Liatris

CHARACTERISTICS
Scientific Name: Liatris spicata

Common Name: Spike gayfeather

Season: summer to fall

Height: 18-36 inches

Hardiness: USDA Hardiness Zone 3-9

Flower color: mauve, pink, white

Soil: The plant prefers light (sandy) and medium (loamy) soils and requires well-drained soil. The plant prefers acid, neutral and basic (alkaline) soils.

Exposure: full sun to light shade

Propagation: division of tuberous roots in spring, seed

Origin: Eastern North America

Plant Uses
Accent: Good Texture/Form
Attracts Butterflies
Border
Containers
Cut Flower
Deer Resistant
Drought Tolerant
Rabbit Resistant
Massed
Wild Flower
Comments:
The genus Liatris belongs to the Asteraceae, or aster family, and is composed of around 40 different species. Common names include gayfeather and blazing star. These showy plants are native to eastern and central United States. The flowers are generally purple, but sometimes white.

One of the reasons liatris are such popular cut flowers is their unusual mode of blooming. Unlike most plants they bloom from the top of their flower spikes down to the bottom. You can actually cut a portion off the top of the spike to bring indoors, and the remaining flower heads will continue to open and provide color for the landscape.

Liatris is in flower in September. The flowers are hermaphrodite (have both male and female organs) and are pollinated by bees. It is noted for attracting wildlife. Butterflies are particularly attracted to the nectar-rich blossoms. Birds will also visit as they enjoy the fall-ripening seeds.

Liatris seeds ripen in October, when they can be collected and sown directly outdoors. The seeds need cool and moist conditions in order to germinate in the spring. On older plants, the tuberous corms can be dug and divided during late winter while dormant. Softwood cuttings can also be taken in spring. However, propagation from seed is the easiest and most reliable method.

Liatris will endure heat, cold, drought, and poor soil. Fertilizing will produce larger flower spikes, which will then need to be staked. Liatris is best used in mixed perennial borders, with careful planning to avoid color clashed with the rosy purple. It is a beautiful American wildflower which was brought to Europe, popularized as a cut flower and perennial, and then returned to popularity in the USA.