Introduction

Firespike is an herbaceous perennial growing to about 4-feet-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

Description

Height: 2 to 6 feet
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

**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.