



Cooperative Extension Service
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

*Odontonema strictum*¹

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Introduction

Firespike is an herbaceous perennial growing to about 4-foot-tall with an upright habit which has naturalized in Florida (Fig. 1). 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.

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 (Fig. 2)

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

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

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



Figure 1. Firespike.

Spread: 2 to 3 feet

Plant habit: upright

Plant density: moderate

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: coarse

Description

Height: 2 to 6 feet

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

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

Invasive potential: may self-seed each year

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. Each plant 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.