Indian Pink

Indian pink (*Spigelia marilandica*), also known as pinkroot, is a native, herbaceous perennial that naturally occurs in many SC counties, as well as in several nearby Southern states. Showy, tubular flowers open during mid-May in the Piedmont, but as much as 2 weeks later at higher elevations.

Clusters of elongate flower buds are formed at the top of each stem, and mature to a vibrant scarlet red. Each flower opens with 5-pointed petals that create an intense yellow star at the top of the floral corolla. Operation Ruby Throat in York County, SC has rated Indian pink in their top ten, native hummingbird-attracting plants.

**Landscape Uses**

Indian pink prefers to grow in semi-shaded, woodland sites with adequate soil moisture. They may be found also growing along the edges of rich, moist woods in partly-sunny sites. Irrigation may be required in more sunny landscape settings. Plants are upright in form and grow to 1½ to 2½ feet tall. Foliage will be denser, and plants will be more compact and floriferous in sites with greater amounts of sunlight. In shady woodland habitats, the plants will be taller and leggier.

**Soil Preparation**

Amending large landscape beds with organic matter is always better than simply amending a planting hole. Amendments containing composted (decomposed) pine bark will improve soil drainage in clay soils, maintain the natural soil acidity that is important for this native perennial, and help suppress soil-borne disease. However, leaf compost...
may be used. All forms of organic matter help the soil hold on to applied nutrients for the plants to slowly utilize.

In general, amend the soil with organic matter to 10 to 20% by volume. This will make for a very good quality soil without extensively changing the soil structure. For a landscape bed, evenly apply a 1 to 1½-inch deep layer of organic matter over the planting bed, and then thoroughly mix by tilling to 6 or 7 inches deep. As these perennials require an acidic soil, choose a site that has not been limed in recent years.

Fall is the best time to plant most perennials as roots will grow during the fall and spring months to better establish plants before the heat and drought begin in the summer. Apply mulch to landscape beds.

Fertilization
Because of the need for acidic soils, acid-forming fertilizers are the best to use. Examples of complete organic fertilizers for acid-requiring plants are:
- Espoma Holly-Tone (4-3-4),
- Fertrell Holly Care (4-6-4),
- Jobe’s Organics Azalea, Camellia & Rhododendron Fertilizer (4-4-4),
- Natural Guard Evergreen & Holly Food (5-4-5).

Examples of appropriate, slow-release fertilizers are:
- Lilly Miller Ultragreen Azalea, Camellia & Rhododendron Food (10-5-4),
- Pennington Evergreen & Rhododendron Plant Food (12-6-6),
- Sta-Green Azalea, Camellia & Rhododendron Food (10-5-4),
- Scott’s Evergreen, Flowering Tree & Shrub Fertilizer (11-7-7),
- Vigoro Azalea, Camellia & Rhododendron Food (10-8-8).

A soil test can help determine the best fertilizer analysis to choose. To encourage faster growth, fertilize perennials twice during the spring, such as on April 1st and again in mid-May to cover the main spring growing period. Do not allow fertilizer to touch the stems.

Cultivar
- ‘Little Redhead’: This cultivar grows to 21 inches tall and produces abundant blooms.

Propagation
By 3 or more years of growth, each Indian pink plant should produce a dense, fibrous root system with multiple stems and may be propagated by division. A plant may be dug, rinsed free of soil to expose the root system, and divisions cut apart
using a sharp, serrated knife. Each division should have a growing point or stem. Divisions are best made in early summer to have time for sufficient root development after transplanting before they go dormant in the fall. Larger divisions may bloom the following spring. For more information on dividing perennials, please see HGIC 1150, Dividing Perennials.

Indian pink are easy to propagate from seed. Seed capsules generally ripen by early July. Once ripe, the seed are not held long as the capsules explosively dehisce and seeds are scattered nearby. Capsules may be bagged to capture mature seeds before they are ejected. Seeds should be planted immediately. Some of the young plants exposed to winter weather may bloom the following year. Smaller seedlings may require another year to bloom.

Propagation from tip cuttings can be achieved by taking the cuttings before the plants begin to bloom in the spring. Stem cuttings with 2 to 3 nodes can be rooted in a 2:1 perlite and peat medium, or use a fine-grade potting soil that is made for seed germination and mix it with an equal part of perlite. Using rooting hormone containing IBA will enhance the number of cuttings that will root.

Examples of powdered products in 2 ounce bottles with 0.1% IBA are:

- Green Light Rooting Hormone,
- Schultz Take Root,
- Miracle-Gro Fast Root Rooting Hormone
- Ferti-lome Rooting Powder
- Bonide Bontone Rooting Powder
- Garden Tech Root Boost
- Garden Safe Take Root Rooting Hormone

Root cuttings in small, clean containers. Once cuttings are rooted, place the young plants to receive morning sun and afternoon shade for growth. Over-winter the plants with cold protection and transplant the following spring.