

## Some of My Favorite Natives Karen Vail

**Glacier Lily *Erythronium grandiflorum*** The first sunny flowers of spring! These are beautiful plants, but establishing them in your garden takes patience. The best way is to collect completely dried seed from the pretty brown, open pods, spread the seed in the fall. Mark the area well! The first year a little tiny single leaf emerges; second year, and up to several years later, that single leaf gets progressively larger. The corms are storing energy to set bud and bloom. Finally, you will see two leaves emerge, and that year you will have a bloom. Each year they get better and better. The plants wilt and disappear for the rest of the summer. Dry and sunny seems to be the best in my garden. In nature I see them in rich meadows and on rocky slopes, so experiment in your garden. Do not try and move them once established; mature corms can be more than 2 feet deep. Add buds, blooms, leaves and green seed pods to salads and stir fries in moderation (they can be emetic in larger amounts)

**Yampa *Perideridia gairdneri*** I love having Yampa in my garden! It is a frilly creamy umbel blooming when not a lot of other flowers are. I add the flowers, leaves and young seeds to my cooking (or just eat them raw, yummy!). Once I have established enough I might dig a couple of tubers, but they are slow growing. There are two ways to introduce Yampa into your garden. Collect completely dried seed in the fall, spread it where you want it and enjoy. Or dig the tubers in the fall after the plants are dormant and transplant them. I gather seed every fall and scatter it throughout my garden. Yampa likes full sun with richer soils.

**Colorado Blue Columbine *Aquilegia coerulea*** If you have rich soil and dappled shade (or even full sun if you can shade the roots) you can grow our beautiful state flower. Legally, you can collect small amounts of ripe seed. Because it is our state flower you cannot dig and transplant plants from public lands. If you have a friend with some on their land, ask them. They seed prolifically and take well from seed sown in late fall. If you have other colored columbine in your garden the resulting seed from you native blue plant will not remain blue. They are very promiscuous.

**Wild Blue Flax *Adenolinum lewisii*** I love having these delicate, long blooming bright blue flowers scattered through my xeric gardens. I let them go to seed freely, and then pull out the seedlings in areas where they compete too much with other plants. Initially I tried transplanting a few plants, with very poor results. These plants tend not to be long-lived so I do rely on seed. They need the driest, poorest soils of your landscape. The gravel of my driveway has become one of their favorite haunts.

**Sulphur Flower *Eriogonum umbellatum* and False Buckwheat *Eriogonum subalpinum*** If you have an exposed slope where nothing seems to grow, these are your plants!! They are matt-forming, growing from a central taproot and occasionally rooting as they go along. Sulphur flower has brilliant yellow flowers and False buckwheat flowers begin creamy when then faded to pink. Their dense matt of foliage turns brilliant red in the fall. They do not like moist areas! They need the best of drainage, but they can take our horrible clay (with drainage, hence loving those slopes). I tried many times to dig and transplant with little success. I found that taking only the very youngest plants worked, this is probably because of their extensive taproot. Seed will work if you have a looong time to wait. Nurseries now carry an excellent selection of *Eriogonum*. A new one I have really enjoyed because of its floriferous ness is Kannah Creek; a beautiful sunny yellow variety.

**Alpine strawberry *Fragaria virginiana*** I actually have a runnerless strawberry that I love. The berries are the sweetest, tastiest berries, and they produce all summer long. Runnering strawberries are great ground covers for richer soil areas. These native strawberries are hardier and tend not to die out in ground cover situations as the hybrid plants. Digging and transplanting is super easy, or you can take the stolons with a little plant at the end and get those to root. *F. vesca* is a little more moisture needy than *F. virginiana*, so if you have a richer soil area, with even a little shade, this species will do well.

**Goldeneye *Heliomeris multiflora*** Some people might berate me for adding goldeneye to gardens. Goldeneye can be a little pesky with prolific reseeding, but they are delicate, beautiful bloomers in late summer when everything else seems to be fading. I love having them come up through shrubs with little balls of color. I will admit, they are weeded out in many areas of the garden. So if you don't mind the "wildness" of these pretty fall bloomers then go for it. Goldeneye can be easily dug for transplanting.

This is best done in the spring as they are a fall bloomer. The best way to find them in the spring is to mark them in the fall as they are difficult to ID in the spring. Of course, seed takes very well; collect and sow in the fall. They seem to like richer soils to really thrive, and they like the shadier areas of my garden.

**Beebalm *Monarda fistulosa*** This stunner has many perks; long bloom time, grows in a variety of conditions and is an outstanding pollinator plant. Being a mint, I thought this would be a super easy plant in my garden. I have tried it in a richer soil area under aspen, a west exposure with native soil, a south exposure with rich soil, and a south exposure with a little shade from shrubs in native soil. The most spectacular plant I have found in the wild was growing in gravel alongside a road facing south. It had seeded in there and was HUGE! Wow, who knew?!? It totally eroded all my images of bee balm in nature in rich soil under aspens or shrubs. This is a valuable pollinator plant, and hummingbirds love it. There are several varieties available of our species now. They are much fuller and even more floriferous, and I have seen similar pollinators on them. Use the aromatic foliage in teas (it tastes very similar to oregano) or medicinally.

**Penstemons *Penstemon* spp.** Oh, where to start with the penstemon? Our natives are probably some of the toughest plants, with some of the most beautiful blooms. If you are interested in delving into the penstemon world there are organizations dedicated to only penstemon. I find them extremely difficult to identify, so when I see one that I really like I try to collect seed if it is ripe. I always pay close attention to where it is growing, and I always bring some of the native soil into the garden with it. Most penstemon are super picky about moisture; they do not like it!! The ones I grow are in sand or gravel mixes with gravel mulches. That said, *P. strictus*, many of the *P. barbatus* hybrids, and the newer hybrids can tolerate much more moisture.

**Wood's rose *Rosa woodsii*** I will warn you that introducing Wood's rose into your garden means you will always have Wood's rose in your landscape! They are aggressive and you will find them sprouting up all over your yard. That said, if you have the room and want to introduce an intensely valuable plant for you and wildlife into your landscape, go for it. A small portion of the root with a good shoot or two will get you started.

**Raspberry *Rubus idaeus* subsp. *melanolasius*** Yummy, wild raspberries are like mini tasty bombshells!! The huge raspberries in the store don't begin to compare to the flavor of wild berries. Our native raspberries are lanky, aggressive spreaders. If you are not willing to accept that, then leave them out of your landscape. They require excellent drainage (I have seen them frequently growing in cracks on the tops of boulders), and just remember that the extra moisture will only create huge canes with very little fruit. To plant in your yard, dig a cane with a little bit of root, plant it and it will grow, and grow...

**Pussytoes *Antennaria* spp.** Our native Rocky Mountain pussytoes (*A. parvifolia*) is a great xeric plant for open sites. They form large mats, and the silver leaves are beautiful in masses. These are tough plants, but will take extra water to get established well. Rosy pussytoes (*A. rosea*) doesn't seem to form as extensive of a mat, but the pink flower heads are so cute! If you are transplanting, dig smaller plants for better success. The seed takes well, but is slow growing. These are excellent plants for revegetating hot, dry slopes.

**Onions *Allium* spp.** I have a variety of wild onions scattered throughout my garden blooming at different times in different aspects of the garden. They provide yummy flowers and leaves for salads. I notice where they are growing in nature, dig a couple of bulbs and try and replicate that in my garden. They are lovely additions to my garden, which the pollinators seem to appreciate.

**Red-osier dogwood *Swida sericea*** This beautiful red-stemmed shrub is a spectacular addition to a winter landscape. Seeing them in nature, they are always along rivers or streams. They are a riparian indicator, so in your landscape they need consistent moisture. Our native can become rather large and ungainly (up to 8 feet tall and wide). Pruning helps control the shape and maintains the red stems. There are varieties now that stay a compact 3-4 feet. To keep the stems really red, prune a third of the shrub to the ground every year. New growth is the reddest and is renewed with pruning. Small shrubs can be dug and transplanted, making sure they have abundant water in the first year.