



Kevin Milaeger

# Milaeger's

## Amazing Gas Plant---it's flammable! See the video, read the blog.

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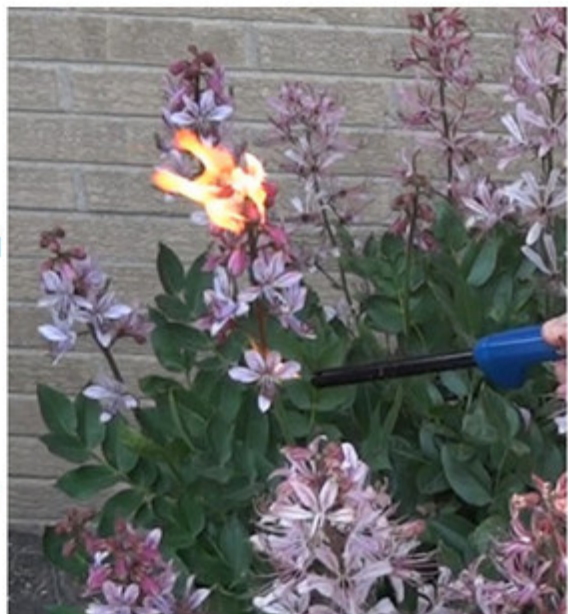
When people hear the name "Gas Plant" they usually don't know what to make of it. I suspect they think it might be some sort of joke. Although this plant makes me smile, this is no joke. Also known as Burning Bush, this plant does emit a flammable gas (about which more later). This hardy Eurasian perennial has all the characteristics that I look for in a plant---hardiness, longevity, great foliage, an attractive flower---plus both flower and foliage have a citrus scent. It normally blooms in June here in Racine. I first became acquainted with this plant over thirty years ago when I saw the white form in great quantity in the garden of a woman who was growing cut flowers for market. She explained that the Gas Plant provided her with large quantities of white flowers for June weddings. The pinkish form of the plant is now the more common variety. The flowering



period of the Gas Plant is about two weeks, and I think that for any short blooming plant to be truly desirable it should have other noteworthy features, and this plant certainly does. After the flower is finished, the very attractive, star-shaped seed heads form. The seed heads are greenish at first, aging to beige. When fully aged, the round black seeds pop out. The dry seed heads can be brought indoors for autumn décor, but you will end up with seeds all over the place unless the dispersal first

takes place in the garden. I believe the most important feature of any perennial is the foliage. If the plant is to have a prominent position, great leaves are a must, and the Gas Plant fulfills that requirement. The leaf branches are stiff and each one holds numerous small pointed leaves. They resemble those of the ash tree, hence the species name *fraxinella*. (*Fraxinus* is the genus name for ash.) The leaves are fairly thick and have a rough texture. They have a strong citrus scent which is released when something rubs up against the plant. Oftentimes when I am absentmindedly hoeing in the perennial garden, the unexpected aroma of lemons wakes me up, and I realize that I have backed into the Gas Plant.

Now, about that "flammable" part---the flowers do produce a flammable gas. I have ignited them many times. If you want to do this yourself you will need to know a few things. The best conditions are at the end of a warm, windless day. The gas will have had a chance to accumulate, and the wind will not have dispersed it. Low humidity also seems to be a plus. Hold a match under the head of the flower cluster. If there is only a small amount of gas you will observe sparks and a crackling sound. If there is plenty of gas a torch like flame will engulf the flower cluster, lasting only a fraction of a second. The gas burns, not the flower, so there is no damage to the flower or the plant. I have even ignited the flowers indoors, after the flowers have been cut. This is great for entertaining guests.



[click here for video 1](#)

[click here for video 2](#)

Of course, you can't have this much fun without putting up with at least one drawback. The Gas Plant contains a sap which can result in a rash for some people---it is called phytophotodermatitis.



Gas Plant is in the "rue" family of plants, and some in that tribe have the same characteristic. Over the many years of dealing with this plant I have met only two people who have had a reaction. But keep this in mind if you are prone to skin problems.

The Gas Plant grows in sun or shade, perhaps a bit happier in sun, where it is somewhat more vigorous. It is hardy to Zone 3, so it would survive even in northern Wisconsin. A mature plant is about 30" wide. Height would be around 18-24", up to 30" in bloom. I suspect that herbivorous animals would not be interested in this plant. I have contended with my share of rabbits, woodchucks, and deer and haven't yet had a problem. Maybe the strong citrus scent or the unpleasant sap acts as a deterrent. If you read old books about this plant they all mention that this plant resents disturbance---well, don't we all? But in this case, I think this is an instance of "facts" getting published, and then other writers "borrowing" that information without ever bothering to check for themselves. I have moved countless Gas Plants, and although I've never moved a really old plant, I don't think I have ever had a failure. Gas Plant seeds itself around the garden in a gentle way, not at all a pest. I like to dig up the seedlings and put them in small pots. Then I always have a small gift to give visitors to my garden. Most everyone admires the Gas Plant, and giving plants from one's garden is an age old tradition among gardeners---probably all over the world, I suspect.