

Blazing Star Bonanza

Members of the genus *Liatris*, or the blazing stars, are one of the showiest fall-blooming plants in North America. Thirty-two species of *Liatris* occur across the U.S., with two species native to the greater Denver metro area: *Liatris punctata* (dotted blazing star) and *Liatris ligulistylis* (Rocky Mountain blazing star).

Liatris are members of the Asteraceae (sunflower) family, and as such their flowers are arranged in heads that are surrounded by bracts. These heads consist of few to several purple disk flowers. *Liatris punctata* is characterized by having heads with bract tips that are acute, and the margins lined with ciliate hairs. The leaves of *L. punctata* are also very distinctive in having black, punctate dots covering the surface. On the other hand, *Liatris ligulistylis* is characterized by having heads with bract tips that are rounded, and the bracts are often fringed on the margins.

Although the common name Rocky Mountain blazing star suggests that this

species is widespread and abundant throughout the Rocky Mountains, *L. ligulistylis* is in fact rather uncommon in Colorado and is more commonly found in the upper Midwest. In fact, there are only two historical records of this species in the Denver metro area, with herbarium specimens collected in 1873 and 1915. This species can be found in wet meadows, and the last known occurrence of this species in the Denver metro area was from Lookout Mountain Park. Alternatively, *Liatris punctata* is widespread throughout the metro area in grasslands and meadows. This species is also often used as a landscaping plant because of its drought tolerance and prolific floral displays.

Help Denver Botanic Gardens document the range of *Liatris punctata* and seek out observations of *Liatris ligulistylis* by photographing as many *Liatris* as possible in the month of September. Post your findings to [iNaturalist](#) so they will be automatically added to the [Denver EcoFlora Project](#).



(TOP) *Liatris punctata*, [hmheinz](#), some rights reserved, CC BY-NC 4.0, (BOTTOM) *Liatris ligulistylis*, [Robert McLeod](#), no rights reserved, CC0 1.0

August EcoQuest – Amache Connections

All six Amache species (*Argemone polyanthemus*, *Cucurbita foetidissima*, *Ipomoea leptophylla*, *Mentzelia nuda*, *Tradescantia occidentalis* and *Ulmus pumila*) were recorded from the Denver metro area. In all, 127 observations were made, with *Argemone polyanthemus* (thistle poppy) the most commonly observed species with 87 observations.

What is an EcoQuest?

EcoQuests are part of the Denver EcoFlora Project. These monthly quests challenge citizens to become citizen scientists and observe, study and conserve the native plants of the Denver – Boulder metro area via iNaturalist, an easy-to-use mobile app.

How Do I Get Started?

1. Download the iNaturalist app or register online at [iNaturalist.org](#).
2. Take photos of the plants in bloom that you find on your daily neighborhood walk. It is okay if they are weeds! Avoid taking photos of cultivated plants in gardens or in your home.

3. If you are concerned about revealing the location of sensitive plants or observations at your own house, you can hide the exact location from the public by changing the “geoprivacy” of the observation to “obscured.”
4. Post your findings on iNaturalist via the app.
5. Your observations will automatically be added to the Denver EcoFlora Project.
6. Sign up to be a member of the [Denver EcoFlora Project](#) on iNaturalist to receive updates and additional information.

What is the Goal?

The Denver EcoFlora Project is designed to meaningfully connect citizens with biodiversity and to assemble novel observations and data on the metro area’s flora to better inform policy decisions and conservation strategies.



Photo by Scott Dressel-Martin