

# Shortleaf gayfeather

(*Liatris tenuifolia*)

For definitions of botanical terms, visit [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary\\_of\\_botanical\\_terms](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_botanical_terms).

With 16 species of *Liatris* creating stunning seas of violet to lavender in natural areas and on roadsides across the state, purple is one of Florida's signature fall colors. Shortleaf gayfeather is endemic to the Southeastern Coastal Plain, from Alabama to South Carolina. It thrives in the dry, well-drained sands of scrub and pine flatwoods. The mid to late fall blooms are a valuable food source for many pollinators.



Photo by Emily Bell

Dormant in winter, Shortleaf gayfeather sends out new 4- to 10-inch narrow linear basal leaves in spring. In summer, a glabrous stem adorned with alternate short needle-like leaves emerges and a long flower spike develops. The small lavender flowers are tubular, 5-lobed corollas with elongated styles that bloom from the top of the spike down. Seeds are dried brown cypsela.

The Atlas of Florida Plants recognizes a separate variety of this species, *Liatris tenuifolia* var. *quadriflora*, which some taxonomists split into a separate species as *Liatris laevigata*. It can be distinguished by its broader basal leaves.

**Family:** Asteraceae (Aster, composite or daisy family)

**Native range:** Throughout, but with absences in many south Florida counties

To see where natural populations of Shortleaf gayfeather have been vouchered, visit [www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu](http://www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu).

**Hardiness:** Zones 8A–10B

**Lifespan:** Perennial

**Soil:** Well-drained sand

**Exposure:** Full sun

**Growth habit:** up to 4 feet tall

**Propagation:** Seed

**Garden tips:** A wonderful addition to a mixed wildflower meadow, Shortleaf gayfeather provides vibrant fall color and attracts many butterflies and bees.

Plants are available from nurseries that specialize in Florida native plants. Visit [www.PlantRealFlorida.org](http://www.PlantRealFlorida.org) to find a nursery in your area.



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