

BWSR Featured Plant

Name: Meadow blazing star (*Liatris ligulistylis*)

Plant family: Asteraceae (*Aster*)

Meadow blazing stars bloom in late summer, and can flower for several weeks.

Photo Credit: BWSR

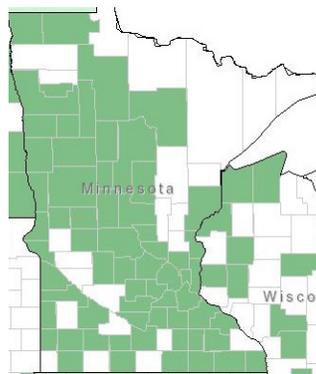
Uses

While milkweed is essential for monarch larvae, the butterflies also require nectar sources — most importantly, those with early or late blooming seasons. Its late and long-lasting blooming season, abundant nectar, and tolerance of varied habitats make meadow blazing star a highly valued pollinator plant. Bumblebees, hummingbirds, and other butterflies including painted lady butterflies, sulphurs, swallowtails and fritillaries feed on the nectar. Later in the season, goldfinches and other birds eat the seeds.



Range

Found in select counties across the Midwest and Great Plains states, meadow blazing star is most common in Minnesota and North Dakota. It is also native to the central Canadian provinces. As its name suggests, it prefers meadows and open areas.



Range map source: University of Minnesota Herbarium

If you're a fan of monarch butterflies, meadow blazing star — AKA Northern Plains blazing star, Rocky Mountain blazing star, meadow gayfeather or Rocky Mountain gayfeather — would be a great addition to your residential, shoreline or wet-meadow planting. Plants' many blooms are a concentrated

nectar source for monarchs, allowing them to linger and feed, giving the plant the nickname "Monarch Magnet." It is also valuable for native bees including the endangered rusty patched bumblebee. All five native species of blazing star that grow in Minnesota provide nectar for butterflies and bumblebees. But meadow blazing star is the most heavily used by pollinators. The tall stalks and long blooming times provide good butterfly viewing opportunities. In the fall, birds eat the seeds.

Plant Stats

STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR

STATUS: Great Plains: FAC; Midwest: FACU; North-central and Northeast: FACU

PRIMARY USES:

Pollinators' nectar source; birds' seed source; monarch butterfly gardens

Identification

Mature plants can grow anywhere from 1 to 5 feet tall, though 2- to 3-foot-tall plants are more typical. Stems are green to deep red with many fine hairs. The lance-shaped lower basal leaves are 1.5 inches wide and about 8 inches long. Leaves along the stem are alternate; they're smaller toward the top of the plant. Meadow blazing

stars' flowers emerge in late summer and can last for weeks. Flowers open from the top of the stem down. Plants produce 30 to 100 purple-to-magenta flowers per head, and one to 40 heads per stem. Flowers are described as thistle-like, feathery and fluffy. Bracts are purple to red, flattening as they mature.



Meadow blazing star's lower leaves are about 8 inches long.
Photo Credit: BWSR

Planting Recommendations

Meadow blazing star prefers rich soils. It tolerates drier soils, where it grows shorter. Seeds can be planted in the fall or spring. As the seedlings establish, they look like grass blades with a distinct central line. Fall planting allows for natural stratification over winter, which breaks seeds' dormancy. Plants also can be established from containerized plants found at native plant nurseries. Or they can be divided in the fall.

Similar Species

Among the Minnesota species, rough blazing star (*Liatris aspera*) bears the closest resemblance and shares a similar range. It can be differentiated by its green, rounded, and

inward-folding bracts. Flowers are similar in color, but with a more distinct stringy style and shorter flower stalks. Dotted blazing star (*Liatris punctata*) also shares a

similar range in Minnesota, but grows farther south and west in the U.S., tolerating drier, sandier soils. Its green-to-purple bracts have larger, long white hairs, and stay flat

against the flower. The plant typically grows only 1 to 2 feet tall. Leaves are shorter and more narrow, (a quarter-inch across and 4 inches long), with dots of resin and short hairy edges.



From left: Dotted blazing star tolerates drier, sandier soils.

The bracts of rough blazing star are a distinguishing feature.

Photo Credits: Katy Chayka, Minnesota Wildflowers

References

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