

Plants for Birds:

Dotted Gayfeather

(Dotted Blazing Star)

- **Scientific Name:** *Liatris punctata* (Asteraceae Family)
- **Height:** 1–2 feet
- **Hardiness:** Zone 3
- **Wildlife Value:** Attracts pollinators, provides nectar for hummingbirds and seeds for finches and sparrows

Dotted gayfeather is a gorgeous native perennial, producing flashy, feathery blooms of purple and pink late in the summer and fall. Highly recommended for pollinator gardens, gayfeather is a favorite of many native bees, including bumble bees, and many Lepidopterans, including monarch butterflies and the rare Pawnee montane skipper. The flowers are favorites of hummingbirds and the seeds are relished by pine siskins, chickadees, American goldfinch, and sparrows. Insectivorous birds are attracted as well since they are drawn to the insect life the plant supports. Dotted gayfeather needs little watering and with its attractive blooms, this species makes the perfect plant for the low maintenance garden.

Liatris punctata commonly occurs in plains and prairie habitat type but is also found in other habitats such as sagebrush, pinyon-juniper, and mountain foothills. In the plains and prairies it grows with several grasses such as the wheatgrasses, Scribner's panic grass, and tumble grass, along with wildflowers like heath aster and golden rod. Interestingly, it is the host for the hemiparasitic wholeleaf Indian paintbrush.

Dotted gayfeather has several human uses. Native Americans have used it for food and medicinally to cure ailments and improve health. Gardeners love it as a cut flower as it retains its color well. It is also a favorite for dried floral arrangements.

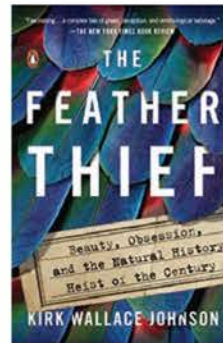
Plant gayfeather in a dry sandy area of your garden 1 to 2 feet apart. It needs full sun and well-drained soil but is tolerant of alkaline conditions. This is a long-lived, highly drought-tolerant plant and when established needs infrequent but deep watering. It grows solitary stems 1 to 2 feet high, which cluster together. It can be started by seed and readily seeds itself, but is also widely available commercially as seedlings. When getting it started in the garden, be patient as first year growth is dedicated to its extensive tap root. It can take a year or more to establish its full bloom size.

Dotted gayfeather is a low maintenance plant needing little care and minimal watering. It provides bright, long-lasting color to the garden and late season food to birds and insects, thus is an excellent choice for the xeric, bird-friendly garden.

- Leslie Eddington



SAS Book Club



February's Book Club Selection is "The Feather Thief: Beauty, Obsession, and the Natural History Heist of the Century." The book has been described as: "One of the most peculiar and memorable true-crime books ever" by *The Christian Science Monitor* and "A rollicking true-crime adventure and a captivating journey into an underground world of fanatical fly-tiers and plume peddlers..."

Both SAS and MOSS book clubs are reading the same book so you have two opportunities to discuss this book. The SAS Book Club meets monthly on the 3rd Wednesday, Feb. 19th, from 4–5:15 at Pilgrim Congregational Church. The MOSS book club meets on the 2nd Wednesday, Feb. 12, 6–7:15 pm at MOSS. The SAS group will be facilitated by Ann Banks and the MOSS group by Jess Haas.

Questions? Contact Sherry Staub at (563) 370-0757 or mayawindsong@gmail.com.