



EL PASO COUNTY
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

Native Plants for Colorado

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Definition of Native Plant

(Federal Native Plant Conservation Committee)

A plant species: that occurs naturally in a particular region, state, ecosystem, and habitat without direct or indirect human actions, since advent of European Colonists in North America

Ecological/evolutionary definition:

A plant that has evolved in a given place over a period of time sufficient to develop complex and essential relationships with the physical environment and other organisms in a given ecological community- Doug Tallamy

Butterfly gardens

Plant in large masses

Provide a sunny, protected spot

Provide shallow water/mud for “puddling”

Don’t use insecticides

Butterflies are specialized – they need specific host plants to provide food for caterpillars – caterpillars can’t eat just any plant

Caterpillars= future butterflies/Cater to the caterpillars

Bird gardens

Water – bird baths/fountains

Shelter – trees (especially evergreens), bird boxes

Food: nuts, seeds, berries, bird feeders

Non-native plants miss critical element: insects

Birds need insects to fledge chicks

Even if adults are seed/nut/fruit eaters, 96% of terrestrial birds require insects to raise young

Chickadee study

6,000 to 9,000 caterpillars are required to rear one clutch of chickadees.

Doug Tallamy, Professor, University Delaware, author of Bringing Nature Home

90% of herbivorous insects require specific host plants – can’t eat unfamiliar plants

500 species of caterpillars on some natives vs none/a few on non-natives (Tallamy)

Tallamy’s research has shown that alien ornamentals support 29 times less biodiversity than do native ornamentals.

It is not necessary to have an “all or nothing” garden – natives and non-natives can grow well together, and the natives will still provide benefit

Lawn Alternatives

Consider converting some or all of your lawn to flowering plants (especially natives)

Soil Preparation

Native plants do not necessarily require amended soils.

If soils are very compacted, loosen 1-2 feet deep.

If soil very sandy/gravelly/scraped off, adding organic matter to can improve tilth/nutrient holding.

What about clay soils?

Either stick with natives that tolerate clay, *or*

Build berms or raised beds 8 - 24" high to create a "well-drained soil" out of clay.

Recipe for amending clay soils:

To 70% clay soils, add:10% wood-based compost],20% small aggregate or crusher fines and Incorporate well.-Recipe courtesy Kelly Grummons, Timberline Gardens

Contouring your land can help:

- Save water by planting in depressions (*rain gardens*)
- Drain clay soils *by* planting on the berm

Use pea gravel mulch or plant closely

Watering

Water even drought resistant native plants until they are established.

Need to develop root systems; are vulnerable to drying out.

Water when soil is dry to a depth of 2-3"

Wean plants gradually to levels of irrigation that they will receive in future.

After establishment, water deeply but infrequently to help plants look best during a drought.

Fertilizing

Fertilizer is often unnecessary, because native plants are adapted to lean soils.

Overfertilizing can lead to weeds and weak overgrown plants.

In some cases, a small amount of fertilizer be helpful

Look for slow release fertilizer with higher phosphorous, and lower nitrogen, or at least a fully balanced one. n-P-K or N-P-K

Maintenance (same as any garden)

Prune:

to improve shape

increase vigor (rejuvenation pruning)

to remove injured, diseased, or insect-infested plant material

To cut back old perennials in the spring

To deadhead or not to deadhead?

Deadheading rarely encourages repeat bloom with natives.

Consider leaving seed heads on plants through spring for winter interest, and for birds/caterpillars and for reseeding of short-lived perennials.

Native shrubs

Serviceberry

Amelanchier alnifolia

Kinnickinnick

Arctostaphylos uva-ursi

Western sage

Artemisia tridentata

Curl leaf mountain mahogany *Cercocarpus ledifolius*

Rabbitbrush

Chrysothamnus nauseosus

Apache plume

Fallugia paradoxa

Rock spray

Holodiscus dumosus

Creeping mahonia

Mahonia repens

American plum

Prunus americana

Shrubby cinquefoil

Potentilla floribunda/Pentaphylloides fruticosa

Sandcherry

Prunus besseyi

Chokecherry

Prunus (Padus) virginiana

Wafer-ash/Hop Tree

Ptelea trifoliata

Golden currant

Ribes aureum

Boulder raspberry

Rubus/Oreobatus deliciosus

Fernbush (regional native)

Chamaebatiaria millefolium.

Cheyenne Mock-orange (regional native)

Philadelphus lewisii

Native herbaceous perennials

Pearly everlasting

Anaphalis margaritacea

Colorado columbine

Aquilegia caerulea

Golden columbine

Aquilegia chrysantha

Sages

Artemisia frigida and ludoviciana

Chocolate flower
Berlandiera lyrata
Poppy Mallow
Callirhoe involucrata
Harebells
Campanula rotundifolia
Showy daisy
Erigeron speciosus
Sulphur flower
Eriogonum umbellatum
Blanketflower
Gaillardia aristata
Wild Geraniums
Geranium viscosissimum and *caespitosum*
Prairie smoke
Geum/Erythrocoma triflorum
Scarlet gilia/Fairy trumpet
Ipomopsis aggregata

Bee balm
Monarda fistulosa
White tufted evening primrose
Oenothera caespitosa
Pasque flower
Pulsatilla patens
Spring blooming Penstemons
Rocky Mountain penstemon
Penstemon strictus

Prairie coneflower
Ratibida columnifera
Black eyed Susan
Rudbeckia hirta
Little bluestem grass
Schizachyrium scoparium
Golden banner
Thermopsis divaricarpa

Upcoming classes:

Low maintenance low water landscaping with native plants IN PERSON May 14 9-12

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/low-maintenance-low-water-landscaping-with-native-plants-tickets-314725982887?aff=ebdsoporgprofile>

Resources:

- [Native Grasses for Colorado Landscapes \(8/12\)](#)
 - **Native Plant Guides**
 - [Front Range \(Print Version\)](#)
 - [Prairie \(Print Version\)](#)
 - [Southeast \(Print Version\)](#)
 - [Native Plant Reference List](#)
 - [Native Plant Vendors](#)
 - [Native Herbaceous Perennials for Colorado Landscapes](#)
 - [Native Trees for Colorado Landscapes](#)
 - [Native Shrubs for Colorado Landscapes](#)
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Butterfly fact sheet:

<https://extension.colostate.edu/topic-areas/insects/attracting-butterflies-to-the-garden-5-504-2/#:~:text=Make%20a%20yard%20more%20attractive,common%20along%20the%20Front%20Range.>