

TOM'S GARDEN

BLOG SEPTEMBER 2022

Antlion (*Myrmeleontidae*)

Antlions are a group of insects known for the predatory habits of their larvae, which dig pits to trap passing ants or other prey. The larvae are sometimes called doodlebugs because of the marks they leave in the sand when relocating.



Sand traps around my house foundation. Antlions are found throughout the world, usually in dry, sandy soil. This is a bug that is recognized in its larval form and hardly noticed as an adult.



Adults resemble drab-colored 1 ½ inch damsel flies with four

veined wings. Antlions are harmless and cause no damage to plants, people, or structures. They are very beneficial and feed on ants and other insects that fall into their traps. It is interesting for both kids and adults to watch them make the pits and catch their prey. Antlions are some of the coolest insects around! [Look up "Antlion Cone Deathtrap" on YouTube.](#)

You get a front-row seat to one of nature's wildest battles. Antlions are not only entertaining, but educational. You can discover how insects learn and respond to their environment.

Antlions can be purchased if you don't see them on your property.

www.antlionfarms.com has kits and other educational products for sale. Great for teachers.

Meadow Blazing Star (*Liatris ligulistylis*)

Meadow blazing star is a perennial flower native to the upper Midwest and Central Canada. This native is one of the best plants for attracting Monarch butterflies.

It grows 5' tall in full sun and well-draining soil and is very drought resistant. It blooms for about 6 weeks in summer and attracts bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds.



If you are considering adding this plant to your landscape, keep in mind that it likes to be out in the open and not crowded by other vegetation or structures. The nectar is irresistible to butterflies and now that the Monarch has made the *endangered species list*, it is even more important to provide nectar and host plants (milkweeds) for their migration to Mexico. As a bonus, seedheads are produced that bird species such as goldfinches love. Keep the stalks up until spring and you will have birds eating the seeds from the stalks and on the ground throughout winter. It will self-seed to some degree, but this is easily controlled. This plant is often used for prairie restoration projects in the Midwest.



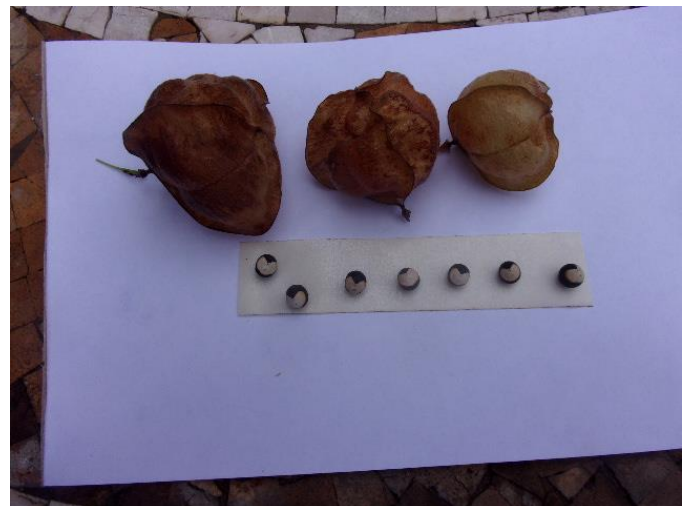
Meadow blazing star does not require any fertilizing. Fertilizers are usually high in nitrogen, which will make the plant grow taller with more leaves and less flowers and cause it to flop over.

You can winter sow these seeds where they are to grow or “cold stratify” in the refrigerator using a paper towel and a sandwich bag. Get the towel damp with a spray bottle and place the seed in the middle so it is between two sheets of moist towel. Put this in a zip-lock bag and put it in the refrigerator for 2 months. Check it occasionally to make sure it is damp. This mimics winter conditions outside. In spring, fill a container with moist potting

soil and sprinkle the seed onto the soil. Press the seed into the soil but don't cover it, light is needed for germination. Place the container where it will get morning sun and afternoon shade. Once you see the second set of leaves, you can separate the seedlings and repot them in other containers. Already started plants can also be purchased from nurseries.

If you already have liatris growing, it can be divided in fall or early spring while the plant is dormant. You can also save your own liatris seeds.

Here is an update on the Love-in-a-puff seeds. Usually 3 seeds in each “puff” with a perfect heart shape.



Mortgage Lifter Tomato

A large, smooth, 1-lb pink fruit has a rich, sweet taste. Developed by M.C. Byles of Logan West Virginia. After crossing varieties for 6 years, and selecting the best, he introduced this tomato that he named Mortgage Lifter in the 1940s. He sold plants for \$1 each and paid off the \$6,000 mortgage on his house.

Planting for Spring

When you have purchased spring flowering bulbs that will be planted in fall, trying to decide where to put them can be a dilemma. Before you just pop them into a bare spot, think about how your garden space will look in spring. Will the perennials die off to the ground? Does the ground cover disappear until late spring?

These are places that are not so inviting looking to plant bulbs in now but would benefit from splashes of color early in the year until the perennials take over again. Some perennials such as butterfly weed, milkweed, and crape myrtle emerge very late, in fact, so late that you would think they didn't survive the winter. These are perfect spots to plant those early-flowering bulbs although it doesn't seem so perfect in fall when plants are still growing. Some ideas would include crocuses, hyacinths, snowdrops, early daffodils, and grape hyacinths.

After a long, dull winter any flower that appears is a welcomed sight. These bulbs look great growing out of dormant groundcovers and brown and lifeless perennials.



Once you start looking for spots where spring bulbs could make a big difference, you will find there is more space than you imagined. Many spaces that now have plants thriving will be gone in spring. Take some photos in spring and you will realize how much more room you have. Use those photos in the fall to plan your bulb gardens.

So.....Buy more bulbs this fall and experiment with them and above all, have some fun! Your friends and neighbors will think you have a green thumb (and ask you for advice!)

Native Viburnums

Native viburnums (members of the elder family), provide all-season beauty as shrubs and small trees. They bloom in spring with white to cream-colored flowers and lush green foliage all summer. The leaves and single-seeded fruits (called drupes), turn brilliant colors in fall. Some have very ornamental bark in winter.

Viburnums are much easier to grow than hydrangeas and are great shrubs for wildlife. Viburnums support a whole host of North American animals that rely on the natural foods they provide. They are of particular importance to butterflies and moths, whose larvae are an important food source for birds. If you are looking for shrubs with multi-season interest, here are a few to try:

Arrowwood (*viburnum dentatum*) USDA Zones 3-8

Nannyberry (*V.lentago*) USDA Zones 2-8

American Cranberry Bush (*V. opulus*) USDA Zones 2-7

