

ASK A MASTER GARDENER

GAGA FOR GAURA

Question: What is a long-blooming, drought-tolerant plant you would recommend for a perennial border?

Answer: *Oenothera linheimeri*, commonly known as wandflower, beeblossom, appleblossom grass, whirling butterfly plant or white gaura is a delicately beautiful, drought tolerant host to a variety of pollinators and has a prolific, long blooming season. I added it to my own border last season and I am so glad I did.

These past weeks of endless rain make it difficult to imagine we could ever have been (or possibly be again) in the clutches of pervasive drought. But though our gardens may



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be sodden now, if the past several summers are any guide, hot, dry weeks are likely to return.

It makes sense to be thinking beyond the weather we find ourselves in now. If you are looking for a plant as enchanting as it is drought tolerant, gaura is a great choice.

I first became aware of this graceful perennial with its simple four-petaled blossoms on arching grasslike stems while I was on a tour of the xeriscape section of the Discovery

Garden near River Forks Park. Clumps of gaura feature prominently along the borders there, its white blooms like tiny dancing fairies set to motion in the least breeze or when brushed by passers-by.

I made a mental note to add it to my own garden and purchased two plants this past spring: one, the white original and the second, a pink cultivar. They settled in well in my amended clay soil.

Gauras are tolerant of most any soil that drains well. The bed I tucked them into has several young plantings that still require moderate watering. Some watering allows for more prolific bloom from gaura, but beware of watering too heavily which can lead to root rot.

So far, mine seem to be faring well, even despite this exceptionally wet winter. I am crossing my fingers. The established specimens in the xeriscape garden receive no water beyond natural rainfall, and bloom through many weeks of dryness. My plants bloomed prolifically early summer into fall, adding the unique magic that initially attracted me to them.

Oenothera linheimeri is native to southeast Texas, Louisiana and Mexico. These days, it is also available in several cultivars that provide some variations in size and color.

BURCHSTEAD, B10



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Top: Gaura is a solid choice for pollinator gardens. It is a favored host for long-tongued bees, bumblebees, syrphid flies and the white lined sphinx moth (hummingbird moth) caterpillars.

Above: One of the best features of gaura plants is the long bloom time, much longer than most perennials. The heaviest blooming occurs in early summer, but you can expect flushes of flowers to recur throughout the summer and into fall.

BURCHSTEAD

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The ‘Ballerina’ series has a deep magenta bloom and more compact growing habit, which may be better suited for smaller or more formal gardens. I chose a “Siskiyou Pink” in addition to the native white. But though its blooms and stems might be more colorful, the plant structure lacks the delicate airiness of the original.

Some sites list gaura as being deer resistant. I did not find that to be the case, though our neighborhood deer seemed to prefer pink over white.

For pollinator gardens, gaura is also a solid choice. It is a favored host for a variety of pollinators such as long-tongued bees, bumblebees, syrphid flies and the white lined sphinx moth (hummingbird moth) caterpillars. If you are not already familiar with hummingbird moths, they are worth a Google.

Gaura is an easy care plant. You can just let it be. The spent blooms tend to dry and fall off without becoming unsightly. Trimming is not necessary, though you

can keep its long blooming season invigorated by pruning spent stems. This fall, I left some stems for over-wintering beneficial insect support, and will prune these in late spring when new growth appears.

Leaving stems may allow for some self-seeding, though ‘Siskiyou Pink’, developed in Medford, is a sterile cultivar.

The information I found on invasiveness seems to be mixed. But gaura has been a friendly neighbor in the Discovery Garden for years.

Gaura can be propagated by seed or by cuttings. In our mild climate, it holds onto its leaves over winter. I love this delightful addition to my garden. Discovering its

value to pollinators only endears it to me more. I am already thinking of where I might add a few more clumps.

This May you will likely be able to pick some up at the Master Gardener Plant Sale at the fairgrounds.

William Wordsworth writes eloquently about how a memory of a field of daffodils fed his soul in darker times that followed. Fortunately for us, in this winter’s darkness, Douglas County is living up to its “banana belt” reputation. Many of our gardens currently feature “still bloomers” and early buddings. And I am so grateful we dodged the debilitating storms and destruction experienced recently by neighboring

gardeners around us.

But the quagmire state of our gardens after these weeks and weeks of soaking rain can make us weary. Remembering the gems of last growing season, and the search and planning for the new garden stars of next season are what get us through.

Gaura is a gem. Mr.

Wordsworth, I do love daffodils, but thinking of gaura’s tiny blossoms dancing in the breeze on delicate stems like a cotillion of tiny fairies, warms me like summer.

What will you be adding to your own garden this spring?

Do you have a gardening

or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, 541-672-4461 or 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.



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Gaura is a clump-forming herbaceous perennial. It grows 3-5 feet tall and 1-2 feet wide.