



Rocky Mountain Penstemon (*Penstemon strictus*) stands about 28" tall with stalks holding purple flowers. The four-foot-tall golden beard Penstemon (*Penstemon barbatus*) sports stalks of small, red flowers. The one- to two-foot-tall common yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) are topped with clusters of tiny white flowers.

A Wildflower Seed Extravaganza

By Cindy Murray

Once again volunteers have been busily harvesting and packing local wildflower seeds for you, the residents of Coconino County, to beautify your landscapes. And, since wildflowers are best sown in fall or winter, this opportunity couldn't have come at a better time! Simply come to the Grow Flagstaff! seed library at the Coconino County Extension Office at 2340 N. 3rd Street in Flagstaff and choose the varieties of flowers that suit your fancy. Currently, we have no limit to the number of seed packets you may take, but please leave some for the next gardeners who come along.

Plant your seeds now or wait until immediately before a snow storm. The forthcoming cold season will satisfy the cold stratification (treatment) some seeds require. Be sure your soil is loose and weed-free, and mix your seeds with some sand. You won't need to water your seeds until late spring or summer. Some folks wait for the monsoon to commence, but that could be a tad risky. Be patient--some seeds may take several seasons to be coaxed out of their dormancy. Here's a sampling of our wildflower seeds:

Upright prairie coneflower (*Ratibida columnaris*), also called Mexican hat, displays flowers with column-shaped, purple-brown centers encircled by drooping yellow or red petals. It is a drought-hardy perennial that, in the wild, grows along roadsides and in forest clearings. When my husband and I first moved here, one section of our property was covered with weeds. After removing the weeds, we sowed various native flower seeds there. Upright prairie coneflowers are now intermingled with other wildflowers, making a lovely summer tableau in our once weed-laden plot.

Purple tansy asters of the *Machaeranthera* and *Dieteria* genres are highly adaptable annuals or perennials finding homes in disturbed soils, roadsides, and fields, as well as streambanks and washes in diverse elevations. Potentially reaching heights of twenty inches, tansy asters

garb themselves in profusions of purple daisy-like flowers. There are many species and varieties of tansy aster in Arizona. Those in our seed library tend to be perennials, which spontaneously and generously reseed themselves in sun-drenched, well-draining, weed free soils.

A shrub-like perennial found naturally in riparian conifer forests and mountain meadows, scarlet cinquefoil (*Potentilla therberi*), bears rich green, palmate leaves and small rose-like flowers. I had originally planted two specimens: one generating scarlet flowers, the other bearing deep-red ones in our partially-shaded rock garden near the house, which receives a moderate amount of water. Some insects or animals must have inadvertently dispersed their seeds, because we now have several small thickets of scarlet potentilla, of both colors, growing along the road fronting our property. These little gems are long-lived, cold tolerant to USDA hardiness zone five, and fairly resistant to drought. They attract honey bees as well as native pollinators.

I love to stroll out to the edge of my street on warm summer evenings just as the sun sets. Here, I marvel at white-lined sphinx moths alighting upon sprightly yellow Hooker's evening primrose (*Oenothera hookeri*) flowers for a quick proboscis-full sip of sweet nectar.

Penstemons are sun-loving perennials adorned with hummingbird-luring, asymmetrical, tubular flowers. Rocky Mountain penstemon (*Penstemon strictus*) stands about 28" with stalks holding purple flowers. The four-foot-tall, golden-beard penstemon (*Penstemon barbatus*), sports stalks of small red flowers.

Scarlet Gilia or skyrocket (*Ipomopsis aggregata*) resemble red penstemons, but the blossom is symmetrical and flecked with yellow. It is a biennial, growing a low rosette of gray-green fernlike leaves (I liken the shape of the leaves to snowflakes) the first summer, then blooming the next. They require full sun and good drainage.

The one- to two-foot-tall upright branches of common yarrow, (*Achillea millefolium*) are topped with flat clusters of tiny white flowers. This perennial's finely dissected leaves are distinctively fernlike and aromatic.

In an expansive field behind our home, Rocky Mountain bee plants (*Cleome serrulata*), grow to four feet tall in a single season! Each raceme (flower stem) is densely packed with miniscule, tubular, pink-purple flowers.

The Grow Flagstaff! Seed Library offers more than wildflower seeds alone. This home-grown treasure is also fully stocked with a variety of both vegetable seeds and cultivated flower seeds. Let's all take advantage of this wonderful opportunity.

