

August EcoQuest: Looking for Liatris

Liatris punctata, or dotted blazing star, lights up the prairie in August with its feathery, purple plumes. This



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species belongs to the sunflower family, Asteraceae. In this family, what appears as a single flower is actually composed of many smaller flowers in the larger “flowerhead.” While many species in the Asteraceae family, like sunflowers and daisies, feature both ray and disk flowers in their flowerheads, *Liatris* showcases only disk flowers, giving the flowerheads a distinct, feathery look.

The star-shaped flowerheads are packed onto spike-like clusters with pink to purple disk flowers. Bracts, the small leaf-like structures below the flowerheads, are pressed flat against the flowerhead. A single plant may have multiple flower spikes, each blooming from top to bottom. The leaves are narrow, upward pointing, with short white hairs along the leaf edges. Covered in resin dots, the leaves give *Liatris punctata* its name: “punctata” means “dotted.” This plant thrives in grasslands and meadows, especially in the Front Range and

eastern plains and is drought-tolerant due to its deep, penetrating taproot. In Colorado, there are only three other *Liatris* species and only *L. punctata* is commonly found. Bracts are important characters in *Liatris*, so if you’re unsure, pay close attention to this feature.

Liatris punctata is known for having many medicinal uses. Pulverized roots have been used to improve appetite and boiled roots for managing swelling. Tea from the plant has been used for stomachaches, as well as bladder and kidney problems. This species’ drought tolerance and attractiveness to pollinators, especially butterflies and native bees, makes it a popular choice for native plant gardens.

Look for these feathery plumes this August and share your photos on [iNaturalist](#) to contribute to our understanding of this beautiful species.

What is an EcoQuest?

EcoQuests, part of the Denver EcoFlora project, challenge citizens to become citizen scientists and observe, study and conserve the native plants of the City 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 ok if they are weeds! But avoid taking photos of cultivated plants in gardens or in your home.
3. If you are concerned about revealing the location of sensitive organisms 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. You can add an identification to your photo when you post your findings on iNaturalist, or leave it blank for others to identify.

What is the Goal?

The 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