This chapter contains the specific information you will need to choose the plants that will populate your native landscape. The species we have included in the Plant Palette were chosen from hundreds of native candidate species based on several criteria. First, the plant had to be attractive, if not astonishingly beautiful. This, of course, is somewhat a matter of opinion, and the list adopted here is the result of working and reworking by several knowledgeable people with different tastes. Second, the plant had to be relatively quick and easy to grow in container culture in a nursery setting. We avoided certain favorites, like sego lily, that have proven slow and difficult to produce. Work continues on many of these hard-to-grow plants, and the time may come when they will be commercially available. For now, we concentrated on plants that are either already available or could be brought on line quickly if warranted by demand. And lastly, the plant had to be at least somewhat tolerant of the abuses that are frequently encountered in residential landscapes. Too much water, too much muleh, too much fertility, and too much competition from other plants are some common forms of abuse. Not all of the plants we included are entirely foolproof in this regard, but, by using the information provided for each plant, you should be able to create favorable conditions in your landscape for even the more finicky species. We narrowed down the list of plants covered in the Plant Palette to one hundred species that we consider to be the core species for creating regionally distinctive landscapes in the Intermountain West. Many more species could have been included, and it is perfectly fine to use species not included in this book in your native plant landscapes. Just get the information you need to meet plant cultural requirements (water, soil, light, and cold hardiness) and make sure that the plants you select really are native to the intermountain area. “Native” is a somewhat slippery concept, in that plants can be native to a very restricted area, a state, a
region, a country, or a continent, and a few plants are naturally cosmopolitan (worldwide) in distribution. But just because a plant grows wild in a region does not mean that it is native to the region. Many species native to other places have been deliberately or accidentally introduced into the wild plant communities of our region. If you have any questions about whether a particular plant is native to the region, a good Internet resource is: plants.usda.gov.

Native plant species vary in the range of habitats that they can successfully occupy. There are many common plant species in the Intermountain West that occur over an amazing range. In some cases, the plant species may be made up of a series of races that are adapted to particular environments—these are called ecotypes. Ideally, it is the responsibility of the nurseries supplying native plants for horticultural use to make sure that the ecotypes being sold in a region are adapted to that region. This is particularly important with regard to cold hardiness. For example, desert sage plants from warm desert populations in the Mojave Desert have been found to be cold hardy only to Zone 7 (average winter minimum temperature from 0° to 10°F), while populations from cold Great Basin valleys are hardy to at least Zone 5 (average winter minimum temperature −10° to −20°F). These differences in cold hardiness clearly have a genetic basis. Similarly, it is quite possible that an ecotype of a widely distributed species that is from an area of higher rainfall will have a somewhat higher water requirement than an ecotype of the same species from a lower rainfall area.

There is another process involved in the apparently wide tolerance of many intermountain species. The plant may occur across a wide range of elevations, but in specific microhabitats, so that the microclimates are more similar across sites than the elevation range would imply. Firecracker penstemon is a case in point. This plant occurs from the fringes of the Mojave Desert up to rocky slopes at twelve thousand feet in elevation. At the low end of its range, it is usually found on shallow, sandy soils in sheltered canyons with partial shade. At the high end, it is again found on shallow, rocky soils, but in full sun as part of a low, perennial plant community. At middle elevations, firecracker penstemon is almost never found as a part of intact woodland or forest vegetation. Like many penstemons, it seems to be a road-cut specialist. It thrives on natural or manmade disturbances characterized by steep slopes, relatively high light intensity, and soils that are little more than rock debris. In these habitats it can escape competition and shade from other plants, as well as the pathogens found in richer soil under intact vegetation. The common elements in the cultural requirements for this plant include excellent drainage, soils very low in organic matter, steep slopes, and minimal competition. And even though its range includes wide variations in terms of precipitation, it tends to be found on the driest microsites available, especially at the upper end of its elevation range.
Many native plants were virtually unknown in the trade only a few years ago, and most designers, contractors, and homeowners have limited experience with them. In this guide to species for Intermountain regional landscapes, we try to give you enough information about each plant to incorporate it into an intelligent and workable design. This includes information on both aesthetic characteristics and cultural requirements. The Plant Palette entry for each plant is comprised of several kinds of information, including the common and scientific name of the plant, a habit illustration, a color photo, and a short description that highlights uses in the landscape and special features. Each Plant Palette entry also includes a series of icons that indicate plant characteristics, such as growth rate and flowering season, as well as cultural requirements. The Plant Palette is organized first into two groups, woody plants and perennials. Within each group, the plants are grouped by their water needs. Within each water-need group, the plants are listed in ascending order according to their average height at maturity. To facilitate design work, we also provide supplemental tables for woody plants and perennials. Plant features such as height and diameter at maturity are listed, along with cultural requirements and the page number for the Plant Palette entry for that plant.

In order to use the Plant Palette to find specific plants, we provide a comprehensive index to both common and scientific names at the back of the book. This includes all the commonly encountered variants for the common and scientific names of the plant, as well as the names used in the Plant Palette itself. This should make it possible to quickly determine if a plant of interest is included in the Plant Palette, and, if it is, to find the page number of its entry.

Plant Characteristics

Habit Illustration

The habit illustration for each Plant Palette entry shows the size and form at maturity of a typical member of the species. A scale figure is included in each illustration—this person is six feet tall. For species two feet tall or less at maturity, we just show the knees and ankles of the figure, scaled to be two feet tall, in order to provide a more detailed representation of the plant habit.

Many factors interact to affect the mature size of a woody plant in the landscape. These include both genetic variation within the species and differences in growing conditions. We chose to represent average rather than maximum mature height, so be prepared for the possibility of a somewhat larger plant over the longer term.
Growth Rate

We include an icon to represent growth rate for woody plants that are either exceptionally fast growing (hare icon) or exceptionally slow growing (tortoise icon). Species that have no icon are considered to have medium growth rates. Growth rate, like maximum size, is variable, depending on growing conditions. Our estimates of growth rate are based on conditions specified in the accompanying cultural requirement icons. For example, if bigtooth maple is grown under the water regime for plants with a medium water requirement, it has a moderate growth rate (i.e., no growth rate icon). Under a high water regime, in an environment with little competition from other plants, it can grow more quickly. We do not include a growth rate icon for perennials because, in general, all of these plants have a fast growth rate in a landscape setting. Most can be expected to reach flowering size in two years, even from seed, and the increase in size from the first spring to the second can be phenomenal.
Flowering Time

We include flowering time icons for all species whose flowers are large and attractive enough to represent a desirable feature of the plant. This icon is a semicircle divided into eight pie wedges, each wedge representing a month of the growing season, from March through October. For those months when you will find this particular plant in flower, the wedges are filled in with the color of the blossoms, while the remaining wedges are colored green. This gives you a sense of the flowering season at a glance. We use flowering times as observed in gardens in the semi-desert precipitation zone for the icons, not flowering times in the wild. These can sometimes be quite different, for example, for high elevation penstemons, which can flower in mid-spring in the valleys, when their native sites would still be deep in snow.

Cultural Requirements

Water Needs

Water needs for each plant are represented in icon form by a water droplet filled to four different levels, from almost empty, representing plants with minimal water needs, to full, representing plants with high water needs. These levels correspond to the amount of naturally available water in each of the four climate zones described earlier, namely the desert, semi-desert, foothill, and mountain zones, and also correspond to the water zones already designated on your landscape plan during the design process.

The water needs icons given for plants in the Plant Palette are intended to be conservative, in that they are based on the driest environment where the species grows naturally without the benefit of favorable microsites. The plants will generally be just as happy in a water zone that is one step higher than the one shown. Thus minimal- and low-water-use plants can be grown together in a low water zone, low- and medium-water-use plants can be grown together in a medium water zone, and medium- and high-water-use plants can be grown together in a high water zone. Plants can also sometimes be grown successfully within a water zone that is one step lower than the one shown in the icon if they are placed in a favorable microhabitat, such as a microhabitat that receives harvested water.

Light Needs

Most of the plants in the Plant Palette fall into three groups in terms of light needs, those that require full sun, those that tolerate either full sun or partial shade, and those that prefer partial shade. By partial shade we mean either full
shade for several hours during the day or dappled shade. In addition, there are a few native intermountain species that can tolerate continuous full shade. We indicate the range of light conditions that a species can tolerate using combinations of three symbols, a full sun symbol, a partial shade symbol, and a full shade symbol.

Soil Needs

In general, all of the plants listed in the Plant Palette require at least adequate drainage, as described in the site analysis section. There are, however, many native plants, especially low- and minimal-water-use plants, that require exceptionally good drainage in order to thrive. These plants generally do better if the soil is sandy or gravelly, if the subsoil is cobbly, or if the site has enough slope to offer natural drainage away from the root system. We designate these plants with an icon that shows a flower pot full of coarse soil.

Species in the Plant Palette that have an aversion to soils with high organic matter are designated with an icon showing a light-colored pile of soil. Most of these are desert and semi-desert plants. Soils for these plants should never receive organic amendments or organic surface mulch. Gravel mulches, which drain water away from the plant crowns while still functioning to conserve subsurface water, will give far better results. Plants from the mountains that benefit from the higher fertility and water-holding capacity associated with organic matter are designated with an icon showing a dark-colored pile of soil. These plants may be grown in soil with organic amendments and organic surface mulches. Plants that have no soil organic matter icon are generally tolerant of the organic matter in ordinary topsoil but will not benefit from organic amendments except in truly heavy soils.

Cold Hardiness

We do not include specific information on cold hardiness for species in the Plant Palette because all listed species meet our minimum cold-hardiness requirement. A primary criterion for inclusion in the Plant Palette was that the species needed to be cold hardy to USDA Plant Hardiness Zone 5 (average winter minimum temperature from –10°F to –20°F). Most of the urban areas of the Intermountain West are in Zone 6 (average winter minimum temperature from 0°F to –10°F) or warmer, but a few cities and towns in mountain valleys, such as Logan, Utah, are in Zone 5. Many of the plants in the Plant Palette are known to occur in nature in places at least as cold as Zone 5. A few do not grow naturally in places as cold as Zone 5 or even Zone 6, but they are successful in cultivation at much colder sites. For example, Apache plume does not naturally occur in places colder than Zone 7 (average winter minimum temperature from 0°F to 10°F).
F), but it can be successfully cultivated at sites as cold as Zone 3 (average winter minimum temperature from −40°F to −30°F). Natural distributional ranges therefore give a conservative estimate of cold hardiness. Species in the Plant Palette that are not found in nature in places as cold as Zone 5 are included based on their proven ability to survive long term in Logan, Utah.

Interactions

Because of the interconnections between climate, topography, and soil, as well as the feedback from the plant community that develops under a particular set of conditions, there is generally a tight relationship between the water requirement for a plant and its light and soil requirements. For example, desert plant communities are generally characterized by high light intensity and low soil organic matter as well as low rainfall, so you are unlikely to encounter a minimal-water-use plant that thrives in shade or in very rich soils. Similarly, plants of mountain streamside communities generally grow in rich soils in partial shade, so high water use is often coupled with tolerance for shade and high organic matter. Thus the same combination of icons is often repeated for different plants in the Plant Palette. Plants with similar icon sets can be thought of as members of the same plant community, and can successfully be planted together.
Cushion Globemallow  
*(Sphaeralcea caespitosa)*

In the wild, this pretty little plant is restricted to the dry deserts of west-central Utah. It combines quite large, fragrant orange flowers with a diminutive stature and thick, silver-green leaves with scalloped edges. It can be grown in a variety of soils, but it will live longer if the soil is rocky and lean and watering is kept to a minimum. It will volunteer from seed, however, so you will likely have a persistent planting, even if individuals only live two or three years. Cushion globemallow is an ideal plant for a rock garden or low perennial border. It combines well with other petite desert plants like sundancer daisy and silver buckwheat.

*Special Features*: Like all its globemallow relatives, cushion globemallow readily forms hybrids with related species, so if you want the volunteers to look like their parents, be sure to plant only this species.

Fragrant Evening Primrose  
*(Oenothera caespitosa)*

Large, heavily perfumed flowers that open in late afternoon and bloom all night give this plant its name. Its rather large, deep green leaves and extravagant blossoms belie its tough, drought-hardy nature. Each flower blossoms only once, wilting and turning pink in late morning, but the profusion of new blooms lasts for weeks. The flowers feature abundant nectar that attracts hawk moths, and the anthers and cross-shaped stigma are held well forward from the petals, where the hawk moth cannot help but contact the sticky pollen. Be careful when sniffing the flowers, or a dust of cobwebby golden pollen will be left on your nose. This plant combines especially well with Utah ladyfinger milkvetch, and they are often found growing together along gravelly road shoulders.

*Special Features*: The sight of this plant flowering in the moonlight is unforgettable. Be sure to plant it where you will be able to enjoy the heady fragrance.

Perennials: Minimal Water Use  
(Ranked Short to Tall)
Indian Paintbrush

*(Castilleja angustifolia var. dubia)*

Indian paintbrush is probably the best-known wildflower of the Intermountain West, yet it is rarely seen in gardens. The main reason is that this plant is dependent on the roots of other plants to help it obtain food and water—it needs a buddy to prosper, whether in the wild or in a garden setting. When you buy an Indian paintbrush plant in the nursery, it should already be potted up with a companion, so the roots have a chance to connect before being planted in the ground. We like to use big sagebrush as a companion plant for Indian paintbrush—the color contrast is beautiful. There are many species of paintbrush. This is the common spring paintbrush of desert and shrub steppe plant communities; other species are found in mountain meadows.

**Special Features:** Once established, Indian paintbrush will come back in the same spot year after year, with the first cheerful, red flowers of early spring, as well as the first reliable nectar for migrating hummingbirds.

Silver Buckwheat

*(Eriogonum ovalifolium)*

This eye-catching little plant features tight mounds of fuzzy, silvery green leaves, topped with flowering stalks that look like lollipops. The blossom puffs vary in color from cream or white through dark rose or even butter yellow. These turn rusty red as the seeds ripen. Silver buckwheat is easy to grow and tolerant of a range of soil types, though it will live longer in a lean, well-drained soil. It is an excellent rock garden plant, and it also works well as a perennial border plant or even as a drought-hardy ground cover. The plant keeps its shape and color and looks good even when not in flower. It volunteers readily from seed. If this is not desirable, just deadhead once the puffs turn rusty.

**Special Features:** Silver buckwheat is a classic example of a cushion plant, which is essentially a little shrub that is condensed into a tight shape. Cushion plants can survive in tough environments, including alpine tundra as well as deserts.
Sundancer Daisy  
*(Tetraneuris acaulis)*

This elegant, golden daisy features slender stems with single flowering heads that seem to dance above the mounds of bright green, grass-like leaves. One of the better-behaved members of its family, sundancer daisy is not much given to volunteering from seed, making it a good choice for more formal plantings. It looks magnificent in mass plantings and also combines well with plants like silver daisy or purple crazypea for a pleasing, polychrome effect. It is not fussy in its requirements, making it a good plant for people just getting started with native plant gardening. It occurs over a wide range of plant communities in nature, from desert and foothill rock gardens to alpine tundra, but always in the bright sunlight of open spaces.

*Special Features:* This plant shows an astonishing variability in flowering stalk height. Nine-inch stalks are the norm, but some tundra and badland races are less than an inch tall.

Purple Crazypea  
*(Oxytropis lambertii)*

This plant has a lot in common with Utah sweetvetch, including brilliant magenta pea blossoms, but it is a true desert plant that can succeed in minimal water landscapes. It can also tolerate medium water environments as long as the drainage is good. Its pale green leaves are held nearly upright, giving the plant a compact, tidy appearance. It puts on a show in late spring that is truly outstanding, and the straw-colored seed pods that follow are also subtly attractive. Purple crazypea rarely volunteers from seed. It is a well-behaved plant that looks good interplanted with Indian ricegrass, gooseberryleaf globe-mallow, and prince’s plume.

*Special Features:* This plant is popular with big native bees when in bloom, though they often nearly weigh down the flowering stalks in their efforts to trip the entrance into the flower.
Utah Penstemon

(*Penstemon utahensis*)

The combination of neon pink flowers and waxy blue foliage makes this plant a showstopper when in bloom. It is one of the earliest-flowering penstemons, making it especially welcome in the spring garden. Found in the driest, rockiest places in the southeastern part of our region, it is not tolerant of coddling. In fact, it can prosper in pure sand, a planting medium some experts recommend for many desert penstemons. Make sure the soil has excellent drainage and minimal organic matter, and give the plants plenty of room. A mature plant can have up to thirty flowering stalks, a sight that is unforgettable. Dwarf golden-bush and silver buckwheat make good companion plants.

*Special Features:* This plant is one of the suite of native species that are badland specialists. Badlands have heavy clay soils, but are located in such dry places that the excess water-holding ability of the clay is not a problem.

Showy Sandwort

(*Arenaria macradenia*)

This handsome plant of rocky outcrops is a relative of domestic baby’s breath, and the family resemblance can be seen in the white flowers. It has very fine, needlelike foliage that makes it rather inconspicuous when not in flower, though it does provide a sparse green backdrop for other plants. But the airy domes of flowers are the main attraction, lasting for several weeks in early to midsummer. This plant looks especially good flowering with sulfurflower buckwheat, and it can be used effectively in dry meadow plantings. It rarely volunteers from seed, so it can also be used in more formal settings. It is a long-lived, almost shrubby perennial that will bloom for many years with virtually no care.

*Special Features:* In nature, this plant occurs over a wide range of elevations, from low desert to alpine fell fields, but the common denominator is always rock. Fortunately, it is not nearly as picky as this preference for rock seems to imply.
**Indian Ricegrass**
*(Achnatherum hymenoides)*

This distinctive, cool-season bunchgrass is one that many people can recognize, with its open, airy flowering stalks, threadlike green leaves, and seeds that look like little black BBs. It can thrive in hot, dry places, but it is equally at home on infertile soils in the foothills, making it an attractive addition to many desert, semi-desert, and foothill plantings. It looks best when grown in a lean, fast-draining soil and when given plenty of room to express its fountainlike growth form. Indian ricegrass is usually relatively short lived, especially when life is too good, but it is a prolific seeder and volunteers readily. It is best used in larger-scale, informal plantings, where it can replace itself from seed.

*Special Features:* Indian ricegrass seeds are edible and even tasty, and were a staple crop for native people of the region. Out in the desert, they are also the favorite food of kangaroo rats, who collect them by the thousands for later consumption, and plant many of them as part of the bargain.

**Gooseberryleaf Globemallow**
*(Sphaeralcea grossulariifolia)*

Like many globemallows, this plant features orange flowers that resemble miniature hollyhocks, in this case borne along vertical stems above a mass of deeply lobed green leaves. It is broadly adapted but does best in lean, dry soils, where its flowering display can be quite showy. Where life is too cushy, it tends to grow mostly leaves. Globemallows produce abundant, long-lived seeds that generate a steady supply of volunteer seedlings. Clipping the stalks while the seeds are still green is a good way to prevent self-seeding, and it also can trigger another round of flowering if soil moisture is sufficient. Plant gooseberryleaf globemallow with other species of globemallow at your own risk—as mentioned before, globemallows hybridize freely.

*Special Features:* Many people never notice the delicate, sweet scent of globemallow flowers, which resembles a mix of orange blossom and cotton candy.

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**Perennials: Minimal Water Use**
*(Ranked Short to Tall)*
Desert Needlegrass

(*Achnatherum speciosum*)

In nature, this elegant bunchgrass is usually found growing among the rocks in desert and semi-desert communities, and rocks do show it off to good advantage. But it is broadly adapted and tolerant of a range of soil types, and extends up into the foothills. It features vertical wands of feathery, platinum-colored fruits, which are even more luminous when backlit. Desert needlegrass needs some room to express itself, because the clumps increase substantially in size as the plant matures. It can provide good structure for a desert planting, as it keeps its flowering stalks for many weeks and stays green year round. It does have a tendency to self-seed, which makes it good for larger-scale, informal plantings.

*Special Features:* The individual fruits of this grass are like little works of art, so be sure and look at them closely. Be careful when handling them, though—the points are sharp.

Prince’s Plume

(*Stanleya pinnata*)

This handsome, robust perennial is one of the hallmark plants of the desert and is especially characteristic of badlands communities throughout the Intermountain West and western Great Plains. It is a tough plant that is tolerant of clay, salt, and drought, but it usually does not live long in ordinary topsoil, especially if overwatered. Because of its large size at maturity, it is best used as a specimen (accent) plant. It does not volunteer much from seed, and can be used successfully in more formal settings. Its tall, golden flower spikes and blue-green foliage look especially fine when it is planted with alkali sacaton grass, another statuesque, salt-tolerant perennial.

*Special Features:* Prince’s plume has large, nectar-rich flowers that attract an astonishing assortment of pollinators, so if you want to see unusual insects, keep an eye on this plant in blossom.
Perennials: Minimal Water Use
(Ranked Short to Tall)
Utah Ladyfinger Milkvetch  
* (Astragalus utahensis)  

One of the earliest-blooming wildflowers throughout the Great Basin, this is just one of over a hundred milkvetches native to our region. It is a low, mat-forming plant that can be used as a drought-hardy groundcover or in a rock garden setting. In nature it is often found on road shoulders and in abandoned gravel quarries, habitats that indicate its preference for well-drained soils low in organic matter. It features woolly, mint green foliage with compound leaves typical of the pea family, and it is graced in spring with masses of large, pink to magenta blossoms. It does volunteer from seed, but usually not in great numbers. Cushion globemallow and fragrant evening primrose are good early-flowering companions for this plant.

*Special Features*: After flowering, the fuzzy seed pods look like a flock of little white chicks surrounding the mother plant. Be careful handling them—they have beaks that bite.

Dwarf Goldenbush  
* (Stenotis acaulis)  

This tidy little plant is found throughout our region, from semi-desert communities on up into the mountains, usually on sunny sites with shallow, rocky soils. In flower it forms a tight dome of yellow daisies that is very attractive to both people and butterflies. In fruit it forms fuzzy balls of seeds that do not disperse far, and it does not volunteer much from seed. It is easy to grow and tolerant of a range of soil types, though it does like good drainage. Its compact growth form suggests use in a rock garden setting or as a perennial border with other low-growing plants, such as silver buckwheat and cushion globemallow.

*Special Features*: Dwarf goldenbush is a plant for all seasons. Its bright green clusters of sword-shaped basal leaves keep it looking good even when it is not in flower.
Shortstem Buckwheat
(*Eriogonum brevicaule*)

Shortstem buckwheat is one of the hidden treasures of the intermountain area. Its bright yellow flowers keep coming all summer, one of the longest bloom times of any native wildflower. Typically found in badlands communities in nature, it thrives in dry, exposed spots, and can tolerate salt and heavy clay soil. But it is a broadly adapted plant that performs equally well in richer, more moisture-retentive soils. The velvety, blue-gray foliage keeps it looking cool even on the hottest days. It is an excellent plant for rock gardens or for the front of a border. It combines well with other buckwheats and various low-growing perennials and carries the show started by these mostly early bloomers well into late summer.

*Special Features*: Shortstem buckwheat and other buckwheats are good flowers for dried arrangements—just clip and dry them when they are in full bloom. The bright color will last for years.

Sulfurflower Buckwheat
(*Eriogonum umbellatum*)

The low, mounding form of sulfurflower buckwheat, combined with its shiny, dark green leaves, makes it an ideal species for rock gardens and more formal plantings. It can also be used in a prairie planting, though it needs plenty of light and space. It is not particular about soils, growing equally well in coarse, well-drained soils and those that are rich and moist. In flower, the plant forms a loose dome of bright sulfur yellow blossoms, sometimes tinged with red. This red becomes more pronounced in fruit, as the flower clusters turn rusty. Sulfurflower buckwheat does not volunteer freely from seed, though occasional new plants may be seen.

*Special Features*: Sulfurflower buckwheat is an evergreen plant that looks good throughout the year. The leaves frequently turn bright red in winter, adding extra color and interest to an often bleak season.
Silver Daisy

*(Erigeron argentatus)*

Just one of many attractive daisy species, this characteristic southern Great Basin plant features lavender flowering heads, each on a slender stalk held above a basal tuft of silvery, strap-shaped leaves. It is easy to grow and not picky about soils, and it can be used in the medium water zone if the drainage is adequate. It is small enough for rock garden use, but can also be mixed to good effect with other wildflowers and grasses of the sagebrush steppe in an informal dry meadow setting. It looks especially attractive with sundancer daisy, which is about the same size but has contrasting bright green foliage and golden flowering heads.

*Special Features:* Silver daisy is a magnet for butterflies in the garden, so if you want to see a diversity of these attractive pollinators, try a silver daisy planting.

Blue Grama

*(Bouteloua gracilis)*

Blue grama is a summer-active grass that is a dominant species on the Great Plains. In the intermountain area, it is confined mainly to the south, where summer rains are more reliable. Blue grama is a versatile grass, occurring naturally from the desert shrubland up into the ponderosa pine parkland. It may be a bunchgrass or a weak sod-former, depending on its origins. The bunchgrass form makes a wonderful specimen plant—the attractive flowering spikes persist into late fall. Blue grama is also useful as a substitute for cool-season turf grasses. It requires about a quarter as much water as Kentucky bluegrass, and can tolerate mowing and moderate foot traffic. It may also be left unmowed, and performs well in prairie mixes with spring and summer wildflowers.

*Special Features:* Blue grama has intriguing one-sided flowering spikes that have given it common names like eyelash grass and navajita (little razor).
Shining Muttongrass  
(*Poa fendleriana*)

Shining muttongrass is a cool-season bunchgrass that can add color and texture in a prairie, sagebrush steppe, or mountain brush setting, as well as in more formal plantings. It begins growth very early and stays green into the fall with little supplemental water. It has a compact growth form similar to blue fescue, but shining muttongrass has the advantage of being tolerant of both full sun and partial shade. Few native grasses are as shade tolerant as this one. Foliage color varies from bright green to pale blue, and the potential exists for selection based on this variation. Shining muttongrass is broadly adapted, not picky about soil, and very easy to grow. It is not a prolific seed producer, and behaves very well in a landscape setting.

*Special Features:* Shining muttongrass is named for its beautiful pearly pink to silver-green flowering heads, which appear very early in the spring.

Utah Sweetvetch  
(*Hedysarum boreale*)

In spite of its name, Utah sweetvetch is widely distributed in the Intermountain West, mostly in the sagebrush steppe and mountain brush communities. Especially drought-hardy forms can occasionally be found in desert communities, but specimens encountered in the nursery are from higher elevations and not likely to be quite so tough. Utah sweetvetch combines lush, green foliage with a spectacular display of magenta flowers in early summer. It makes an excellent understory plant for mountain brush or sagebrush steppe plantings, and also holds its own with grasses in prairie plantings. It shows only a moderate tendency to self-sow, and can thus be used in more formal perennial beds as well.

*Special Features:* Many peas look somewhat alike in flower, but Utah sweetvetch has very distinctive seed pods. They look like chains of flattened disks, each one containing a single seed.

Perennials: Low Water Use  
(Ranked Short to Tall)
Desert Four O’Clock

*(Mirabilis multiflora)*

This plant ranks among the legendary desert wildflowers. Its large green leaves and gargantuan growth form make it look almost tropical, but it is one of the toughest and most drought-hardy of native perennials. It blooms all summer long with little or no extra water. When in full flower in late afternoon, it is a glorious sight. Desert four o’clock is broadly adapted, but if life is too good, it will make more leaves than flowers. It does best in a lean, coarse soil. It should be planted as a specimen plant or in a bank with plenty of room between plants. The plants can live many years, and they will get bigger each year.

*Special Features:* The secret to drought hardiness for this plant is a large underground water-storage organ. It starts anew each year from this massive root when the soil warms up in late spring—it will begin growing later than you expect.

Hopi Blanketflower

*(Gaillardia pinnatifida)*

Hopi blanketflower is native to the southeastern part of our region, the Colorado Plateau country. It features large heads with deeply notched, dark yellow rays and domed red centers, held above a sparsely leafy plant with deep green lobed leaves. It often grows in spare, sandy soils, but it is tolerant of rich soils, as long as they are well drained. It is best used in prairie plantings or as a shrubland or woodland understory species. Like all blanketflowers and most of their relatives, it has a strong tendency to seed itself, so it is best used in informal plantings.

*Special Features:* The seeds of Hopi blanketflower are popular with birds. They were also used to make a sort of peanut butter by indigenous people, who also used the plant as a medicinal.
Lewis Flax
*(Linum lewisii)*

Lewis flax is found from the salt desert to the mountain meadows, but it is most characteristic of shrub steppe and foothill communities. It is one of the easiest native wildflowers to grow. The plants are sparsely leafy with fine, blue-green leaves, but when the flowers open, the plants become very noticeable. Flower color varies from sky blue to almost silver-white, and flowers are produced in great abundance over an extended period. Lewis flax is a prolific seeder and volunteers readily. It is a wonderful addition to informal prairie, shrub steppe, and mountain meadow plantings, where it combines well with Utah sweetvetch, showy sandwort, and Hopi blanketflower.

*Special Features:* Each Lewis flax flower lasts a only single day, and by the end of the season the ground beneath the plant is often littered with blue confetti.

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**Wasatch Penstemon**
*(Penstemon cyananthus)*

Just one of many fine blue penstemons found in the Intermountain West, Wasatch penstemon is a plant primarily of the sagebrush steppe and mountain brush communities of the central part of the region, though it is also found in aspen understory and mountain meadow communities. It is somewhat more shade tolerant than most penstemons, as well as more tolerant of a variety of soil types. It can also cope better with extra water. Wasatch penstemon features bright green leaves and intensely blue flowers that are smaller than some other species but tightly clustered on the stem, for a very showy effect. It combines well with Indian paintbrush, sundancer daisy, and Utah sweetvetch.

*Special Features:* Wasatch penstemon tolerates competition from other plants better than most penstemons, and it can be used successfully in prairie and meadow plantings.

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Perennials: Low Water Use
(Ranked Short to Tall)
Bluebunch Wheatgrass  
*(Pseudoroegneria spicata)*

This grass, along with big sagebrush, forms the backbone of the sagebrush steppe community, and it is also a dominant species in the palouse prairie. No steppe or prairie planting would be complete without it. Fortunately, it is also a very beautiful plant, and one that is easy to grow. It is tolerant of a wide range of soil types and can live with both benign neglect and some overwatering. It provides texture, color, and structure, especially in mid- to late summer, when most of the other plants in these communities have already finished flowering. It is a prolific self-seeder, so it may occasionally be necessary to weed out seedlings to keep this species from overdominating a planting, especially on a fertile, well-watered site.

*Special Features:* The slender flowering stalks of bluebunch wheatgrass are a lovely sight when backlit in the late afternoon, and the plants manage to look good even during those January thaws, when all the other plants just look flattened.

Bridges Penstemon
*(Penstemon rostriflorus)*

Bridges penstemon is a relatively common plant in semi-desert and foothill communities across the southern half of our region, from the Sierras to the Rockies. It can be a somewhat rangy plant, especially in overly fertile soils, but its elegant blossoms more than make up for its rather open structure. It has a broader soil tolerance than many penstemons, but it does look better when grown in a coarse, lean soil. It can be used in perennial beds or as part of the understory for semi-desert shrub and foothill woodland plantings. It looks especially good planted with other midsummer flowering species, such as littlecup penstemon, gooseberryleaf globemallow, and Lewis flax.

*Special Features:* Bridges penstemon is usually the last red-flowered penstemon to bloom in our area, making it a good companion plant for firecracker penstemon, another red-flowered species that blooms earlier in the summer, in a hummingbird garden.
Littlecup Penstemon
(Penstemon sepalulus)

Littlecup penstemon is an upright, bushy plant with narrow, sea green leaves and long stalks of slender, deep lavender, snapdragonlike flowers. In the wild, littlecup penstemon is a specialist on steep, eroding banks in the sagebrush steppe and mountain brush zones, but it has turned out to be a very tractable garden plant, thriving in a variety of soils and experiencing very few problems. Even though it appears somewhat shrubby, it is best to cut this plant back close to the ground in the late fall, as flowering takes place from new shoots each year. Littlecup penstemon is best used in perennial beds and tall borders. It looks especially good with Bridges penstemon against a wall or rock backdrop.

Special Features: Littlecup penstemon is an example of an endemic plant, that is, a plant found growing wild in a very restricted area, namely the southern Wasatch Mountains in northern Utah. Fortunately, it performs well in gardens over a much wider area.

Firecracker Penstemon
(Penstemon eatonii)

Firecracker penstemon is the common red-flowered penstemon throughout the southern half of the Intermountain region, and it has naturalized from roadside seedings in the north as well. It is a handsome plant, with large, shiny, dark green leaves and tall stalks of flared tubular flowers that hang down along the stalk. Firecracker penstemon can be a little tricky in the garden—it needs a well-drained soil low in organic matter. The good life makes for a short life for this plant. It is best used as a specimen plant or in a screen or mass planting with other tall penstemons. It will volunteer freely from seed—to prevent this, just cut the stalks after flowering is finished.

Special Features: Like most red-flowered natives in our area, firecracker penstemon attracts hummingbirds and depends on them for pollination. Watching the hummingbirds dueling for control of a firecracker penstemon patch in flower is great spectator sport on a summer afternoon.
Alkali Sacaton Grass
(*Sporobolus airoides*)

This large bunchgrass is notable for its tolerance to salt, heavy soils, and subsurface moisture, but it is also quite drought tolerant. It can be used in minimal water landscapes if even a modest effort is made to provide it with harvested water—it is often seen growing along road shoulders, where it gets some runoff, in very dry places. Alkali sacaton is a beautiful grass that could serve as a handsome substitute for exotic ornamental grasses that tend to become invasive. A closely related plant, giant sacaton, is even larger and would be a suitable substitute for pampas grass. Alkali sacaton grass is best used as a specimen plant or in large massed plantings. It combines well with lacy buckwheatbrush, a shrub that is also tolerant of salt and clay soils.

*Special Features:* Alkali sacaton grass is especially beautiful in flower, when the finely divided, spangly flowering heads take on a luminous pink tinge.
This little penstemon is quite different from its taller cousins. It is a mat-former that pins itself to the ground by rooting at the nodes as it spreads. Its small, dark green, almond-shaped leaves stay green all summer. It makes a beautiful ground-cover plant, especially when used to fill the spaces between the flagstones of a pathway, and it can take some light foot traffic. An added bonus is the mid-spring display of miniature blue, snapdragon-like flowers with bright orange “beardtongues” sticking out of their little faces. This plant is not picky about soil, but it does benefit from occasional watering during the heat of the summer.

Special Features: Tiny flowers like those of mat penstemon are pollinated by equally tiny native bees, and some of these, such as the metallic turquoise *Osmia* bees, are as pretty as the flowers.

This plant often forms patches at the edge of the oaks and maples in the foothills, and it is also found in open meadows higher in the mountains. It is a good choice for a rock garden or as a ground cover. It can tolerate light shade, which makes it useful as an understory plant in mountain brush plantings. When not in flower, it is very short, only an inch or so tall, but the flower stalks rise above the cottony mat of basal leaf rosettes. The height of the stalks is variable, ranging from a couple of inches to nearly a foot. A ground-cover planting of taller forms of rosy pussytoes can easily be tidied up with a string trimmer once flowering is finished, and the planting can take light traffic when not in flower. This plant likes a well-drained soil, but it appreciates a little extra water during hot weather.

Special Features: Rosy pussytoes is almost cuddly to the touch, and is named for the soft clusters of flower heads that do indeed feel a bit like the toes of a pussy cat.
Trailing Daisy
(*Erigeron flagellaris*)

Trailing daisy gets its name from its habit of producing runners, which then root at the tips like strawberry runners. It can use these runners to form large patches, making it a useful ground-cover plant in the foothill and mountain water zones. It does well in either full sun or partial shade, but will need less water if not exposed to afternoon sun in the summer. It appreciates rich, water-retentive soil. The flowering stalks vary in height, but taller forms in ground-cover plantings can be trimmed after flowering with a string trimmer.

*Special Features:* It is quite possible to manage a trailing daisy planting as a substitute for turf, and the planting will require far less water than lawn, as well as looking very pretty when in flower. The rest of the time it forms a low green mat that can take some light foot traffic.

Leo Penstemon
(*Penstemon leonardii*)

Leo penstemon is a little-known species that has a relatively small distribution, centered in northern Utah, but it is a broadly adapted plant that could be used successfully throughout our region. It features a low, mounding growth form quite different from that of most penstemons, deep green foliage, and a profusion of electric blue, snapdragon-like flowers in spring. It is the amazing blue color of the flowers that is its chief selling point, though the plant does provide masses of green foliage color through the growing season, especially with a little extra water. This is a great species for a perennial border, and it could be used as a low-maintenance ground cover as well. It would also be a good addition to a prairie planting. Unlike most penstemons, it does not volunteer readily from seed.

*Special Features:* Leo penstemon flowers at the same time as Indian paintbrush, and makes a good buddy plant. When they are planted together, the combination of bright blue and bright red flowers is spectacular.
Lavenderleaf Sundrops
(Calylophus lavandulifolius)

This low-growing plant has rather sparse, fine-textured foliage, but its deep yellow flowers are quite large, so that in bloom the plant seems to be mostly flowers. The blossoms start as satiny red-and-green striped buds, open to almost square, four-petaled flowers, and fade through shades of orange and red as they age. Lavenderleaf sundrops can keep up this parade of blossoms all summer long. A plant of rocky, open country, it needs full sunlight to prosper, but it is tolerant of a range of soil types as long as the drainage is good. It is a great rock garden plant. It can also be used in traditional perennial beds and as an understory species in open foothill woodland plantings.

*Special Features:* This plant is strongly perennial and will live many years under good conditions. It is not much given to self-seeding, so plant it where you need it to be.

Flaxleaf Penstemon
(Penstemon linarioides)

The leaves of flaxleaf penstemon are narrow and strap-like, similar to those of Lewis flax. It has a low, mounded form that works well in a perennial border or rock garden setting, though it does have a strong tendency to self-seed. It also makes a good understory plant in the openings of mountain brush and foothill woodland plantings, and it could be used as an informal ground cover. Flaxleaf penstemon can hold its own against perennial grasses, in spite of its small stature. It combines well with lavenderleaf sundrops, Bridges penstemon, and shortstem buckwheat. Flower color varies in this species from deep sky blue to almost white, but the flowers are usually a soft baby blue.

*Special Features:* Flaxleaf penstemon is one of the last penstemons to flower each summer, providing a welcome splash of color in midsummer landscapes. Its pale blue flowers are very pretty against the fine screen of dark green leaves.

Perennials: Medium Water Use
(Ranked Short to Tall)
Butterfly Milkweed
(Asclepias tuberosa)

It may be a surprise to learn that this familiar garden plant is an intermountain native. It grows naturally throughout the eastern and central United States, and enters our area in the mountain brush and ponderosa pine communities of the Colorado Plateau country. Butterfly milkweed rarely seeds itself, making it a welcome plant in traditional gardens. It can also be used as an understory plant in pinyon and ponderosa pine openings, where it combines well with little bluestem and blue grama. It prefers a rich soil and regular water in hot weather. It will reward your attention with a magnificent display of bright yellow-orange flowers in mid- to late summer, at a time when little else is blooming.

Special Features: Butterfly milkweed is well named. It is a great plant for a butterfly garden, attracting a variety of different species. Later, you can enjoy the beautiful flight of the milkweed seeds themselves, without worrying much about weeding volunteers.

Whipple Penstemon
(Penstemon whippleanus)

An unusual penstemon of rocky soils at the edges of mountain conifer forests, Whipple penstemon has bright green, finely toothed leaves and flowers that are nearly tubular and close to the color of grape Kool-aid. Occasional plants have dusty mauve or maroon flowers. They occur in clusters at intervals along the flowering stalk, for a decidedly showy effect. This penstemon is a delicate plant, quite different from its robust relatives of lower elevations, and it needs to be mass-planted or given a prominent spot to show off its rather exotic beauty, which passes all too quickly. It prefers light shade, a rich but not heavy soil, and a mulch of conifer needles.

Special Features: Whipple penstemon can be used as the centerpiece of a shade garden featuring firechalice and Rocky Mountain and western columbines as companion plants.
Little Bluestem
(Schizachyrium scoparium)

Little bluestem is best known as a tallgrass prairie plant, but it has a wide distribution in North America, entering our region in the Colorado Plateau country. It is a warm-season grass that flowers in late summer and holds its seed heads well into the fall. These feathery seed heads, combined with rich green foliage and a lovely, fountain-like growth form, make it one of our most beautiful native grass species. It works well as a specimen plant or in a bank, and it can also be used as an understory species in foothill woodland and ponderosa pine plantings. It needs summer rain to prosper, so it is not a suitable choice for a palouse prairie planting.

*Special Features:* The foliage of little bluestem provides wonderful fall and winter color, turning various shades of yellow, orange, and red. The cultivar ‘Blaze’ was selected for exceptional fall color, and does well in our region.

Dusty Penstemon
(Penstemon comarrhenus)

This elegant but little-known plant is native to the Colorado Plateau and southeastern Great Basin, where it is often the most common penstemon species at middle elevations. It features a tall, willowy growth form, narrow, pale green leaves, and long stalks of large, baby blue flowers with pale pink throats. Occasional plants have shell pink flowers. Dusty penstemon makes a beautiful specimen plant, and it would fit in well in a tall border planting. It can also be used in mountain meadow plantings or as an understory species in mountain brush and aspen parkland communities, as it can tolerate light shade. It combines well with Utah sweetvetch and mountain puccoon.

*Special Features:* Dusty penstemon is not as finicky about soil as most penstemons, and can handle more water than most, making it relatively easy to grow.
**Maple Mallow**  
* (Iliamna rivularis)  

This robust plant is one of the showiest wildflowers of middle elevations throughout the intermountain region. It combines large, maplelike leaves with spikes of pale pink to deep rose flowers that resemble miniature hollyhocks. It is best used as a specimen plant, as individual plants can get quite large, especially in favorable situations. It could also be used in a tall border, in a mass planting used for a screen, mixed with other tall flowers and grasses in a mountain meadow, or as part of a mountain brush or aspen understory planting. The plants do not get so large when grown in partial shade or on drier sites.  

**Special Features:** You will rarely see more than a few maple mallow plants at a time in the wild, except after a fire, when large stands spring up from seeds that have stayed in the soil for decades, waiting for the heat of a fire to make them germinate.

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**Basin Wildrye**  
* (Leymus cinereus)  

The largest and perhaps the most spectacular of our native bunchgrasses, basin wildrye is widely distributed throughout the West. It is an excellent choice for a specimen plant or a tall screen planting. It can also be used as a component of a palouse prairie or sagebrush steppe community, though it will stay smaller on these somewhat drier sites. Basin wildrye keeps its structure year-round, and it is especially attractive in high summer when the foliage is a deep green that contrasts beautifully with the lime green flower spikes. Later the whole plant turns straw-colored. Given enough room, basin wildrye combines well with big sagebrush, oakleaf sumac, alderleaf mountain mahogany, and other large shrubs of the foothill zone.  

**Special Features:** The “basin” in basin wildrye is short for the Great Basin, the region where this plant reaches perhaps its greatest abundance. It was so abundant there in pre-settlement times that it was harvested as a grain crop by the indigenous people.
Prairie Smoke
*(Geum triflorum)*

This little wildflower is commonly encountered in mountain meadow communities, and it is right at home in the rich soil of a traditional garden bed. It can be used as a low border, or in an informal meadow planting with trailing daisy and flaxleaf penstemon as companions. Its leaves, found mostly at the base of the plant, are long and narrow, bright green, and deeply lobed along the edges. The rest of the plant, including the stems, the flowering stalks, and the flowers themselves, are an attractive dusty rose color. The flowers resemble small bells that nod charmingly from branched flowering stalks.

*Special Features:* Prairie smoke also goes by the names prairie duster and old man’s whiskers. All these names refer to the feathery pink tufts of fruits, one of the most attractive features of the plant.

Little Beebalm
*(Monardella odoratissima)*

The compact mounds of little bee balm can be found growing along protected canyon walls in the foothills, but this plant really comes into its own on open, rocky mountain slopes, where it can form extensive stands. In bloom, the plant is completely covered with lilac balls of flowers, putting on a beautiful display and attracting an interesting array of pollinators. Foliage color varies from bright green to pale gray-blue. Little bee balm is best used as a border plant or in the rock garden. It keeps its structure throughout the growing season and is only a modest self-seeder, making it suitable for more formal settings.

*Special Features:* If you brush your hand over the foliage, the sweet, menthol scent will tell you right away that this plant is a wild relative of mint.
Mountain Puccoon
*(Lithospermum multiflorum)*

A little-known species from the southern mountains within our region, mountain puccoon is a wonderful addition to mountain meadow and aspen parkland communities, and it can also hold its own in more formal plantings. It features an upright growth form, narrow, bright green leaves, and sprays of golden yellow trumpet flowers that have a sweet fragrance. Mountain puccoon rarely self-seeds. It is not fussy about soil and can tolerate moderate shade. It combines well with dusty penstemon, showy daisy, and sticky geranium, plants that are often found growing together at the edge of the aspens on the high plateaus.

*Special Features:* Another name for the puccoon genus is stoneseed, and when you see the large, shiny white seeds of this plant, this name will make sense. The seeds look as if they are made of porcelain.

Firechalice
*(Epilobium canum)*

Various forms of this plant are found throughout the southern part of our region, as well as to the south and west. Its usual haunts are shady canyon walls and rocky outcrops at middle to high elevations, but it has proven to be a remarkably versatile and broadly adapted garden plant. It spreads from underground runners to form patches, but the process is slow and not difficult to control. Firechalice can handle full sun or partial shade, and it will thrive in both rich, organic soils and spare, sandy ones. It flowers from late summer into the fall and can be used as an accent plant, in a bank or border planting, or as an informal ground cover. It does well planted as an understory between shrubs like squaw apple, mallowleaf ninebark, and mountain snowberry.

*Special Features:* Other common names for this plant are zauschneria and hummingbird trumpet. Its brilliant red-orange flowers provide the last nectar source of autumn for hummingbirds on their southward migration.
Rocky Mountain Columbine
(Aquilegia coerulea)

One of the most beloved of all western wildflowers, this is also one of the easiest to grow. The large, white or two-tone white and pale blue blossoms are every bit as showy as any cultivated columbine species. Rocky Mountain columbine thrives in dappled shade, and it combines well with showy daisy, blooming sally, and mountain puccoon in plantings for aspen parkland or mountain meadow communities. It also performs well in more formal settings, though it will seed itself freely if the seedstalks are not removed when still green. The plants are also pretty when not in bloom, with an abundance of blue-green foliage that forms an attractive mound.

Special Features: Columbines are notorious for their tendency to hybridize, so if you plant more than one species, it is best not to let the plants self-seed, as the mixed-parentage offspring are rarely as pretty as the parents.

Western Columbine
(Aquilegia formosa)

Western columbine is an elegant plant that does best in partial shade and rich, moist soils. In nature, it is almost always found at streamside or near springs, but it is not hard to grow in a garden. It has dainty, red-and-yellow, nodding blossoms on long stems over a compact basal mound of blue-green foliage. It performs well in informal as well as formal settings, and it can also be used in aspen parkland understory plantings. Western columbine will self-seed, though not as freely as domestic columbines. It hybridizes readily with other columbines, so do not plant it with other species if you want the self-seeded offspring to resemble their parents.

Special Features: Like all columbines, western columbine has petals with long spurs that hold the nectar reward for long-tongued pollinators like hummingbirds and hawk moths, while the stamens are thrust in a mass out of the front of the flower, where pollinators will be sure to contact them.

Perennials: High Water Use
(Ranked Short to Tall)
Showy Daisy

*(Erigeron speciosus)*

Showy daisy is a characteristic species of aspen parkland and mountain meadow communities throughout our region. It is a robust plant that can put on an impressive flowering display, especially when grown as a specimen plant or in a bank in full sun. It also combines well with sticky geranium, maple mallow, and meadow fire in mountain brush, aspen understory, and meadow plantings. It features rounded masses of large daisy flowers with deep lavender rays and yellow centers. Showy daisy has bright green foliage that provides structure late in the season, after flowering is finished. It should be cut to the ground in fall. It spreads by short underground runners as well as by self-seeding, but it is not particularly assertive in this regard.

*Special Features:* The Europeans have developed several cultivars of this magnificent plant. This happens with many of our natives—no one here thinks they are anything special, but gardeners in other places value them highly.

Meadow Fire

*(Hymenoxys hoopesii)*

With its clusters of large, deep chrome yellow daisy heads, this plant is one of the showiest species of mountain meadow communities. The narrow, petal-like rays are bent downward, giving the heads a characteristic shaggy look. This plant does best in full sun but can also grow in dappled shade. It looks wonderful in massed plantings and as a companion plant for sticky geranium, tall larkspur, and blooming sally. The rather lush, bright green foliage is an added attraction. Meadow fire is not a prolific seeder in the garden and can be used in formal settings. It has been known in the past by some peculiar common names, including owl's claws and orange sneezeweed, a name that refers to its use as a substitute for snuff. We decided to christen it with a name worthy of its considerable beauty.

*Special Features:* Meadow fire is a great plant for the butterfly garden. Painted ladies seem to be especially attracted to its large, pollen-rich heads.
Sticky Geranium  
*Geranium viscosissimum*

This handsome plant is one of the easiest and most reliable natives for home landscapes. It features a basal clump of large, bright green, almost round leaves that are deeply lobed, and bright magenta flowers held above the leaves on branched flowering stalks. An added attraction is the brilliant red foliage color in the fall. Sticky geranium is not fussy about soils, though it does benefit from added organic matter. It thrives in full sun or partial shade. It is a modest self-seeder that can be used as a specimen plant, in perennial borders, or as a member of mountain brush, aspen parkland, and mountain meadow communities.

*Special Features:* The fruits of sticky geranium are fascinating from an engineering perspective. The seeds, held down by force at the base of the long central style, are catapulted from the plant when the dry style segments spring upward. Seedlings can show up in odd places.

Blooming Sally  
*Chamerion angustifolium*

Very widely distributed in western and northern North America, blooming sally is a well-known wildflower, especially in the northern part of its range, where it is often very abundant. It is a slender plant with willowlike leaves, and its name comes from this resemblance to a blooming *Salix* (willow). It flowers in late summer, and its tall wands of deep magenta flowers look wonderful in massed plantings or with tall larkspur and meadow fire. Blooming sally spreads by underground runners and by self-sowing, but unless the site is very wet, the rate of spread will be slow and easily controlled, especially in partial shade.

*Special Features:* Fireweed is another name for this plant. It is a fire-follower, often occurring in large stands in the openings created by forest fires. Its tiny seeds are dispersed by the wind, enabling it to travel great distances to find new openings.
Tall Larkspur
*(Delphinium barbeyi)*

This statuesque plant is similar to domestic delphiniums. It is perhaps not quite as showy, but it can thrive on much less water. It is an abundant species in aspen parkland and mountain meadow communities throughout our region. Tall larkspur features long spikes of deep blue-violet flowers over clumps of bright green basal leaves. Its large leaves are deeply lobed, almost succulent, and quite attractive even when the plant is not in flower. Tall larkspur combines well with other mountain meadow species like blooming sally, showy daisy, and meadow fire. It forms large clumps over time and makes a beautiful specimen plant or formal border display.

**Special Features:** Like its relatives the columbines, tall larkspur has flowers with nectar spurs to encourage pollinators. Native bumblebees are frequent visitors.
Shadscale  
*(Atriplex confertifolia)*

This little silver-green shrub is one of the toughest and best for minimal water use landscapes, tolerating salt, heat, and drought. It has small, nearly round leaves that have a soft shine and a pleasing, compact growth form. It grows quickly to mature size and often sets fruit the year after planting. Shadscale is definitely a plant that needs tough love—it hates organic matter and too much water. Do not try to use it in foothill or mountain plantings. Planted in the right place, it is low-maintenance and long-lived. Once established, it will not need supplemental water. It combines well with winterfat, desert sage, and green Mormon tea. Shadscale is quite thorny and hard to weed, so aim to plant it where weeds will not be an issue.

*Special Features:* The fruits of shadscale ripen in autumn and are one of the most attractive features of the plant, turning satiny pastel shades of pink, rose, and orange.

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Winterfat  
*(Krascheninnikovia lanata)*

Winterfat is a fast-growing little shrub that thrives in minimal- and low-water-use landscapes. It has soft, white foliage, with small, upright leaves that look a bit like little rabbit ears. It is more tolerant of extra water and fertility than most desert shrubs, though it can get floppy if life is too good. The most appealing feature of the plant is the luminous white wands of cottony fruits that form in late summer and persist through the fall—these look especially beautiful in backlight. Winterfat volunteers freely from seed, especially on less dry sites. It looks good planted with lacy buckwheatbrush and shadscale for a handsome autumn display. Combine with prince’s plume, Palmer penstemon, and desert sage for color through the season.

*Special Features:* Winterfat gets its odd name from the fact that it is a palatable and nutritious browse for sheep in the wintertime. Another name for the plant is whitesage.
Lacy Buckwheatbrush

\textit{(Eriogonum corymbosum)}

This striking and unusual plant comes in a variety of shapes and sizes, but all feature soft, pale leaves and intricately branched flowering stalks. These give an airy but substantial, domelike structure to the plant. The plants flower in late summer to fall, and flowers vary from cream to dark rose pink or bright sulfur yellow. The flowers persist on the plants and turn rust colored, and eventually the whole dome turns rusty. This dome persists through winter and adds great structure and color to the winter garden. There is no need to clip these flowering stalks. In spring, the new growth will come right through the old. Lacy buckwheatbrush is very forgiving, especially considering its desert origins. It will thrive in rich soil or poor, with or without extra water. It just needs plenty of room to express itself.

\textit{Special Features:} Lacy buckwheatbrush is the all-season plant \textit{par excellence}. It looks great as a specimen plant, a hedge, a border, or a mass planting, and it combines especially well with desert sage.

Desert Sage

\textit{(Salvia dorrii)}

This hidden treasure of the desert looks a lot like many other little gray-green shrubs—except when it flowers. In blossom, it becomes literally covered with hundreds of spikes of royal blue flowers, each held inside a purple bract, for a very showy bicolor effect. The mass of flowers attracts many interesting native pollinators. The pale green leaves of desert sage are small and rounded, with a thick, almost leathery texture, and the plant is a true evergreen, providing structure and gray-greenery year round. A pungent scent somewhat like cooking sage is another nice feature. Desert sage needs a lean, well-drained soil to thrive, and will almost never need watering after establishment. It combines well with green Mormon tea, winterfat, and lacy buckwheatbrush.

\textit{Special Features:} Desert sage makes a good host for Indian paintbrush. The contrast of deep red with royal blue and purple is spectacular. Add sundancer daisy to the mix for a stunning polychrome effect.
Datil Yucca
(Yucca baccata)

Datil yucca is a handsome plant of the southwest plateaus, entering our region from the south, but it is fully cold-hardy. Its heavy, swordlike, blue-green leaves are borne in a massive clump. They feature beautiful curling white fibers along their edges and sharp, hard tips. The very large flowers of datil yucca are borne along short, stout stalks not much longer than the leaves. They hang downward in clusters of waxy, cream- and rose-colored bells. Datil yucca is a broadly adapted plant that is easy to grow, though it does prefer a well-drained soil. It makes a beautiful structural contrast planted with finer-textured shrubs like sand sagebrush, Apache plume, and rubber rabbitbrush.

Special Features: Datil is the Spanish word for “date,” and refers to the fleshy, sweet fruits. These are rarely seen in cultivation because of the need for a specialized pollinator, the yucca pronuba moth. Another common name for this plant, banana yucca, also refers to these fruits.

Dwarf Yucca
(Yucca harrimaniae)

Dwarf yucca ranges further north in our region than any other yucca species. It forms compact clusters of narrow, sharp-tipped leaves with showy flowering stalks that are carried well above the leaf clusters. These clusters are sometimes very small, about baseball size, hence the name dwarf yucca. The plants more commonly have leaves up to a foot long. The waxy, cream-colored flowers are nearly round in outline and hang down along the stalks. These are followed in the wild by pods that are dry and that crack open to reveal flat black seeds stacked like coins in each chamber. Dwarf yucca looks good planted with green Mormon tea, Fremont barberry, and Indian ricegrass. It needs some room to express itself in order to look its best.

Special Features: Yucca plants can flower multiple times from the same leaf cluster, unlike their relatives, the century plants. Dwarf yucca also tends to propagate itself by forming “pups” at the base of the mother plant.
Sand Sagebrush

*(Artemisia filifolia)*

This graceful and elegant plant has feathery, sea-green foliage on branches that tend to arch and droop downward as the plant grows older. The foliage color takes on an almost bluish hue against the red sands that are often its habitat in nature, and it also contrasts nicely with the shreaddy, almost black bark of the trunks. This evergreen plant provides excellent structure and color throughout the year. Though confined in nature to sandy soils, it does not require sand to prosper. It does need a lean, well-drained soil and plenty of sunshine, however. This is not a plant for foothill and mountain precipitation zones, but it can form a magnificent backbone plant for a minimal-water landscape. It looks wonderful with datil and dwarf yucca, green Mormon tea, Palmer penstemon, Hopi blanketflower, and Indian ricegrass.

*Special Features:* Like all its relatives, sand sagebrush has strongly scented foliage, in this case a sweet, almost menthol-like fragrance that is especially noticeable after a rain.
Big Sagebrush  
(*Artemisia tridentata*)

Perhaps the best-loved and certainly the most maligned native shrub, big sagebrush is the signature plant for the entire region. Fortunately, this plant is easy to live with, both for people and for other plants. It provides a fine, pale green backdrop that sets off the colors and textures of smaller shrubs, grasses, and wildflowers. It is especially valuable as a source of winter structure and color. There are many forms, including basin big sagebrush, that can grow to ten feet or more. Wyoming big sagebrush is much smaller and is best for low-water-use landscapes, while mountain big sagebrush, also small and exceptionally sweet-scented, is best for foothill and mountain landscapes.

*Special Features*: We plant Indian paintbrush with big sagebrush, which is deep-rooted and will provide water to keep its companion flowering longer into the spring. Basin wildrye, bluebunch wheatgrass, Utah sweetveteh, and Lewis flax also make great companions for big sagebrush.

Green Mormon Tea  
(*Ephedra viridis*)

People often mistake green Mormon tea for Scotch broom, and it is broomlike in its upright habit and bright green, essentially leafless stems. But unlike Scotch broom, green Mormon tea is a well-behaved plant that never oversteps its bounds to become invasive. It is tolerant of a range of soil types, but it does appreciate good drainage. Green Mormon tea looks beautiful planted with yuccas, with soft green shrubs like big sagebrush and desert sage, and with Indian ricegrass, gooseberryleaf globemallow, and sundancer daisy. Once old enough to flower, an individual will produce either masses of bright yellow male flowers or tiny, dark brown cones, both of which are quite decorative.

*Special Features*: Green Mormon tea is a great asset in autumn and winter landscapes, as it keeps its structure and bright chartreuse green color year round.
Littleleaf Mountain Mahogany
*(Cercocarpus intricatus)*

This tough little shrub is usually found growing right out of the slickrock in the canyon country where it is most at home. Fortunately, it does not require such an extreme environment in order to thrive. It will be as happy in ordinary, well-drained garden soil as it is in a sandstone crack. It features shiny silver bark, almost needle-like, dark evergreen leaves, and a compact, intricately branched growth form. Its flowers are not very showy, but the feathery fruits that follow are quite attractive, especially when backlit. Littleleaf mahogany looks especially good planted with Fremont barberry and cliffrose. It can also be used effectively as a low hedge.

**Special Features:** Littleleaf mountain mahogany is quite tolerant of pruning and shaping. If you have deer, they may take care of this for you. Protecting new plantings is recommended.

Rubber Rabbitbrush
*(Ericameria nauseosa)*

A widely distributed and common roadside plant throughout our region, rubber rabbitbrush is often the first native shrub that newcomers learn to recognize and love. It features an absolutely glorious autumn display of rich golden flower masses, set off handsomely by the often nearly white, fine-textured foliage. Rubber rabbitbrush has a rubber-like scent that is pleasing to some and not so pleasing to others. It is broadly adapted and tough as nails, thriving in desert washes as well as in high mountain meadows. It will be happy as long as it gets plenty of sunshine. It looks stunning planted with bright green shrubs like fernbush and cliffrose, and it also combines well with larger perennials such as Palmer penstemon, prince’s plume, and alkali sacaton grass.

**Special Features:** Once rubber rabbitbrush has finished flowering, it can be pruned back to the ground. This prevents massive volunteering from seed and keeps the plant compact and attractive. Pruning can also prolong its life. The plant will sprout back vigorously in the spring.
Fernbush  
(*Chamaebatiaria millefolium*)

Fernbush is named for its fine, fernlike foliage, which has a sweet, resinous scent. The plants are semi-evergreen, leafing out very early in the spring, and they have an open form that shows their intriguing leaf pattern to good advantage. Fernbush produces its showy spikes of cream-colored flowers in high summer, when most other ornamental trees and shrubs have long since flowering. The cinnamon-colored fruiting heads add interest into the fall. These should be clipped before the next flush of growth. Fernbush looks especially good planted with littleleaf mockorange, oakleaf sumac, and rubber rabbitbrush. It is not a fussy plant and will tolerate a broad range of conditions.

*Special Features*: Fernbush is dominant on the cinder fields at Idaho’s Craters of the Moon, which shows you how tough this plant really is. But a little extra water will speed its growth.

Apache Plume  
(*Fallugia paradoxa*)

Apache plume is primarily a plant of the washes of the desert Southwest. It enters our region via the Colorado Plateau and southern Great Basin. Do not be misled by these southern origins, however. Apache plume is a versatile and widely adapted plant, cold-hardy as far north as Saskatchewan. It has many attractive features, including an abundance of white flowers that resemble apple blossoms. These are followed by pink, feathery fruit clusters that last for weeks into the summer. The plant has a mounding growth form, satiny white bark, and small, deeply lobed green leaves. It combines well with other large, mounding shrubs such as oakleaf sumac and Fremont barberry in larger-scale landscapes, and it can also be used as a screen or specimen plant. It can be useful in minimal water landscapes if provided with harvested water.

*Special Features*: Apache plume is very tolerant of pruning, which may be necessary to scale back its tendency to spread by root sprouts. Oddly, it is rarely touched by deer.
Fremont Barberry
(Mahonia fremontii)

This handsome evergreen shrub is a characteristic species of the Colorado Plateau. Also called Utah holly, Fremont barberry has hard, holly-like leaves that are quite unfriendly to the touch. But they have a beautiful blue-green color, turning rose-purple in winter. Fremont barberry features masses of large, honey-scented golden blossoms in late spring. These are followed by fruits that are fleshy but hollow, like little balloons in party colors of purple and red. The fruits are edible and sweet, with a cluster of a few applelike seeds attached inside at the base. Fremont barberry is truly a plant for all seasons. It is a little slow to get started, but it is broadly adapted and not hard to grow, as long as the soil is well-drained and not kept too wet.

Special Features: With its sprawling growth form and deep blue-green foliage, Fremont barberry look great planted with shrubs that have contrasting forms and colors, for example, green Mormon tea, cliffrose, Apache plume, and rubber rabbitbrush.

Cliffrose
(Purshia stansburiana)

Cliffrose is among the most memorable shrubs of our region, and it has many excellent features. It is a tall, statuesque evergreen that has fine-textured, bright green foliage. It often takes on an interesting, rugged growth form as it matures. In early summer, cliffrose is graced with an abundance of pale yellow blossoms that have a spicy, clove-like fragrance. These are followed by feathery fruits that make the plant light up against a backdrop of late sun. Even the bark, which shreds off in tan and rosy strips, is beautiful. Cliffrose likes a coarse soil that is not very fertile, and it definitely does not like to have wet feet. It looks handsome planted with Fremont barberry and littleleaf mahogany. Deer love this plant, so give it protection when young.

Special Features: One of the most pleasing things about cliffrose is its scent. The foliage emits a lovely, resinous odor when warmed in the summer sun. Cliffrose wood also smells fragrant when it burns in a campfire.
Creeping Oregon Grape
(Mahonia repens)

This pretty, evergreen, ground-cover plant can grow in sun or partial shade, but it tends to get taller in the sunshine, and it can winter-burn if the site is too bare and sunny. It has broad, leathery leaves with fine, spine-tipped teeth and fragrant sprays of golden flowers in spring. The clusters of grapelike berries are dark blue-violet with a waxy bloom. The berries are edible, and are attractive to birds. The leaves turn beautiful shades of purple and red in the winter. Best used as an understory plant beneath bigtooth maple, Gambel oak, or quaking aspen, it can also be used to stabilize a north- or east-facing slope. It combines well with mountain lover and common juniper.

Special Features: This plant is often confused with Oregon holly grape (Mahonia aquifolium), a larger plant of the Pacific Northwest, which is widely planted in our area and can be invasive. Our plant has dark green leaves with a “matte” finish, while the Northwestern species has bright green, lacquer-shiny leaves.

Mountain Lover
(Pachystima myrsinites)

A graceful, fine-textured, evergreen ground cover plant, mountain lover is one of the few natives that prefers partial to full shade. It is well-named, as it rarely ventures out of the mountain forests that are its home. It likes rich soils, and, though it often grows under the relatively drought-tolerant little trees of the mountain brush community, it does not object to extra water. It can be quite successful as a landscape plant, as long as it has some protection from winter sun exposure, either under snow or in shade. Mountain lover has tiny flowers that are rarely noticed. It combines well with mountain perennials like columbines, as well as with other shade-tolerant ground cover plants.

Special Features: Unlike many native evergreens, mountain lover stays bright green all winter. It is startling to see its leafy branches springing up out of the snow on a warm January day.
**Shrubby Penstemon**  
*(Penstemon fruticosus)*

Shrubby penstemon is widely distributed in the interior Northwest, and enters our region in eastern Washington and Oregon and central Idaho. It is one of the most reliable and beautiful native shrubs, featuring evergreen leaves that are a cheerful bright green and masses of large, spectacular, lavender flowers in mid-spring. Shrubby penstemon is a mountain plant, but it grows on steep, coarse scree slopes in full sun and is remarkably drought-hardy. Unlike many penstemons, it is a long-lived shrub that stays short and compact. A wonderful low hedge or bank planting, it can serve as a green backdrop for later-flowering species such as showy sandwort, sulfurflower buckwheat, and littlecup penstemon.

*Special Features*: Shrubby penstemon flowers are a magnet for hawk moths. These striped, furry insects are so large that they are easily mistaken for hummingbirds, especially in the dusk. The sight of these moths silently working the pale flowers in the twilight is truly magical.

**Martin Mountain Lilac**  
*(Ceanothus martinii)*

One of many closely related species native to the West, Martin mountain lilac is a widely distributed but rarely encountered shrub of mountain brush communities in the southern Great Basin. It has a tidy, rounded growth form and coin-shaped green leaves that turn golden in the fall or sometimes persist all winter. But its main attraction is the veritable blizzard of fragrant white blossoms that cover the plant in spring. Each flower is tiny, but they are so densely packed on the branches that the leaves are often scarcely visible. Mountain lilac is an easygoing plant with no special needs. It combines well with mallowleaf ninebark and littleleaf mockorange.

*Special Features*: The seeds of mountain lilac are held in triplets in small, three-lobed capsules. When the capsule dries to a critical point, the seeds are catapulted away from the plant, making it hard to collect them.
**Littleleaf Mockorange**  
*(Philadelphus microphyllus)*

This little-known shrub is quite similar to the mock-orange species of wetter climes. It has the same pretty, four-petaled blossoms and the same memorable sweet scent. But its leaves are much finer, and the plant is much more drought-tolerant than cultivated mockorange species. It has a lovely, fountain-like form with slender, arching branches, and the satiny white bark peels in strips to reveal a cinnamon-colored underlayer. Its almond-shaped leaves turn a clear bright yellow in the fall. Littleleaf mock-orange is not finicky and is easy to grow. It combines well with fernbush, green Mormon tea, and oakleaf sumac. Or try planting it along the edges of groves of bigtooth maple and Gambel oak.

**Special Features:** Plant littleleaf mockorange where you will be able to enjoy its spectacular floral display and beautiful fragrance on warm June nights.

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**Oakleaf Sumac**  
*(Rhus trilobata)*

Oakleaf sumac is very widely distributed in western North America, and a similar species, fragrant sumac *(R. aromatica)*, is found to the east. This plant has many fine features, including rapid growth, spectacular fall color in shades of red, orange, and yellow, bright red berries that attract birds, and the ability to tolerate a wide range of conditions. It does get quite large, so be sure to give it plenty of room. It can be used as a specimen plant, a screen or hedge, or to stabilize steep slopes. It is very tolerant of pruning, but trying to keep it small by pruning it back can be a losing battle. The common version has leaves with three leaflets. A somewhat smaller version with simple, scalloped leaves *(R. trilobata* var. *simplicifolia)* is found on drier sites in the southern half of its range, and this may be a better option for small landscapes.

**Special Features:** The red berries of oakleaf sumac are not edible, but they can be soaked in water to make a refreshing drink known locally as “boy scout lemonade.”
Mallowleaf Ninebark
*(Physocarpus malvaceus)*

Mallowleaf ninebark is often a dominant plant in the mountain brush community at middle elevations. Its growth form varies by habitat—on steep, open slopes it stays short, while in more favorable bottoms and drainageways it grows much taller. Its size can thus be managed in the landscape with judicious watering. It has small, bright green, somewhat maplelike leaves, shiny red bark, and showy sprays of pink to white blossoms. It is an adaptable species, tolerant of a variety of conditions, but it does best in a rich soil with an organic mulch. It combines well with mountain lilac, littleleaf mockorange, and mountain snowberry.

*Special Features:* The leaves of mallowleaf ninebark turn an intense wine-red early in the fall, often coloring whole hillsides before the first hint of autumn color in any other species.

Squaw Apple
*(Peraphyllum ramosissimum)*

Squaw apple combines narrow, bright green leaves with rather large, white to pink, delicately fragrant, apple-like blossoms. It is a relatively common member of mountain brush communities throughout the Intermountain region, but it is only occasionally seen in cultivation, perhaps because of its slow growth rate. It has an irregular form and smooth gray bark that becomes black and furrowed in older plants. Its pretty fruits resemble small, bright yellow and red apples. The leaves also turn bright yellow in the fall. Squaw apple is tolerant of a range of soil types and is not difficult to grow in the landscape. It is a favorite food of deer, however, so young plants need to be protected if deer browsing is an issue.

*Special Features:* The taste of squaw apple fruits is disappointing, to say the least, with a biting bitterness as the dominant element, though birds and squirrels take them readily, and they are known to be a favorite food of black bears.
Alderleaf Mountain Mahogany

(Cercocarpus montanus)

A slender shrub that tends to form patches in the mountain brush zone, alderleaf mountain mahogany has smooth, pinkish gray bark and small, diamond-shaped leaves with deeply incised veins. In autumn the leaves turn a dark golden color, and the plant provides vertical structure in the winter garden. The feathery fruits add interest from middle to late summer, and are especially attractive when backlit. Alderleaf mountain mahogany is widely adapted and easy to grow. It makes a good addition to a mountain brush community planting, and can also be used effectively as a screen or specimen plant. It makes a good companion for fernbush, Utah serviceberry, and mountain lilac.

Special Features: During very dry summers in the wild, alderleaf mountain mahogany may lose its leaves. This somewhat alarming sight is an adaptation to avoid drought, and the plants will leaf out again normally the following spring.

Utah Serviceberry

(Amelanchier utahensis)

A graceful shrub or small tree with an open, vaselike form, Utah serviceberry is common and widely distributed throughout our region. It is found on drier sites in the mountain brush than its relative, Saskatoon serviceberry, which it closely resembles, and may occasionally be found in sagebrush steppe communities. Utah serviceberry features masses of white flowers in spring, followed by fruits that look like blueberries. The nearly round, soft, pale green leaves of serviceberry turn a beautiful dark gold in autumn, and its smooth gray bark and elegant form make a lovely sight in winter. Utah serviceberry is not picky about soils, though it likes an organic mulch. It looks good in an open planting with New Mexico privet and singleleaf ash. It is a popular deer food, so provide protection for young plants.

Special Features: The fruits of Utah serviceberry are dry, in contrast to the edible though rather flavorless fruits of Saskatoon serviceberry. Its chief advantages are greater drought hardiness and a somewhat showier flower display.
New Mexico Privet  
(*Forestiera pubescens*)

Also known as desert olive or stretchberry, New Mexico privet is a shrub or small tree of sandy floodplains on the Colorado Plateau. It is fully cold-hardy and has landscape potential far beyond its natural range of occurrence. It features smooth, cream to pale green bark on older wood, and striking black twigs. It has quite large, lime-green leaves, and clusters of showy purple fruits. Not every plant will produce fruits, as the sexes are on different individuals. New Mexico privet tends to be a shrub when grown in full sunlight, but in the gallery forests along rivers its form is more treelike. It can be limbed up to encourage this treelike form. This plant looks good with cliffrose, Utah serviceberry, and singleleaf ash, and can also be used in park-like settings with a native turf of blue grama.

*Special Features:* The olivelike fruits of New Mexico privet are popular with birds and also with coyotes in the wild. They can be a little messy in a landscape setting, though usually most are eaten before they have a chance to fall.

Singleleaf Ash  
(*Fraxinus anomala*)

This sturdy little tree is a common plant in the slickrock canyons of the Colorado Plateau. It features deep green, rounded, almost fleshy leaves, quite different from the slender compound leaves of other ash species. The lime-green flowers in spring are followed by clusters of dangling, canoe-paddle fruits that are quite attractive. Singleleaf ash also has striking black bark that is deeply furrowed on older branches. It often stays small and shrubby when growing out of rock, but in favorable microhabitats along washes it develops into a small tree. Singleleaf ash has been used very little in landscapes. In our experience, it is not difficult to grow, though it is slow to get started. It needs plenty of sunshine and space to prosper.

*Special Features:* The leaves of singleleaf ash turn a spectacular bright gold in autumn, and the black bark adds considerably to the dramatic effect.
Curlleaf Mountain Mahogany  
( *Cercocarpus ledifolius* )

Curlleaf mountain mahogany is a tough little evergreen tree of windswept mountain ridges throughout our region. Its narrowly oval leaves are leathery and hard, with edges that are curled under, and they have a deep olive green color that contrasts nicely with the ridged gray bark. The trees are most conspicuous in fruit, when the feathery fruits can be so abundant as to nearly obscure the branches. These are especially noticeable when backlit. Curlleaf mountain mahogany is one of the best native trees for landscape use, because it stays small and has a pleasing, regular growth form. It makes a great specimen plant and is also very useful as a colonnade or a screen. This tree likes good drainage, but is otherwise not too particular about soil. It grows fairly quickly once it has had a year or two to get deeply rooted.

*Special Features*: Curlleaf mountain mahogany looks good in an open planting with other species from not-so-fertile environments, including datil yucca, Fremont barberry, cliffrose, and green Mormon tea.

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Western Virgin’s Bower  
( *Clematis ligusticifolia* )

One of our few native woody vines, western virgin’s bower makes an excellent choice to train over a pergola or arbor. It is a fast and vigorous grower and looks beautiful both when covered with clusters of cream-colored flowers and when these turn into feathery balls of seeds. It does not have tendrils or holdfasts, but instead climbs by twining its stems, as do domestic clematis species. It is densely leafy in summer, but these leaves are deciduous, so that much more light comes through in winter. The leaves themselves are bright lime green and have large, pointed leaflets that tend to be held vertically on the plant. They turn a clear yellow in autumn. Western virgin’s bower is an easy plant to grow, but it requires pruning to direct its growth.

*Special Features*: Western virgin’s bower looks quite a lot like oriental clematis. This introduced plant has become a nasty weed in many parts of our region. Oriental clematis has yellow, bell-shaped flowers that are solitary, not in clusters. Please do not plant it.
Rocky Mountain Juniper
(Juniperus scopulorum)

Rocky Mountain juniper is widely distributed and common throughout the West. Its slender, often weeping branchlets and small berries distinguish it from the native junipers of drier habitats. It commonly provides a strong evergreen element to mountain brush communities, and it is also found in aspen and ponderosa pine parkland at higher elevation, as well as in riparian areas of the shrub steppe. Rocky Mountain juniper has no special needs and is very easy to grow. This may be one reason why it has been so widely accepted into the landscape trade. Except possibly for blue spruce, it is planted more often than any other intermountain native. It combines well with Gambel oak, bigtooth maple, and oakleaf sumac in mountain brush plantings and also has many uses in more formal plantings.

Special Features: This plant is highly variable in form and color, and this has been the basis for the selection and release of numerous cultivars. We prefer species trees, but Rocky Mountain juniper cultivars certainly have their uses.

Pinyon Pine
(Pinus edulis)

Pinyon pines are dominant species of foothill woodland communities throughout the southern half of our region, and they are largely responsible for its characteristic look and feel. The two-needle pinyon (P. edulis) is more common on the Colorado Plateau, while the single-needle pinyon (P. monophylla) is more common in the Great Basin. These familiar trees feature a twisted growth form, short, shiny green needles, and woody cones that contain edible pinenuts. Pinyon pines perform well in a landscape setting as long as they are not overwatered, though they can be slow-growing, especially the first few years. They can be used as specimen plants, in screen plantings, or as part of foothill woodland communities. They look great planted with green Mormon tea, datil and dwarf yucca, Fremont barberry, and cliffrose.

Special Features: The scent of pinyon pines in warm sun is one of the most familiar smells of the foothill woodlands.
Gambel Oak  
(*Quercus gambelii*)

Gambel oak is a common tree of mountain brush communities across the southern half of our region. It features furrowed, rough gray bark, a rugged, often arching growth form, and deeply lobed leaves with rounded lobes. These large, somewhat leathery leaves are among the last to fall in late autumn, after turning shades of deep gold, bronze, and red-purple. Its dramatic structure is accentuated by snow in the winter. Gambel oak is tolerant of a range of soil types, but prefers a rich but well-drained soil. It often grows with bigtooth maple and netleaf hackberry as its natural companions, along with understory species such as creeping Oregon grape, shining muttongrass, and rosy pussytoes.

*Special Features*: Gambel oaks reproduce by sucker ing, often forming patches. In a landscape setting, the trees are usually so slow-growing that this suckering habit is not much of an issue. If you have Gambel oak on your building lot—build around it. Gambel oak does not transplant well, and the trees can take a long time to mature.

Netleaf Hackberry  
(*Celtis laevigata var. reticulata*)

This small tree is found throughout our region. It is important primarily in the mountain brush zone, but also grows in floodplain communities at lower elevations and occasionally as a minor component of the sagebrush steppe. It has a gnarled growth form, narrowly triangular, pointed leaves with deep veins and rough surfaces, and beautiful gray bark with corky ridges. Its small orange fruits have a thin but sweet pulp. They provide food for birds in winter. Netleaf hackberry is broadly adapted and occurs in a variety of soils. It is not difficult to grow. It can be used as a specimen, in screen or hedge plantings, or as a component of mountain brush community plantings. It will grow more quickly without an understory.

*Special Features*: One feature of this tree that you will love or hate is the tendency for the leaves to develop nipple galls, caused by a tiny, cicadalike insect. The silver-brown leaves with galls tend to cling to the tree through the winter, giving the effect of ghostly winter foliage.
Bigtooth Maple

*(Acer grandidentatum)*

This elegant little tree is found almost exclusively in the Intermountain West. Its has a stately, fountainlike growth form when planted in the open under favorable conditions. It can be tall and aspenlike when growing in a forest setting, while on dry hillsides it forms shrubby thickets. It features smooth gray bark and classic Canada-flag maple leaves. Perhaps its most outstanding feature is its superb fall color, ranging from scarlet to deep crimson. Bigtooth maple is a common tree in the mountain brush zone and in lower-elevation streamside communities throughout the eastern half of our region. It is easy to grow, as long as it is grown as a species tree. Avoid bigtooth maple cultivars, as most are grown on sugar maple rootstocks—these rootstocks are not well adapted to western soils. Bigtooth maple can be used as a specimen plant, as a colonnade, or as part of a mountain brush community planting.

*Special Features:* Bigtooth maple is a close relative of sugar maple, and it can be tapped in the early spring for sap to make maple syrup.
Common Juniper  
(*Juniperus communis*)

This little evergreen occurs throughout the cooler regions of the Northern Hemisphere. It features a sprawling to prostrate growth form and spreading, shaggy branches cloaked with needlelike leaves that are dark or waxy blue green. It has reddish bark that peels off in shreds, and clusters of small, wrinkly, blue-purple berries. The plants root in at the branch nodes. Common juniper grows mostly on rocky soils in the mountains, but it is an adaptable plant that can grow in a range of soil types, as long as the soil is well-drained. This versatile plant looks good in formal foundation plantings, and the low forms are useful as a ground cover, especially for stabilizing steep slopes. Common juniper can also be used as an understory species for mountain forest plantings. It combines well with mountain lover and creeping Oregon grape.

*Special Features*: This plant has been in cultivation for a long time, and many cultivars are available. Most of these were developed from European collections.

Mountain Snowberry  
(*Symphoricarpos oreophilus*)

Mountain snowberry is an attractive, fast-growing shrub that looks a lot like its relative common snowberry (*S. albus*), a plant that is much more common in cultivation, but mountain snowberry has longer, more tubular flowers. It is found throughout the West, and is often the dominant understory shrub in mountain brush, aspen parkland, and ponderosa pine communities. Its attractive features include a pretty, arching growth form, bright green leaves in pairs along the stems, pink, bell-shaped flowers, and soft, white berries. It can be used in formal settings, and also adds structure to mountain forest and meadow plantings. It prefers moist soils rich in organic matter. It combines well with squaw apple, golden currant, and mountain ninebark.

*Special Features*: The berries of mountain snowberry persist into the winter. It is a fine sight to see a flock of cedar waxwings descend onto snow-covered snowberry bushes and strip them of their berries in a matter of minutes.

Woody Plants: High Water Use  
(Ranked Short to Tall)
Golden Currant
(*Ribes aureum*)

This handsome, tall shrub is one of the natives most familiar to the average gardener. It has many fine qualities, including beautiful, three-lobed leaves, fragrant yellow blossoms in late spring, fruits that are edible to both birds and humans, and outstanding red and orange fall color. The plants spread slowly by suckering and can be renewed by pruning out older stems. Golden currant prefers a rich, moist soil. It can be used as a specimen or screen, in foundation plantings, or in a mountain forest or meadow planting. It combines well with river birch, mountain snowberry, chokecherry, and western mountain ash. It is a great addition to a wildlife planting.

*Special Features:* In contrast with most intermountain natives, this plant is almost impossible to kill with too much water. This may explain its current popularity in home landscapes. It is no coincidence that virtually all native species currently used in intermountain home landscapes are plants of wet places.

American Hops
(*Humulus lupulus var. lupuloides*)

American hops is actually not a woody plant, because it dies back to the ground every winter and regenerates from the roots in the spring. We include it here because it can function in the landscape much as a woody vine does. It features rapid and vigorous growth each year, easily covering an arbor or pergola and creating an inviting, dappled shade effect. Its large, deeply lobed leaves have a tropical look, somewhat like mulberry leaves. They are rough to the touch and have deeply incised veins. The plant lacks tendrils or holdfasts for climbing, relying on its twining stems. The fruits look like little papery cones that hang down and are quite decorative. American hops is a streamside plant that requires rich soil and regular water in order to thrive. Its best use is to create shade over a ramada or arbor.

*Special Features:* American hops is a very close relative of the European hops used to flavor beer. The two species are now considered two varieties of a single species.
Western Mountain Ash
(Sorbus scopulina)

Western mountain ash is related to the European rowan (S. aucuparia). It features smooth, almost shiny, red-brown bark, large, compound leaves, sprays of white flowers in late spring, and red-orange berries that are very ornamental. Western mountain ash is widely distributed in our region, usually as an understory tree in aspen and white fir communities or at streamside. It is sometimes found in mountain brush communities on moist northern slopes. Western mountain ash prefers rich soil and regular water, making it readily adaptable to traditional gardens. It can be used as a specimen plant or screen, or planted with taller trees for a charming multi-story effect. It combines well with quaking aspen, chokecherry, golden currant, and river hawthorn.

Special Features: This little tree really comes into its own in autumn. The combination of beautifully displayed leaves that turn magnificent shades of gold, orange, and red with sprays of crayon-orange berries is unforgettable.

River Hawthorn
(Crataegus rivularis)

This handsome little tree is usually found on floodplains and at streamside. It features an upright growth form, usually with a single main trunk, and with branches that are at right angles to the trunk. It has shiny toothed leaves that turn yellow in fall, sprays of cherrylike blossoms, and deep purple fruits that resemble small apples. The fruits are tasty though rather seedy. They are readily taken by birds. This plant prefers rich soil and regular water. River hawthorn has a tendency to spread by rootstocks, but this tendency can be controlled by targeted watering. This plant can be used as a specimen or screen, or as part of a multistoried mountain forest planting. It combines well with golden currant, western mountain ash, chokecherry, and river birch.

Special Features: Like most hawthorns, river hawthorn is heavily armed with stout thorns, making it a great choice as a bird haven where there are cats or other climbing predators. It combines nesting sites with a built-in food supply.
Chokecherry
*(Prunus virginiana)*

Chokecherry is familiar as the source of fruits for delicious syrups and jellies. It is common in streamside and aspen communities throughout North America, and is also found in mountain brush communities on cooler north slopes. Chokecherry is a small, multitrunked tree with finely toothed cherry leaves and bright red twigs. The older bark is ashy gray and deeply furrowed. Its cream-colored flowers are borne in dense spikes that hang downward and have a pleasant, almondlike fragrance. They are followed by loose clusters of small, dark red cherries that have a sweet if astringent flavor. Chokecherry prefers rich soils and regular watering. Best used as a specimen plant or as part of a multi-storied mountain planting, it combines well with river hawthorn, Rocky Mountain maple, western mountain ash, and quaking aspen.

*Special Features:* Chokecherry is a good plant to include in a wildlife planting, as its flowers are visited by many interesting pollinators and its juicy fruits are quite attractive to birds.

Great Basin Bristlecone Pine
*(Pinus longaeva)*

This slow-growing tree of the high mountains makes a surprisingly good landscape tree, especially where there is a need for a pine that will not outgrow its space. It is full of character even as a young tree, with an irregular crown form and short, stiff needles that cloak the branches, giving a bottlebrush effect. This character only increases as the tree grows older. Bristlecone pine is best used as a specimen plant, so that it will have room to develop its interesting shape. It needs a well-drained, preferably rocky soil to prosper. It could be used as the centerpiece of a rock garden or in combination with other conifers. It also looks good planted with flowering shrubs such as squaw apple or littleleaf mockorange.

*Special Features:* Plants of this species growing at timberline in mountains of the Great Basin are the oldest known living trees, some as old as 4,700 years. It will grow more quickly in a garden setting than on the ridgetops where these ancients are found.
Rocky Mountain Maple
(Acer glabrum)

Rocky Mountain maple is a slender, elegant, often multitrunked tree that is widely distributed in our region. It is usually found along streams in the foothills, but is associated with ponderosa pine, aspen, and white fir at higher elevations. The leaves of Rocky Mountain maple have three pointed lobes and coarse to fine teeth along the edges. They usually turn a clear yellow in autumn. This plant likes rich soil and moist conditions. It works well as a specimen or screen, or as part of a multistoried mountain forest planting. It is quite shade tolerant and can coexist with evergreens like white fir, which set it off to great advantage, especially in fall.

Special Features: Rocky Mountain maple features bright red bark on new growth, somewhat like the bark of red osier dogwood. The bark on older wood is gray and slightly roughened.

Western Water Birch
(Betula occidentalis)

This fast-growing, multitrunked tree is usually slender and graceful, but it can get quite massive with age. It is found throughout the West, usually along streams and floodplains, but sometimes on north-facing mountain slopes. River birch features a fountain-like growth form and bright green, rather leathery, finely toothed leaves. These put on a fine display of gold to bronze fall color. River birch is more drought hardy than its name implies, though it prefers moist, rich soil. It is tolerant of a range of soil types, including heavy clay soils. It makes an excellent specimen plant and can also be used as part of a mountain forest community. It combines well with golden currant, river hawthorn, and Rocky Mountain maple.

Special Features: The most striking feature of river birch is its smooth, shiny red bark accented with horizontal white stripes (lenticels). This bark is reminiscent of cherry bark.

Woody Plants: High Water Use
(Ranked Short to Tall)
Quaking Aspen  
*(Populus tremuloides)*

Probably the best-loved native tree of the region, quaking aspen is also one of the most problematic in cultivation. We do not recommend quaking aspen for desert or semi-desert sites. It sprouts vigorously, especially when one of many insect and disease ailments attacks the parent tree. Keeping trees healthy is the best defense, but this is much easier in a mountain environment. Planting on a north-facing exposure, using a soil amended with plenty of organic matter, and using a thick organic mulch can improve success in the foothills. Targeting the application of water also helps control sprouting—the over-watered lawn is usually the first area to turn into a sprout forest. Appropriately placed, aspen is a beautiful tree that looks great planted with white fir and Rocky Mountain juniper.

*Special Features:* This is the tree *par excellence* for golden fall color; the contrast of shimmering golden leaves with creamy white bark and black branches is truly stunning.

White Fir  
*(Abies concolor)*

White fir is a beautiful evergreen tree of the intermountain region, and it deserves much wider use. It has a regular, conical shape when young but develops a more rounded crown with age. The blue-green, flattened needles are curved upward from the twigs, giving the foliage a soft look and feel. Metallic red male cones and large, cylindrical, pale green to purplish female cones add interest on older trees. White fir grows well in a range of soil types, but will grow more quickly in a silt or loam soil. It looks great planted with Rocky Mountain and bigtooth maples, river birch, and aspen, and also makes a pretty backdrop for flowering shrubs such as mallowleaf ninebark and mountain lilac.

*Special Features:* White fir has a root system that is both deep and spreading, making it more drought hardy than many more widely used conifers and also less subject to wind throw in the sometimes violent summer storms that characterize our region.
Ponderosa Pine

*(Pinus ponderosa)*

This majestic tree is common throughout the West, but it is often overlooked for landscape use. It features deeply plated red and yellow bark, long, shining needles, and a predictable, upright growth form. It is a large tree, but correctly placed, it can be a great shade tree, much better than most conifers. Because it has a natural tendency to self-prune as it gets taller, it looks quite natural when limbed up. This makes it easy to create a shady living space beneath its canopy, with soft, springy pinestraw for a floor. Ponderosa pine is broadly adapted and not difficult to grow. It is a natural companion for understory species like Indian ricegrass, little bluestem, and sulfurlower buckwheat. It also combines well with fernbush, mountain lilac, and alderleaf mountain mahogany.

**Special Features:** One of the most attractive things about ponderosa pine is its smell. It has a fresh, piney scent even from a distance. But if you get close enough to stick your nose in the bark fissures, you will be rewarded with a spicy vanilla fragrance.
## Table of Perennial Plants
Ranged by Water Zone and Height

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Scientific Name</th>
<th>Common Name</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Ht.</th>
<th>Crn.</th>
<th>Water</th>
<th>Light</th>
<th>Drain</th>
<th>OM</th>
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<tr>
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<td>sun</td>
<td>part</td>
<td>high</td>
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</table>

* Plants spread and form bigger patches.

Ht. = height in feet
Crn = crown diameter in feet
Water = water zone: min (minimal), low, med (medium), high
Light = light requirement: sun, part (partial shade), shd (full shade)
Drain = drainage: yes (exceptionally good drainage needed)
OM = organic matter: low (shuns organic matter), high (prefers organic matter)
## Table of Woody Plants (Trees, Shrubs, and Subshrubs)
### Ranked by Water Zone and Height.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Scientific Name</th>
<th>Common Name</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Ht.</th>
<th>Crn.</th>
<th>Water</th>
<th>Light</th>
<th>Drain</th>
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<td>Datil Yucca</td>
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<td>sun/part</td>
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<td>204</td>
<td>Philadelphus microphyllus</td>
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<td>Saxifragaceae</td>
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<td>Physocarpus malvaceus</td>
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<td>Squaw Apple</td>
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<td>sun</td>
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<td>Cercocarpus montanus</td>
<td>Alderleaf Mountain Mahogany</td>
<td>Rosaceae</td>
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<td>Amelanchier utahensis</td>
<td>Utah Serviceberry</td>
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<td>Forestiera pubescens</td>
<td>New Mexico Privet</td>
<td>Oleaceae</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>sun</td>
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<td>207</td>
<td>Fraxinus anomala</td>
<td>Singleleaf Ash</td>
<td>Oleaceae</td>
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<td>sun</td>
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<td>208</td>
<td>Cercocarpus leditius</td>
<td>Currleaf Mountain Mahogany</td>
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<td>sun</td>
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<td>208</td>
<td>Clematis ligusticifolia</td>
<td>Western Virgin's Bower</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>sun</td>
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<td>Juniperus scopulorum</td>
<td>Rocky Mountain Juniper</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>med</td>
<td>sun/part</td>
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<td>Pinus edulis</td>
<td>Pinyon Pine</td>
<td>Pinaceae</td>
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<td>Quercus gambelii</td>
<td>Gambel Oak</td>
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<td>Celtis laevigata reticulata</td>
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<td>sun/part</td>
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<td>Acer grandidentatum</td>
<td>Bigtooth Maple</td>
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<td>sun/part</td>
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<td>Juniperus communis</td>
<td>Common Juniper</td>
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<td>part/shd</td>
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<td>Ribes aureum</td>
<td>Golden Currant</td>
<td>Saxifragaceae</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>sun/part</td>
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<td>Humulus lupulus lupoides</td>
<td>American Hops</td>
<td>Moraceae</td>
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<td>high</td>
<td>sun/part</td>
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<td>Sorbus scopulina</td>
<td>Western Mountain Ash</td>
<td>Rosaceae</td>
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<td>sun/part</td>
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<td>Crataegus rivularis</td>
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<td>Prunus virginiana</td>
<td>Chokecherry</td>
<td>Rosaceae</td>
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<td>sun/part</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Pinus longaeva</td>
<td>Great Basin Brislecone Pine</td>
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<td>Acer glabrum</td>
<td>Rocky Mountain Maple</td>
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<td>sun/part</td>
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<td>Populus tremuloides</td>
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<tr>
<td>217</td>
<td>Abies concolor</td>
<td>White Fir</td>
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<td>high</td>
<td>sun</td>
<td>yes low</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Plants spread and form bigger patches.

Light = light requirement: sun, part (partial shade), shd (full shade)

Drain = drainage: yes (exceptionally good drainage needed)

OM=organic matter: low (shuns organic matter), high (prefers organic matter)
Plant Names Index

Scientific and common names we use in the Plant Palette are shown in this index in **bold**. Scientific names are shown in *italics*. We refer to the USDA Plants Database (plants.usda.gov) as our authority for current scientific names. Because of recent advances in plant taxonomy, quite a few names have changed, and the new names may be unfamiliar to many people. We have also included the old, familiar scientific names for several of these plants, along with their modern versions. Not all of the old names are simple synonyms for the new names—sometimes the story is more complex. Similarly, many plants have multiple common names—the name we prefer to use is listed in bold, but other names are listed as well, along with the equivalent name used here.

*Abies concolor* ........................................... 217
*Acer glabrum* ........................................... 216
*Acer grandidentatum* ............................... 211
*Achnatherum hymenoides* ......................... 170
*Achnatherum speciosum* ....................... 211
*Agropyron spicatum* =
  *Pseudoroegneria spicata* .................. 179
*Alderleaf Mountain Mahogany* .............. 206
*Alkali Sacaton Grass* ......................... 181
*Amelanchier utahensis* ......................... 206
*American Hops* ................................... 213
*American Mountain Ash* =
  *Western Mountain Ash* ................. 214
*Andropogon scoparius* =
  *Schizachyrium scoparium* ............... 186
*Antennaria microphylla* ..............................
  *Antennaria rosea* ................................. 182
*Antennaria rosea* ................................... 182
*Apache Plume* .................................... 200
*Aquilegia coerulea* ................................ 190
*Aquilegia formosa* ................................ 190
*Artemisia filifolia* ................................ 197
*Artemisia tridentata* ......................... 198
*Asclepias tuberosa* ............................. 185
*Aspen = Quaking Aspen* .................. 217
*Aspen Fleabane = Showy Daisy* .......... 191
*Astragalus utahensis* ......................... 173
*Atriplex confertifolia* .................... 194
*Banana Yucca = Datil Yucca* ............ 196
*Barbey's Larkspur =
  *Tall Larkspur* .................................. 193
*Basin Wildrye* ................................... 187
*Betula fontinalis* =
  *Betula occidentalis* ...................... 216
*Big Sagebrush* .................................. 198
*Big Sandwort = Showy Sandwort* .... 169
*Bigtooth Maple* .................................. 211
*Birchleaf Mountain Mahogany* =
  *Alderleaf Mountain Mahogany* ........ 206
*Blanketflower = Hopi Blanketflower* ..... 177
*Blooming Sally* .................................. 192
*Blue Columbine = Rocky Mountain
  Columbine* ....................................... 190
*Blue Flax = Lewis Flax* ..................... 178
*Blue Grama* ........................................ 175
*Bluebunch Wheatgrass* ...................... 179
*Boreal Sweetvetch* =
  *Utah Sweetvetch* .............................. 176
*Bouteloua gracilis* ............................. 175
*Bridges Penstemon* ............................. 179
*Brigham Tea = Green Mormon Tea* .... 198
*Bristlecone Pine* =
  *Great Basin Bristlecone Pine* .......... 215
*Bush Penstemon* .................................. 203
*Butterflyweed = Butterfly Milkweed* .... 185
*Butterfly Milkweed* ......................... 185
*Butterfly Milkweed = Butterfly Milkweed* .... 185
*Calystogus lavandulifolius* ............. 184
*Canyon Maple = Bigtooth Maple* ........... 211
Castilleja angustifolia var. dubia...167
Castilleja chromosa =
Castilleja angustifolia var. dubia...167
Ceanothus martini...203
Celtis douglasii =
  Celtis laevigata var. reticulata ...210
Celtis laevigata var. reticulata ...210
Celtis reticulata = Celtis laevigata var. reticulata...210
Ceratoides lanata =
  Krascheninnikovia lanata...194
Cercocarpus intricatus...199
Cercocarpus ledifolius...208
Cercocarpus montanus...206
Chamaebatiaria millefolium...200
Chamerion angustifolium...192
Chamisa = Rubber Rabbitbrush...199
Chokecherry...215
Chrysothamnus nauseosus =
  Ericameria nauseosa...199
Clematis ligusticifolia...208
Cliffrose...201
Cloverhead Horsemint =
  Little Beebalm...188
Colorado Blue Columbine =
  Rocky Mountain Columbine...190
Colorado Columbine =
  Rocky Mountain Columbine...190
Colorado Four O’Clock =
  Desert Four O’Clock...177
Colorado Pinyon = Pinyon Pine...209
Common Hops = American Hops...213
Common Juniper...212
Common Paintbrush =
  Indian Paintbrush...167
Common Sagebrush = Big Sagebrush...198
Concolor Fir = White Fir...217
Corymb Buckwheat =
  Lacy Buckwheatbrush...195
Corzania mexicana =
  Purshia stansburiana...201
Corzania stansburiiana =
  Purshia stansburiana...201
Coyote Bush = New Mexico Privet...207
Crataegus douglasii =
  Crataegus ricularis...214
Crataegus ricularis...214
Crazypea = Purple Crazypea...168
Creeping Barberry =
  Creeping Oregon Grape...202
Creeping Mahonia =
  Creeping Oregon Grape...202
Crispleaf Buckwheat =
  Lacy Buckwheatbrush...195
Curleaf Mountain Mahogany...208
Cushion Buckwheat =
  Silver Buckwheat...167
Cushion Globemallow...166
Datil Yucca...196
Delphinium barbeyi = Delphinium barbeyi...193
Delphinium occidentale = Delphinium barbeyi...193
Desert Four O’Clock...177
Desert Needlegrass...171
Desert Olive = New Mexico Privet...207
Desert Paintbrush =
  Indian Paintbrush...167
Desert Princesplume =
  Prince’s Plume...171
Desert Sage...195
Desert Sweet = Fernbush...200
Dorr Sage = Desert Sage...195
Douglas Hawthorn = River Hawthorn...214
Duncecap Larkspur = Tall Larkspur...193
Dusty Beardtongue =
  Dusty Penstemon...186
Dusty Penstemon...186
Dwarf Goldenstem...173
Dwarf Goldenbush...173
Dwarf Mountain Mahogany =
  Littleleaf Mountain Mahogany...199
Dwarf Yucca...196
Eaton Penstemon =
  Firecracker Penstemon...180
Elymus cinereus = Leymus cinereus...187
Elymus spicatus =
  Pseudoroegneria spicata...179
Ephedra viridis...198
Epilobium angustifolium =
  Chamerion angustifolium...192
Epilobium canum...189
Ericameria nauseosa...199
Eriogonum argentinatus...175
Eriogonum flagellaris...183
Eriogonum speciosum...191
Eriogonum aureum =
  Eriogonum corymbosum...195
Eriogonum brevicaule...174
Eriogonum corymbosum...195
Eriogonum ovalifolium...167
Eriogonum umbellatum...........................................174
Eriotheca lanata ........................................179
Krascheninnikovia lanata ...........................................194
Eyelash Grass = Blue Grama ...........................................175
Fallugia paradoxa........................................200
Fendler Bluegrass =
Shining Muffongrass ........................................176
Fernbush........................................................................200
Firechalice....................................................................189
Firecracker Penstemon ...........................................180
Fireweed = Blooming Sally ...........................................192
Flaxleaf Penstemon.....................................................184

Forestiera neomexicana =
Forestiera pubescens .............................................207
Forestiera pubescens .............................................207

Fragrant Evening Primrose ....................................166
Fragrant Sumac = Oakleaf Sumac ..................................204

Fraxinus anomala ..................................................207
Fremont Mahonia =
Fremont Barberry ..................................................201
Fremont Barberry ..................................................201
Fremont Buckwheat =
Lacy Buckwheatbrush ...........................................195

Gaillardia pinnatifida .............................................177
Gambel Oak ..................................................................210
Garrett's Firechalice = Firechalice ............................................189

Geranium viscosissimum ............................................192
Geum triflorum ...........................................................188

Giant Wildrye = Basin Wildrye ....................................187
Gin Juniper = Common Juniper ......................................212
Golden Currant .............................................................213
Goldenweed = Dwarf Goldenbush ....................................173
Gooseberryleaf Globemallow ........................................170

Great Basin Bristlecone Pine ..........................................215
Great Basin Wildrye = Basin Wildrye ....................................187
Green Ephedra = Green Mormon Tea ..................................198
Green Mormon Tea .....................................................198
Greene's Mountain Ash =
Western Mountain Ash ..........................................214

Gumbo Lily =
Fragrant Evening Primrose ....................................166
Handkerchief Plant =
Fragrant Evening Primrose ....................................166

Haplopappus acaulis =
Stenotus acaulis ....................................................173
Harriman's Yucca = Dwarf Yucca .....................................196
Hawthorn = River Hawthorn ..........................................214

Hedysarum boreale ....................................................176
Helenium hoopesii =
Hymenoxys hoopesii ..................................................191

Hops = American Hops ..................................................213
Hummingbird Flower = Firechalice ...................................189
Hummingbird Trumpet = Firechalice ...................................189

Humulus americanus =
Humulus lupulus var. lupuloides ...........................................213
Humulus lupulus var. lupuloides ...........................................213
Hymenoxys acaulis =
Tetranereis acaulis .....................................................168
Hymenoxys hoopesii ....................................................191

Iliamna rivicularis.........................................................187
Indian Paintbrush .......................................................167
Indian Ricegrass .........................................................170
Jones Globemallow =
Cushion Globemallow ....................................................166

Juniperus communis ...................................................212
Juniperus scopulorum....................................................209
Krascheninnikovia lanata .............................................194

Lacy Buckwheatbrush ...................................................195
Lambert Locoweed =
Purple Crazypea .........................................................168
Lavender Evening Primrose =
Lavenderleaf Sundrops ....................................................184

Lavenderleaf Sundrops ....................................................184
Leo Penstemon .........................................................183
Leonard Penstemon =
Leo Penstemon .........................................................183
Leonard's Beardtongue =
Leo Penstemon .........................................................183

Lewis Currant = Golden Currant .......................................213
Lewis Flax .................................................................178
Leymus cinereus ...........................................................187
Linum lewisii ...............................................................178
Linum perenne var. lewisii ................................................178

Lithospermum multiflorum ............................................189
Little Beebalm .............................................................188
Little Bluestem ............................................................186
Littlecup Beardtongue =
Littlecup Penstemon .....................................................180

Littlecup Penstemon .....................................................180
Littleleaf Mockorange ..................................................204
Littleleaf Mountain Mahogany .......................................199

Mahonia fremontii .......................................................201

Mahonia repens ...........................................................202
Mallow Ninebark =
Mallowleaf Ninebark ....................................................205

Manyflowered Stoneseed =
Mountain Puccoon .....................................................189
Landscaping on the New Frontier

Maple Mallow
Martin Ceanothus =
Martin Mountain Lilac
Martin Mountain Lilac
Mat Penstemon
Meadow Fire
Mexican Tea = Green Mormon Tea
Mirabilis multiflora
Mojave Sandwort = Showy Sandwort
Monardella odoratissima
Morning Lily = Fragrant Evening
Mountain Ash =
Western Mountain Ash
Mountain Beebalm = Little Beebalm
Mountain Hollyhock = Maple Mallow
Mountain Lover
Mountain Monardella =
Little Beebalm
Mountain Puceoon
Mountain Snowberry
Mountain Sugar Maple =
Bigtooth Maple
Muttongrass = Shining Muttongrass
Navajita = Blue Grama
Netleaf Hackberry
New Mexico Privet
Ninebark = Mallowleaf Ninebark
Northern Sweetvetch =
Utah Sweetvetch
Oakleaf Sumac
Oenothera caespitosa
Old Man Sagebrush =
Sand Sagebrush
Old Man’s Beard = Prairie Smoke
Old Man’s Whiskers = Prairie Smoke
Orange Milkweed =
Butterfly Milkweed
Orange Sneezeweed = Meadow Fire
Oregon Boxleaf = Mountain Lover
Oregon Fleabane = Showy Daisy
Oryzopsis hymenoides =
Achnatherum hymenoides
Owls’ Claws = Meadow Fire
Oxytropis lamberti
Pachystima myrsinites
Palmer Penstemon
Paxystima myrsinites =
Pachystima myrsinites
Penstemon caespitosus
Penstemon comarrhenus
Penstemon cyananthus
Penstemon eatonii
Penstemon fruticosus
Penstemon leonardii
Penstemon linarioides
Penstemon palmeri
Penstemon rostriflorus
Penstemon sepalus
Penstemon utahensis
Penstemon whippleanus
Peraphyllum ramosissimum
Philadelphus microphyllus
Physocarpus malvaceus
Pinus aristata = Pinus longaeva
Pinus edulis
Pinus longaeva
Pinus ponderosa
Pinyon Pine
Pleurisy Root = Butterfly Milkweed
Poa fendleriana
Ponderosa Pine
Populus tremuloides
Prairie Duster = Prairie Smoke
Prairie Flax = Lewis Flax
Prairie Smoke
Pretty Daisy = Showy Daisy
Pretty Stoneseed =
Mountain Puceoon
Prince’s Plume
Provo Canyon Penstemon =
Littlecup Penstemon
Prunus virginiana
Peraphyllum ramosissimum
Pseudoroegneria spicata
Pucered Sundrops =
Lavenderleaf Sundrops
Purple Avens = Prairie Smoke
Purple Crazypea
Purple Locoweed = Purple Crazypea
Purple Oxytrope = Purple Crazypea
Purple Sage = Desert Sage
Purshia mexicana =
Purshia stansburiana
Purshia stansburiana
Pussytoes = Rosy Pussytoes
Quakey = Quaking Aspen
Quaking Aspen
Quercus gambelii
Red Dome Blanketflower =
Hopi Blanketflower
\textit{Rhus aromatica} var. \textit{trilobata} =
\textit{Rhus trilobata} ........................................204
\textit{Rhus trilobata} ........................................204
\textit{Ribes aureum} ........................................213
\textit{Ricegrass} = \textit{Indian Ricegrass} ...........170
\textit{River Birch} = \textit{Western Water Birch} ........216
\textit{River Hawthorn} ........................................214
\textit{Rock Mountain Ash} =
\textit{Western Mountain Ash} ..........................214
\textit{Rocky Mountain Columbine} ....................190
\textit{Rocky Mountain Juniper} ................................209
\textit{Rocky Mountain Maple} ................................216
\textit{Rocky Mountain White Oak} =
\textit{Gambel Oak} ........................................210
\textit{Rosebay Willowherb} =
\textit{Blooming Sally} .....................................192
\textit{Rosy Pussytoes} .......................................182
\textit{Rubber Rabbitbrush} ................................199
\textit{Sacaton Grass} = \textit{Alkali Sacaton Grass} ...181
\textit{Sagebrush} = \textit{Big Sagebrush} ....................198
\textit{Salvia dorrii} .............................................195
\textit{Sand Sagebrush} .......................................197
\textit{Scarlet Bugler Penstemon} =
\textit{Flaxleaf Penstemon} ..................................180
\textit{Seeded Beardtongue} =
\textit{Palmer Penstemon} .....................................172
\textit{Schisachyrium scoparium} ..........................186
\textit{Scrub Oak} = \textit{Gambel Oak} .........................210
\textit{Shadscale} ...............................................194
\textit{Shadscale Saltbush} = \textit{Shadscale} .............194
\textit{Shining Muttongrass} ................................176
\textit{Shortstem Buckwheat} ................................174
\textit{Showy Daisy} ............................................191
\textit{Showy Four O’Clock} =
\textit{Desert Four O’Clock} .................................177
\textit{Showy Sandwort} .........................................169
\textit{Shrubby Penstemon} ...................................203
\textit{Shrubby Sandwort} =
\textit{Showy Sandwort} .........................................169
\textit{Siler Bugle} =
\textit{Flaxleaf Penstemon} ..................................184
\textit{Silver Buckwheat} ......................................167
\textit{Silver Daisy} ............................................175
\textit{Silver Fleabane} = \textit{Silver Daisy} .............175
\textit{Singleleaf Ash} ...........................................207
\textit{Skunkbush Sumac} = \textit{Oakleaf Sumac} ..........204
\textit{Sorbus scopulina} .......................................214
\textit{Southwestern Stoneseed} =
\textit{Mountain Puceoon} ....................................189
\textit{Sphaeralcea caespitosa} ..............................166
\textit{Sphaeralcea grossulariifolia} ......................170
\textit{Sporobolus airoides} ..................................181
\textit{Squaw Apple} ...........................................205
\textit{Squawbush} = \textit{Oakleaf Sumac} ..................204
\textit{Stanleya pinnata} .......................................171
\textit{Stansbury Cliffrose} = \textit{Cliffrose} .............201
\textit{Stemless Four-nerve Daisy} =
\textit{Sundancer Daisy} .......................................168
\textit{Stemless Goldenweed} =
\textit{Dwarf Goldenbush} ...................................173
\textit{Stemless Mock Goldenweed} =
\textit{Dwarf Goldenbush} ...................................173
\textit{Stemless Woollybase} =
\textit{Sundancer Daisy} .......................................168
\textit{Stenotus acaulis} .......................................173
\textit{Sticky Geranium} .......................................192
\textit{Sticky Purple Geranium} =
\textit{Sticky Geranium} .......................................192
\textit{Stinking Horsemint} = \textit{Little Beebalm} ....188
\textit{Stipa hymenoides} =
\textit{Achnatherum hymenoides} .........................170
\textit{Stipa speciosa} =
\textit{Achnatherum speciosum} ..............................171
\textit{Streambank Wild Hollyhock} =
\textit{Maple Mallow} ..........................................187
\textit{Stretchberrry} = \textit{New Mexico Privet} ........207
\textit{Subalpine Larkspur} = \textit{Tall Larkspur} .......193
\textit{Sulfur Buckwheat} =
\textit{Sulfurflower Buckwheat} .........................174
\textit{Sulfurflower Buckwheat} .........................174
\textit{Sundancer Daisy} .......................................168
\textit{Sundrops} = \textit{Lavenderleaf Sundrops} ...........184
\textit{Symphoricarpos oreophilus} .......................212
\textit{Tall Larkspur} ..........................................193
\textit{Tetranurus acaulis} ....................................168
\textit{Threeflower Avens} = \textit{Prairie Smoke} .......188
\textit{Threeleaf Sumac} = \textit{Oakleaf Sumac} ..........204
\textit{Toadflax Penstemon} =
\textit{Flaxleaf Penstemon} ..................................184
\textit{Trailing Daisy} ..........................................183
\textit{Trailing Fleabane} = \textit{Trailing Daisy} .........183
\textit{Trembling Fleabane} = \textit{Quaking Aspen} .......217
\textit{True Mountain Mahogany} =
\textit{Alderleaf Mountain Mahogany} .............206
\textit{Tufted Evening Primrose} =
\textit{Fragrant Evening Primrose} .......................166
\textit{Tufted Globemallow} =
\textit{Cushion Globemallow} .............................166
\textit{Two-needle Pinyon Pine} =
\textit{Pinyon Pine} .............................................209
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plant Name</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Utah Holly = Fremont Barberry</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah Ladyfinger Milkvetch</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah Milkvetch =</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah Ladyfinger Milkvetch</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah Mountain Lilac =</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Mountain Lilac</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah Penstemon</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah Serviceberry</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah Sweetvetch</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah White Fir = White Fir</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virgin's Bower =</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Virgin's Bower</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanderer Daisy = Trailing Daisy</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wasatche Beardtongue =</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wasatch Penstemon</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wasatch Penstemon</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Birch = Western Water Birch</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wavyleaf Indian Paintbrush =</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Paintbrush</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Columbine</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Larkspur = Tall Larkspur</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Mountain Ash</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Virgin's Bower</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Water Birch</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western White Clematis =</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Virgin's Bower</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Yellow Pine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ponderosa Pine</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whipple Penstemon</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Columbine =</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rocky Mountain Columbine</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Fir</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Virgin's Bower</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitesage = Winterfat</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White-tufted Evening Primrose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fragrant Evening Primrose</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wild Crab Apple = Squaw Apple</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wild Geranium = Sticky Geranium</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wild Hollyhock = Maple Mallow</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wild Snapdragon = Palmer Penstemon</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winterfat</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow Pine = Ponderosa Pine</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yucca baccata</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yucca harrimaniae</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zaeaton = Alkali Sacaton Grass</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zauschneria californica =</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilobium canum</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zauschneria garrettii =</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilobium canum</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zauschneria latifolia =</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilobium canum</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>