

Gaura (*Oenothera lindheimeri*)

Damon E. Abdi, Ph.D., Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist, LSU AgCenter Hammond Research Station

Sara R. Shields, Ph.D., LSU AgCenter Master Gardener State Coordinator

Jason Stagg, Senior Landscape Manager, LSU AgCenter Botanic Gardens at Burden

Allen Owings, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus, LSU AgCenter Hammond Research Station

Gaura (*Oenothera lindheimeri*)

- **Latin Name:** *Oenothera lindheimeri*; formerly known as *Gaura lindheimeri*
- **Common Name:** Gaura, Bee Blossom, Wand Flower, Whirling Butterflies
- **Recommended Use:** Herbaceous perennial, mass planting, native plantings, pollinator gardens, cottage gardens
- **Exposure:** Full sun to part shade
- **Size:** 2 to 4 feet tall; 1 to 2 feet wide
- **Habit:** Upright, airy and vasselike form with gracefully arching shoots stemming from the basal clump
- **Bloom Time:** Early spring to midsummer. Deadheading in summer supports secondary flowers in the fall.
- **Maintenance Category:** Low
- **Water Use:** Low
- **Highlights:** Performs well across a spectrum of environments, demonstrating resiliency to heat, humidity, drought and seasonal temperature swings.

Summary

Gaura adds a delicate touch to the landscape, with the wispy flowers on this herbaceous perennial adding a stunning, soft texture to the landscape from spring to midsummer (and even longer if cut back). While the common name of this plant is gaura, that same name used to be the genus of this plant; however, it has been recently reclassified as a member of the *Oenothera* genus. Gaura is native to Louisiana and is often observed growing in environments ranging from prairies and



The Belleza variety of gaura comes in various shades including dark pink. Photo by Allen Owings

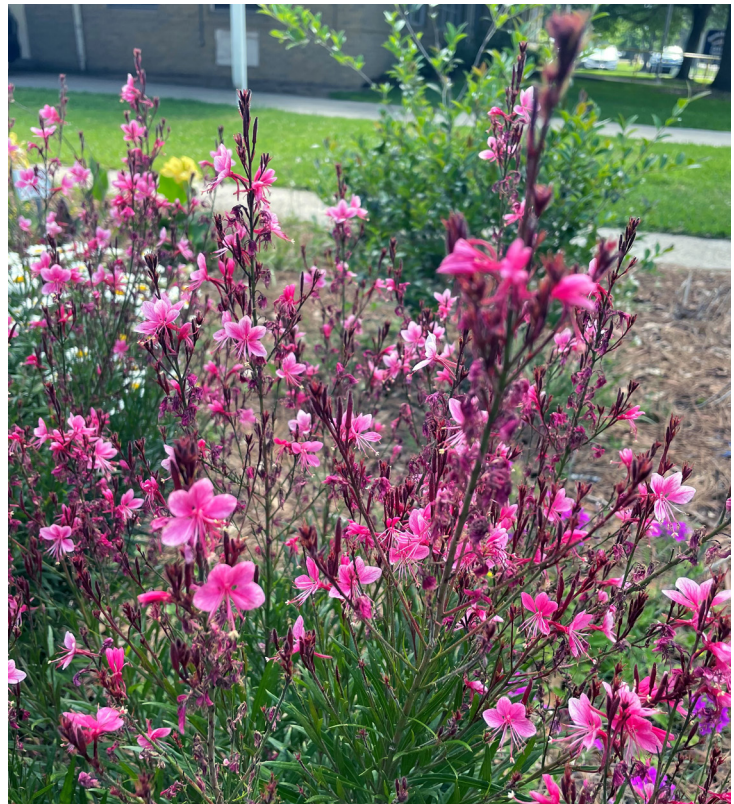


Gaura flowers float above the surface, swaying gently in the wind to create a unique look to the landscape. Photo by Sara Shields

piney woods to the edges of ponds, highlighting its adaptability to a range of soils and site conditions. It has been observed to perform well in the droughts we have experienced as of late and in our quintessential humid conditions that grace the gardens and landscapes of Louisiana. The defining feature of this plant is the delicate flowers that rest upon the end of the thin, gracefully arching stems that emerge from the clumps. Flowers are relatively small (less than 1 inch wide), possessing four to five petals that come in several colors. While white flowers are considered the most common, several other shades can be selected to add a unique flair to the garden. You may certainly enjoy the pinks of Siskiyou Pink, Belleza (which is available in lighter or darker shades of pink), or Whirling Butterflies. As the name of the latter might imply, gaura is just as appealing to pollinators as it is to people — both bees and butterflies can be observed buzzing around this plant. The flowers, small and subtle as they may be, steal the show with their elevated position on the plant; however, the foliage can add a dynamic fall feature as the season progresses. The typically green, lanceolate leaves can mature into a reddish hue as the season progresses, and some cultivars may even be selected with foliage at the front of mind. For example, the new



White is the most commonly seen color of gaura. Photo by Allen Owings



Gaura shows off its blooms from spring to midsummer. Deadheading gaura during the summer supports secondary flowers in the fall. Photos by Allen Owings

growth on Belleza brings forth vibrant, red foliage that attracts attention with or without flowers. Foliage can be evergreen, semievergreen, or deciduous based on location and climate conditions.

A robust, low-maintenance perennial, gaura can handle a wide range of weather conditions and soils; however, it performs best in well-drained soils. This may be attributed to its prominent taproot, searching deep into the soil for sufficient water, even in sandy sites. Its appreciation of moist yet well-drained soil makes this a great selection in all sorts of site conditions, where, when planted in masses, this species creates fine clouds of flowers scattered a few feet above the soil surface. Minimal maintenance is needed for this plant; however, late-season flower blooms can be bolstered by deadheading flower stalks in midsummer. As gaura matures throughout the season, leggy stems may languish in the landscape and be less self-supportive. Simply severing the scraggly flower stems can maintain an appealing form and support a flush of flowers in the fall. As part of your spring cleaning, cutting this plant back to half its height can set up a successful growing season and maintain a more desirable form. While deadheading and pruning might not be necessary if a mass planting with

a natural look is desired, light maintenance will foster a more formal look to the garden that may be easier to manage. Gaura may be difficult to transplant or divide given the prominent taproot, but the ease with which this plant reseeds can provide plenty of opportunities to expand your collection of this showy species; however, many of the named cultivars do not reseed to the same extent as unnamed varieties.

As a low-maintenance herbaceous perennial that tolerates all types of conditions that we face in the Louisiana landscape, gaura can add a unique texture, flower form and aesthetic attributes to the landscape. While the individual flowers are relatively inconspicuous, mass plantings create a unique, elevated effect, with the flowers seemingly floating above the basal clumps. One of the more unique qualities of this plant is that it provides movement to the landscape, where a brisk breeze can create a gentle sway of the flower stems that lends an appearance of butterflies whirling around the garden. Consider using gaura to fill in areas of the landscape that won't regularly require watering, have sandy soils or could benefit from more bees and butterflies.

Requirements

- Gaura prefers sunny locations, but part shade is acceptable.
- It performs well in humid conditions, making it ideal for the Louisiana landscape.
- It is very adaptable to drought conditions but can tolerate some moisture.
- Well-drained soil is ideal, but overly rich soils (i.e., lots of organic matter and nutrients) are not preferred.

Growth Habit

- Gaura is a herbaceous perennial that grows from clumps.
- Upright, airy and arching stems add elevated interest and provide a pedestal for the small flowers.
- It often grows 2 to 4 feet tall by 1 to 2 feet wide; however, compact cultivars such as Little Janie, Steffi

White and Steffi Pink can be selected to provide a more manageable size.

- While below the surface and out of sight, the prominent taproot is a defining feature of this species and supports drought tolerance and sandy soil establishment.

Care and Maintenance

- Gaura does not require much nutrition. A light fertilizer application in spring, if needed, can support healthy growth. Too much fertilizer can force a floppy form that may not be desirable.
- Deadheading flower stalks in midsummer as blooms wane can support a fresh flush of flowers during the fall.
- Many of the popular named cultivars do not reseed quite as freely as unnamed varieties of gaura, which may be preferable for meticulously managed landscapes.

For more information on gaura and other Louisiana Super Plants, contact your local LSU AgCenter Extension office or visit www.lsuagcenter.com/portals/our_offices/research_stations/hammond/features/super_plants.



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