

LOOK AGAIN !

The average garden contains so many exotic species and artificial hybrids that it is easy to forget that some native North American wildflowers were long ago brought into cultivation unchanged. A few that come to mind are the hardy and beautiful New England Aster, the Blazing Stars (Liatris spp.), and the so-called Moss Pink or Thrift (Phlox subulata).

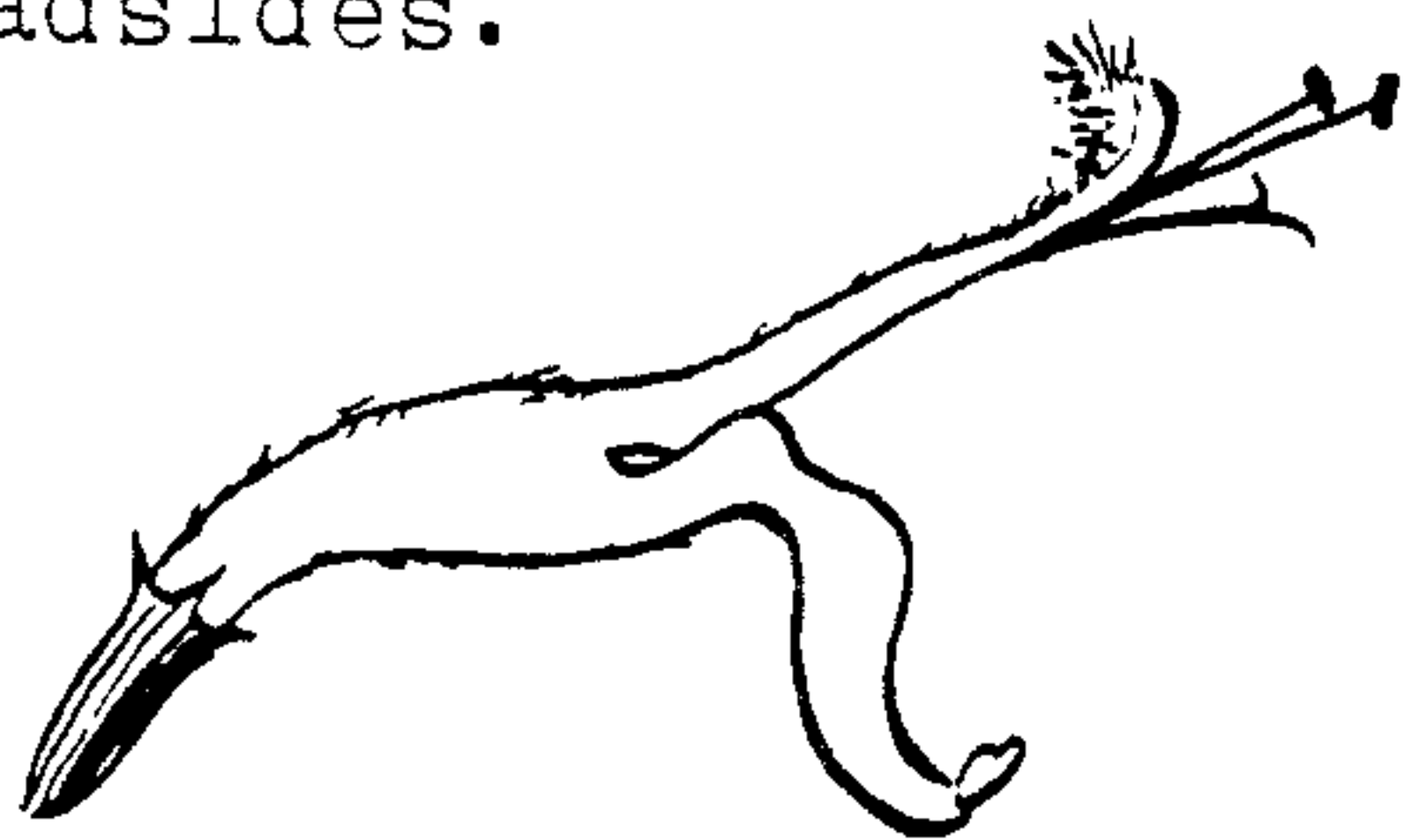
Another familiar example is Bee-balm, or Oswego Tea (Monarda didyma). This showy member of the Mint Family was used by Indian tribes in the northeast as a flavoring agent, and during the colonial period the residents of Oswego, New York, made a beverage from its leaves in protest against the tax levied by the English on imported Oriental teas. This particular species is the one with bright crimson flowers, and in the wild it favors wet situations.



MONARDA DIDYMA

There are several other Monardas in our area, and all of them have a dense terminal head of long, tubular, two-lipped flowers subtended by leafy bracts which tend to be suffused with color corresponding to that of the corolla. All bloom in the summer and early fall.

The most abundant is Wild Bergamot (M. fistulosa), with pink or lavender flowers each having a distinctive tuft of hairs near the outer end of the upper lip. This very fragrant species is more likely to be found in dry open woods or fields or along roadsides.



M. FISTULOSA

Basil Balm (M. clinopodia) is widely distributed in the southern mountains. It has white or pinkish flowers which are spotted with purple and lack the tuft of hairs.

Occasionally one will find what appears to be a color variant of Oswego Tea, with flowers of rich purple instead of red. This is thought to be a natural hybrid of M. didyma and M. fistulosa, and has been named M. media.

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