



By Cindy Murray

You finished harvesting your summer and fall vegetables and fruit (how about them apples!) weeks ago. And your perennials, as well as shrubs, are tucked away in their winter beds. Afraid your green thumb will fade to a sickly brown over the dreary winter months? No worries! Now is a choice time to not only plan your wildflower garden but also sow the seeds! Wildflower seeds native to our region fare quite well through our harsh winters. Some, like native penstemons, even require a cold spell. And you're in luck—the Grow Flagstaff! Seed Library at the Coconino Cooperative Extension office has stocked up on native, drought-tolerant, pollinator-pleasing wildflower seeds that are yours for the taking.

This year all ten seed varieties were gleaned by little ol' me on my property only weeks ago. Here is a description of each, in order of what I deem to be easiest to grow to the most difficult.

Skyrocket or scarlet gilia (*Ipomopsis aggregata*) will be so happy to grow for you, and it will gift you year after year by growing in unexpected spots. It is a biennial, growing a rosette of fernlike leaves the first summer, then sending up a three-to-four-foot stalk decked with small, tubular, yellow-flecked, scarlet flowers the second year.

Come mid-August my back acre and adjoining land transforms into a sea of golden crownbeard (*Verbesina encelioides*) dotted with Rocky Mountain bee plant (*Cleome serrulata*). At first, you may think the gold ones are sunflowers (*Helianthus spp.*), but those sport a maroon-brown center (disk flowers), whereas golden crownbeards sport a golden center. Golden crownbeard is an annual attaining a height of about three to four feet.

Occasionally, Rocky Mountain bee plant pops up in giant four-foot-tall stands before the crownbeards mature and take over. Each raceme (flower cluster) is densely packed with minuscule, tubular flowers. A stand of Rocky Mountain bee plant creates a gorgeous hazy spectacle of purple-pink.

Hooker's evening primrose (*Oenothera elata*) is a biennial, starting life as a rosette of lance-shaped leaves. During its second year, it sends forth a three-to-six-foot stalk adorning yellow, three-inch flowers with four petals from dusk until dawn.

A mid to late season bloomer, purple aster (*Machaerantheria spp.*) creates a low mound of profusely blooming, daisy-like blooms.

Rabbitbrush (*Ericameria nauseosus*) is a mid-size shrub showing off a blaze of densely packed gold, feathery blossoms in late summer and early fall. They populate many of Northern Arizona's open grasslands.

Content with sunny or shady sites alike, red potentilla or cinquefoil (*Potentilla thurberi*) is a low-growing shrub-like perennial bearing small, scarlet or deep-red, rose-like flowers.

For me, beardlip penstemon (*Penstemon barbatus*) is the easiest penstemon to grow. (Penstemons are perennials that happen to be my favorite wildflower.) All penstemons bear asymmetric flowers that have two upper petals protruding upward and two lower petals projecting downwards. Beardlips are festooned with vibrant red, small, tubular flowers and grow to four feet tall.

One of the most impressive early bloomers in our yard is the Rocky Mountain, or purple penstemon (*Penstemon strictus*). It boasts sprightly purple, medium-sized, tubular flowers on a one-to-three-foot stalk.

Common yarrow seeds are a bit tricky to sow because they require temperatures of 59-65°F and sunshine to germinate. Be sure not to sow seeds more than ¼" deep. For me, I never know when they will germinate—a few weeks to a few years. But with flat clusters of minuscule white flowers atop lacy fernlike leaves, they are absolutely worth the bother!

Plant your seeds now or wait until immediately before a snowstorm. The forthcoming cold season will satisfy the cold stratification (treatment) some seeds require, while a layer of snow will sink the seeds into the earth. Be certain to prepare your soil so it is loose and weed-free. You won't need to water your seeds until late spring or summer. Be patient—some seeds may take several seasons to be coaxed out of their dormancy.

Come choose your seeds at Grow Flagstaff! Seed Library at 2304 3rd St. Flagstaff, Arizona. Seeds will be available starting December 8 and through the winter. It's open Monday through Thursday 9:00-4:00.

The next Master Gardener class will be in-person starting on January 23, meeting on Tuesday afternoons from 1:00 to 4:30 in Flagstaff. For more information, go to: <https://extension.arizona.edu/coconino-master-gardener>.

Cindy Murray is a biologist and co-editor of Gardening Etcetera and has been a Coconino Master Gardener since 2010. She is married and has two amazing grown children and two grown grandchildren. Cindy enjoys photographing Arizona's great outdoors, especially sunsets, birds, and insects. She is a member of Arbor Day Foundation, Audubon Society, The Nature Conservancy, and The Cornell Lab of Ornithology.