



Landscaping with Native Plants of the Intermountain Region

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Introduction

Whether for beauty, drought tolerance, wildlife, or hardiness, homeowners in the arid west are beginning to look to natives as alternatives for their landscaping needs. Each year, more visitors to the native plant gardens at the BLM in Boise, Idaho are asking questions about the plants featured: their names, how to grow, and where to find them. In response to the enthusiasm over native plants and to encourage their use, this guide is meant to aid in their selection, placement, and growth. This guide was conceived and compiled by southwest Idaho gardeners with experience growing native plants. For the purposes of this guide, we have defined a “native plant” as one that evolved in a particular area, and is therefore naturally adapted to its climate and soil. Many of the recommended plants are native to the Boise area, but all of the plants presented here are native to the Intermountain Region, the Southwest, or the Great Plains. The plants featured were selected for their relative ease of growth (assuming they are grown according to recommended cultural conditions), availability, and ornamental value. Because native plants should never be removed from the wild, a list of reputable sources is provided from which most can be obtained.












The format of this guide is subdivided into wildflowers, grasses, shrubs, and trees. Above the scientific and common name, symbols are used for quick reference to provide the following information: sun exposure, water requirements, pollinators it will attract (hummingbirds, butterflies, etc.), whether deciduous or evergreen, and its lowest USDA cold hardiness zone. Additional information is presented in roughly the following order in the text: height and width, color and time of bloom, unusual characteristics or cultural preferences (such as preferred soil conditions), value to wildlife when applicable, and any significant cultural, medicinal, or homeopathic uses, past or present. To quickly search for plants with specific criteria such as height, bloom time, or color, go to the Quick Reference Guide which follows the section on trees.

Many are discouraged from using native plants because they've heard they are too finicky. Without modifying water use, or planting them according to their cultural requirements, many of these plants can indeed become finicky. To be successful, you'll need to become well acquainted with your landscape: areas of high exposure, areas of shade, drainage, soil type, and microclimates. Once you've mapped it out in your mind, or ideally on paper, you can begin to match the specifics of the site with the cultural needs of the plants. When grown in the appropriate conditions, native plants should be very hardy, rarely needing fertilizers or insecticides.

The first year or two will require a little patience. The first spring and summer will not offer a dense show of foliage and color. Some plants require several years before blooming, and some are slow growing, which may be a drawback for those wanting immediate effect, but it can also be a real bonus when considering the reduced amount of pruning and trimming required. The first and possibly second year will require nearly the same water and weeding as a traditional garden. Because the soil has been turned up at planting time, and watering will be frequent to get the plants established, weeds may be particularly pesky. As the native plants become established, time spent watering will decrease which will dramatically decrease weed growth. Within a few years, the benefits will become apparent in their various forms: healthy beautiful plants, an increase in native birds and other pollinators, a lower water bill, and reduced use of chemicals in the environment.

We hope this manual inspires both novice and experienced gardeners to start or expand the use of natives. Whether integrating drought tolerant plants into a cheatgrass hillside behind the house or creating a special bed to feature native plants, please share your experiences, recommendations, or any other feedback by writing to the Idaho Native Plant Society at: www.IdahoNativePlants.org.

Key to Symbols

Sun	Water	Wildlife	Deciduous or Evergreen
 = Full Sun	 = Drought tolerant	 = Attracts butterflies	D = Deciduous
 = Partial Sun	 = Low water	 = Attracts bees and insects	E = Evergreen
 = Shade	 = Moderate water	 = Attracts birds	SE = Semi-Evergreen
	 = Plentiful water	 = Attracts hummingbirds	WI = Winter Interest

USDA Zones

USDA	Fahrenheit (degrees)	USDA	Fahrenheit (Degrees)
1	Below -50	6b	-5 to 0
2a	-50 to -45	7a	0 to 5
2b	-45 to -40	7b	5 to 10
3a	-40 to -35	8a	10 to 15
3b	-35 to -30	8b	15 to 20
4a	-30 to -25	9a	20 to 25
4b	-25 to -20	9b	25 to 30
5a	-20 to -15	10a	30 to 35
5b	-15 to -10	10b	35 to 40
6a	-10 to -5	11	above 40

From Mountain States Wholesale Nursery

Disclaimer: any info on homeopathic or medicinal uses is not meant to instruct or encourage use or consumption of the plants in this manner. Always consult an expert before using any plant for medicinal or homeopathic use.



Wildflowers



Achillea millefolium Western Yarrow

White flowers fading to cream bloom in dense, round topped clusters from spring to fall on this common wildflower. Some consider it weedy because in moist conditions it self-seeds and spreads rhizomatously (1-3 1/2' tall by 8-12" wide). To keep it more restrained and compact cut back in half after the first bloom, reduce irrigation and divide in the spring. Its prolific habits may be seen as an advantage if used as an alternative to grass. By allowing the dense fern-like foliage to fill in those areas with light foot traffic, it can be mowed and watered less often than a typical lawn. It can be grown in almost any soil. Native Americans used it to make a tea, as an ointment for cuts, burns and bruises, smoked the flowers to clear the head, and placed a wad of the leaves in the ear for ear aches (Ogle 1997). Widespread from lowlands to alpine and subalpine habitats.



Agave parryi Parry's Agave

The light gray to green foliage is broad and flat, growing from a basal rosette (radiating outwards from a central base). It looks similar in form to "Hens and Chicks" but in a much larger version. It typically stands 24" tall by 30" wide, and is lightly toothed at the margins with dark spines at the tip. It adds contrast both in shape and outline, making an excellent specimen for a hot, dry site. Adequate drainage is essential, especially in colder climates. It will take 8 years or more to flower, and will create numerous offshoots throughout the growth period. Native Americans of the southwest ate the younger leaves and heart, used the stalk and fiber to make fire, and cooked the juice to make mescal (wine). It ranges from AZ to NM, and south into Mexico, occurring in open grasslands, pine-oak woodlands, and Arizona chaparral at elevations of 3,600' to 8,400'.



Anaphalis margaritacea



Anaphalis margaritacea Pearly Everlasting

Ranging in height from 6-18", these cheerful white flowers bloom prolifically from June to September followed by fluffy seed heads, and may be left in the garden for winter interest. Being rhizomatous it can be used as a non-aggressive ground cover and will grow in poor soils. It makes an excellent dried flower, and looks nice in both formal and informal settings. Widespread in forested habitats.



Antennaria spp. Rosy Pussytoes

Upright flower stalks reach 4-8" with pink and white flowers during June and July. The silver, mat-like foliage is low growing and can be used as a ground cover for areas with light foot traffic, between paving stones, and at the front of a border. It prefers well-drained soil, but can adapt to many different soil types. This plant is drought tolerant (the plant may go dormant, causing the leaves to die back under extreme drought). There are a number of species available with similar growth habit and needs, including *A. microphylla*, *A. parvifolia*, *A. dimorpha* and others. Native range spans east of the Cascades in WA, ID, MT, NV, and northern CA in sagebrush to shallow rocky soils.



Aquilegia caerulea



***Aquilegia caerulea* Colorado Blue Columbine**

This plant is unique for its long nectar spurs on blue and white blooms that appear from June to August. The size ranges from 12-30" tall by 9-18" wide. It does well in a moist place with partial sun, particularly in the late afternoon. Soil should be moderately fine for adequate drainage.



***Aquilegia formosa* Western Columbine**

Growing slightly taller than *Aquilegia caerulea*, this species can reach 2-3' by 18" wide. It has the same unique flower, but in red and yellow. It blooms from spring to summer. Western Columbine prefers medium to coarse soil and a cooler location with moderate water.



***Aster* spp. Wild Aster**



Aster spp.

Purple, light blue to cream flowers bloom at various times of the year, depending on the species, on relatively compact upright plants. Height varies, but is typically between 12"-36" depending upon cultural conditions. Numerous species and cultivars are available. *A. alpinus* grows 6-12" and blooms in the spring, *A. divaricatus* grows 2-3', taking sun or shade, and *A. oblongifolius* grows 16" and thrives in harsh, dry conditions in full sun, blooming in the fall.



***Balsamorhiza sagittata* Arrowleaf Balsamroot**

Tender leaf shoots of silvery velvet emerge in April or May, prior to the unfurling of large deep green, basal, arrowhead shaped leaves. Plants eventually grow 18" wide, with numerous 12-24" tall flower stalks. Each stalk carries a single flower head of golden petals surrounding a darker center. Plants don't flower until they are about five years old. It provides spring forage for deer and elk, and grows well on hot dry slopes once established. A few weeks after flowering the foliage will begin to dry up and die as the plant goes dormant until the following spring. It is a good idea to mark the location, so the large taproot is not accidentally dug up in the summer or fall when the plant is without foliage. It is native from lowland to mid elevations in the mountains, and is widespread east of the Cascades.



Balsamorhiza sagittata



***Camassia quamash* Blue Camas**



Camassia quamash

The flower consists of six distinct, narrow blue petals pointing straight outwards to form a star pattern, in the center of which is six bright yellow stamens. The plants grow 1-2' x 1-2', bloom from mid-May to June, and prefer fine to coarse soil where very moist springs are followed by relatively dry summers. To the Native Americans of the Northwest, the root was indispensable as a food source.

Lewis and Clark's fortunate encounter with the Nez Perce Indians in September of 1805 meant their very survival. The Nez Perce Indians knew the appropriate time to dig the camas root and numerous ways to prepare it (Phillips 2003). Conflicts over the harvesting of this plant precipitated the Sheepeater Indian War in Idaho. A local endemic species, Cusick's Camas, *Camassia cusickii*, is much larger and prefers heavy clay soils over

basalt bedrock. It grows along the Snake River north of Weiser to the Halfway, OR area and in the Blue Mountains. It has been used by the horticulture industry and can be obtained commercially from farm raised plants. It has twice the chromosome number of the common camas and produces more leaves. As noted for Blue Camas, Cusick's Camas also prefers moist conditions in the spring, followed by a dry summer. Blue Camas ranges from British Columbia south to California and east to southwest Alberta, MT, WY and UT.



Echinacea purpurea **Purple Coneflower**

Blooming from summer to autumn, this sturdy wildflower grows 2-3' tall by 1-2' wide. It is unparalleled for its continuously blooming, stunning purple ray flowers and the raised golden brown center of disk flowers. The root and rhizomes are harvested for their medicinal use to bolster the immune system. Adaptable to many soil conditions, a long slender taproot provides a moderate drought tolerance once established. Native to the Great Plains where it and its relative, *E. angustifolia*, are subjected to over-harvesting.



Erigeron compositus



Erigeron compositus **Cut-leaf Daisy**

This small wildflower (6" tall) produces numerous white to lavender flowers with yellow centers on short, single stalks in spring. The leaves are divided at the tips, almost fern like, and covered in hairs. The short stature and wooly texture protect this plant from the blazing sun and constant wind of its native habitat of sagebrush deserts to subalpine mountain ridges. This makes it excellent for rock gardens or exposed slopes with good drainage. The genus name *Eri* is Greek for early; and *geron*, old man, like an old man's gray whiskers (Phillips 1997). The common name comes from its use as an insect repellent, where it would be hung in the house or burned to repel fleas and other insect pests (Ogle 1997). There are three varieties: some are found along sandy riverbanks at low elevations in WY, OR and adjacent ID, while others grow at moderate to high elevations in the Rocky Mountains.



Eriogonum heracleoides

Wyeth Buckwheat

The low-growing (6-16" tall and wide) perennial forb blooms in late spring to early summer. It has creamy white flowers produced on an erect stalk, green ovate basal leaves with a wooly or pubescent underside, and a whorl of leaves below the flowers. Wyeth buckwheat is very drought tolerant and semi-evergreen. It is one of the many *Eriogonums* that could be used more frequently in landscaping. The flower stalks are brittle once dry and do not tolerate foot traffic. Found in ID, MT and UT.



Eriogonum heracleoides



Eriogonum niveum **Snow Buckwheat**

The flower stalk typically branches 3 ways at the base and splits twice again farther up. Plants range from 6-18" tall and wide. In the summer and fall, white flowers appear in clusters where the branches fork. The foliage is wooly gray and typically 6" tall. Grow for a nice ground cover on slopes and hillsides and for erosion control. It provides a good source of late season nectar for honeybees and food for mule deer and elk. The cultivar "Umatilla" has improved vigor and growth (Ogle 1997). It requires well drained soils and is native from sagebrush deserts to ponderosa pine forests, mostly east of the Cascade Mts, from southern BC to south central OR and into west central ID.



Eriogonum umbellatum with dark yellow flowers (left), *E. heracleoides* with creamy flowers (right)



Eriogonum umbellatum Sulfur Buckwheat

Yellow flowers with hints of reddish orange or cream bloom profusely above the erect, spatula-shaped leaves in June and July. The semi-evergreen foliage reaches 6"x 6", is deep green and woollier on the underside. The flowers are 12" tall on leafless stalks, although leafy bracts surround the base of each flower. Within 3-5 years, it can spread 2-3' wide. Plant in moderately coarse, well-drained soil. Commercial availability has grown recently as xeriscapers and native plant enthusiasts recognize its many attributes: semi-evergreen foliage, nice in dried flower arrangements, good fall structure and moderate drought tolerance. Native to sagebrush deserts, and alpine rocky ridges, mostly east of the Cascades, from southern British Columbia to CA, east to MT, WY, CO and AZ.



Eriophyllum lanatum



Eriophyllum lanatum Woolly Sunflower

The 6-12" tall perennial has yellow flowers that bloom in spring. The leaves have a gray green color from the densely matted, soft woolly hairs. Requires a well drained to coarse textured soil and full sun. Plants are drought tolerant and commercially available from several nurseries. It occurs from lowland to mid elevations from BC to CA and east to MT, ID and UT.



Gaillardia aristata Blanket Flower

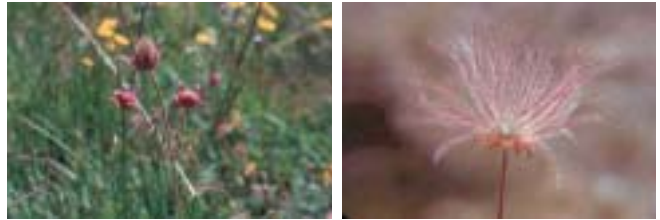
This perennial wildflower grows to 24"x 24" with flower rays a mix of red, yellow or orange, blooming from summer to fall. Drought tolerant in moderate to well drained soils once established. Looks excellent when clustered in groups. While short lived, it reseeds easily and is deer resistant. Native intermittently east of the Cascades at 5,000'- 9,000' in open meadows, hills and plains.



Geranium viscosissimum Sticky Geranium

Growing 12-30" tall and wide, the showy flowers dot grassy mountain slopes from May to September. The petals are pink to lavender, with dark red veins. Opposite leaves are

deeply lobed and serrated, and covered with sticky hair. The genus is also known as Crane's Bill for the elongated seedpod. Medicinally they are used to tone up the muscles of the digestive tract, reduce diarrhea and heal sores in the mouth (Ogle 1997). Native east of the Cascades on fairly dry to moist sites with two varieties: var. *viscosissimum* ranging from BC to northern CA, northern NV, and east to Saskatchewan and northern WY, while var. *nervosum* stretches farther southeast into CO and UT.



Geum triflorum in bud (left), seed head (right)



Geum triflorum Prairie Smoke

Also known as old man's whiskers, this reddish to purplish flowered perennial does best in full sun to partial shade in well-drained soils. While moderately drought tolerant, it will do much better with regular irrigation. Without flowers the height is relatively short (6-8"), but in bloom, the stalks can reach up to 18". Native to upland meadow habitats from sagebrush plains to subalpine ridges, it occurs east of the Cascades from British Columbia to California, east to Newfoundland, NY, IL, and south to the Rocky Mountain States.



Hesperaloe parviflora (foliage, left), summer flowers (right)



Hesperaloe parviflora Texas Red Yucca

Reaching 4' tall by 3' wide, this slow growing yucca-like plant produces red blooms in summer that can reach 5' tall. Its leaves are long and narrow and have a gray green color, but are not sharp like yucca. The tubular flowers prove to be hummingbird favorites, and the large black seeds that follow are easy to germinate. Requiring coarse soil, it will rot in heavy clay soils without adequate drainage. Very drought tolerant and widely used in the southwest US, it is a native of TX.



Ipomopsis aggregata



Ipomopsis aggregata **Scarlet Gilia**

Red or scarlet flowers bloom in June on this biennial wildflower that grows 12-24” tall. Hummingbirds are attracted to the clusters of long (3/4”-1 1/2”), narrow flowers that flare at the tip, forming a six petaled star pattern. It does very well on dry eastern slopes, and while short lived, it should spread by seed and reseed easily. Native to dry meadows, open forests, and rocky slopes from mid-elevations to lower subalpine zones.



Linum perenne var. *lewisii*



Linum perenne **Wild Blue Flax**

An 8-24” forb with blue flowers that bloom all spring and summer, though each 5-petaled flower only lasts a single day. Blue flax is easy to grow in full sun, and is often included in wildflower seed mixes. It produces a lot of seed and can be invasive if the site is well watered. It stays green into the summer, is drought tolerant, and can be used to decrease the fire hazard around the home or on steep hillsides. It also looks nice in a border or naturalized setting. Native Americans ate the tasty and nutritious seeds, while the Shoshone used the plant for sore eyes and swelling (Phillips 1999). The variety *lewisii*, native to the western states, is not as invasive as the variety *perenne*, of Eurasian origin.



Lupinus argenteus



Lupinus argenteus **Silver Lupine**

From mid-spring to early summer, blue to white sweet pea-like flowers line each flower stalk. The silvery gray foliage with palmate leaves is 8-24” tall x 12-18” wide. In symbiosis with specific bacteria, the roots have a nitrogen-fixing capacity, allowing them to thrive in otherwise poor soil. Due to its long, deep taproot, lupine is very difficult to transplant. Over-grazing increases stands of Silver Lupine. Because of its poisonous alkaloids, sheep and cattle will eat nearly everything but the Lupine, often depleting plant diversity. For landscape use, plant in clumps in beds or mixed borders or naturalized plantings on a hillside. It may be difficult to find commercially. Seeds can be collected while the pod is still green and then air dried to maturity (when collecting never take more than 1/3 of the seeds and correctly identify the plant to verify it is not rare or endangered). Native from pine forests to subalpine ridges of central OR, northeast CA, east to Alberta, the Dakotas, Rocky Mountain States and south to NM.



Oenothera missouriensis **Missouri Evening Primrose**

The yellow flowers, each with 4 petals up to 4” across, bloom from June to late September. Plants grow 6-12” tall and often spread 3-4’ wide, sometimes very aggressively. Flowers are slightly fragrant, begin blooming in the evening, and last only through the following day. Great as a groundcover on dry sites, and a food source for birds and butterflies. Tolerates poor soil on dry sites once established. Native to NE, TX and MO.