

Odontonema strictum Firespike¹

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Introduction

Firespike is an herbaceous perennial growing to about 4 feet tall with an upright habit which has naturalized in Florida. The shiny, dark green leaves of this plant have entire to undulate margins and reach a length of 7 to 8 inches. Beautiful terminal or axillary spikes of tubular red flowers appear on firespike in the fall and winter. These showy flowers attract hummingbirds and several species of butterflies. In some ways the plant remains me of an overgrown and much nicer red salvia.



Figure 1. Full Form - *Odontonema strictum*: Firespike
Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS



Figure 2. Leaf - *Odontonema strictum*: Firespike
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Figure 3. Flower - *Odontonema strictum*: Firespike
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General Information

Scientific name: *Odontonema strictum*

Pronunciation: oh-dawn-toe-NEEM-muh STRICK-tum

Common name(s): firespike

Family: *Acanthaceae*

Plant type: herbaceous

USDA hardiness zones: 8B through 11 (Figure 4)

Planting month for zone 8: year round

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: may self-seed each year

Uses: cut flowers; mass planting; attracts butterflies; attracts hummingbirds

Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries



Figure 4. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: 2 to 6 feet

Spread: 2 to 3 feet

Plant habit: upright

Plant density: moderate

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: undulate

Leaf shape: ovate

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: red

Flower characteristic: fall flowering, winter flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: unknown

Fruit length: unknown

Fruit cover: unknown

Fruit color: unknown

Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems

Current year stem/twig color: reddish

Current year stem/twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun

Soil tolerances: acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam

Drought tolerance: moderate

Soil salt tolerances: poor

Plant spacing: 24 to 36 inches

Other

Roots: not applicable

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding plant: plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

Use and Management

Firespike may be best utilized in the landscape in a mass planting. Plants can be spaced about 2 feet apart to fill in the area quickly. It is one of only a few flowering plants that give good, red color in a partially shaded site. The lovely flowers also make firespike an excellent candidate for the cutting garden.

Place firespike in full sun for best habit and heavy blooming. This perennial may be grown on a wide range of moderately fertile, sandy soils and is quite drought tolerant. Firespike is tender to cold, but winter freezes help to control its size. Prune this plant to the ground in the winter to clean it up.

Propagate firespike by division or cuttings.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.