbirds to the garden.

In addition to borders it also looks great as part of a prairie / meadow wild-life landscape and makes a great fresh or dried cut flower.



Liatris spicata Description

Gayfeather is a fairly tall plant reaching about 36 to 48 inches (90–120 cm) in height. It has a spread of 10 to 20 inches (25–50 cm). It is upright and clump-forming. One or more stalks may arise from the tufted base. Smaller cultivars are available that reach heights of 18 to 24 inches (45–60 cm).

Leaves are linear and grass-like and can reach lengths of 12 inches (30 cm) at the base, getting smaller further up the stalk. The leaves are green from spring to autumn.



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Planting Instructions

- Till a well-drained planting bed in full sun to a depth of about 6 inches. *Liatris* prefers consistent moisture but not soggy roots. Add humus to sandy soil by tilling in a 1-inch layer of compost. Rake the planting bed smooth.
- Scatter *Liatris spicata* seeds over the prepared bed in early spring, as soon as frost danger is past in cool areas. Instead of covering the seeds, press them gently into the soil.
- Mist the seedbed and keep it moist, but not wet, until the seeds germinate. Daytime temperatures should be 70 degrees Fahrenheit and nighttime temperatures about 60 degrees for optimum germination. Germination may take up to three weeks.
- Till a planting bed 6 to 8 inches deep, adding compost to increase the humus content of sandy soils, if necessary. Plant corms in either fall or spring.
- Dig individual planting holes or a furrow with a garden trowel to plant corms, spacing them 2 to 4 inches apart, or 10 to 20 per square foot. Set the corms so the bottom is about 5 inches below the soil surface. The small, flattened area is the top of the corm, and the claw-like projections should point down.
- Rake the planting bed smooth over the corms and water thoroughly. Apply a light layer of organic mulch to help prevent evaporative loss.





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Tools You Will Need

- Tiller or shovel and hoe
- Rake
- Seeds or corms
- Garden trowel

Tips

- You may want to start *Liatris spicata* seeds indoors in sterile medium about eight weeks before you plan to set the seedlings outside. Cover starting containers with clear plastic to help preserve moisture and place the containers in a window with bright, indirect light.
- *Liatris* prefers slightly acidic soil, about 6.8 pH.
- Drip irrigation helps provide consistent moisture to the root zone without over-watering while it minimizes evaporative loss. Although *Liatris spicata* prefers moist growing conditions, root or stem rot can be problems if drainage is poor.

Warning

- *Liatris* plants die back after blooming, and once the plant debris is cleaned up there is no trace of them. Mark the plants' location to avoid damaging them when you prepare spring beds.