

Native plants for year round interest

Irene Shonle, CSU Extension Gilpin County

Gardening with Natives in the Winter

Colorado has a long brown winter (especially at lower elevations).

A garden of natives looks good in winter when most cultivated gardens look homely and empty.

– Panayoti Kelaidis

Placement of winter garden: put winter interest plants where you will walk by them on way in or see them from a window, since you won't be outside as much

Planning your winter garden

Do you typically have snow? – Think sculptural and tall

Do you typically have no snow on the ground? Think textures and plants that keep their color and structure

Design for snowy sites

Consider using hardscapes/sculptures in addition to plants

Consider conifers

Many full-sized Colorado native conifers can bring winter interest (blue spruce, Douglas fir, Ponderosa pine, limber pine, bristlecone pine, etc.)

Small lot? Consider dwarfed varieties

Dwarf conifers at Denver Botanic Garden

There are many varieties of Rocky Mtn Juniper, some with narrow profiles

Red twig dogwood (*Cornus sericea*) looks great against the snow

Tall seed heads also provide interest (and free bird seed)

Wild rose (*Rosa woodsii*) has hips that last well into winter

Yuccas (*Yucca spp*) and Ephedra look great outlined in snow, or with no snow

Ideas for less snowy areas

Think of gardens touched by frost

Seed heads

Smooth sumac (*Rhus glabra*) seed heads

Ground Junipers (*Juniperus communis*) can provide low evergreen interest – there are many cultivars

Little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) keeps color most of the winter

Place rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus nauseosus*) where it catches low-angled winter light

Winterfat (*Krascheninnikovia lanata*) is also a great winter light-catcher

Non-coniferous low-growing evergreens like Kinnickinnick (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*) provide a glossy green in the winter and red berries

Creeping Mahonia (*Mahonia repens*)

Buckwheats provide great texture and often color

Wright's buckwheat (*Eriogonum wrightii*)

Sulfur flower (*Eriogonum umbellatum*)

*Prairie baby's breath (*Eriogonum effusum*) and *crisp-leaf buckwheat (*Eriogonum corymbosum*)

Pussytoes (*Antennaria spp*)

Spring

Placement: cluster spring plants by a spot to sit outside as soon as the weather warms

Put shrubs in the back, lower growing plants in the front

Many natives are slow to start

Using non-native bulbs mixed with native plants can be helpful – provides more early nectar and color, and they have similar growing needs.

Spring shrubs are early to bloom, and these are fragrant – put them behind a chair or near a window or door

American plum – *Prunus americana*

Golden currant – *Ribes aureum*

Serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*)

*Fremont's mahonia (*Mahonia fremontii*)

Creeping mahonia (*Mahonia repens*) also shines in the spring with honey-scented flowers

Early perennials

Pasque flower (*Pulsatilla patens*) and *Easter daisy (*Townsendia hookeri*)

*Nelson's larkspur (*Delphinium nuttallianum*) and mouse-eared chickweed (*Cerastium strictum*) make an early charming pair

*Creeping phlox (*Phlox multiflora*)

Slightly later in spring, many flowers are out. Here are some **late spring combinations**

- Golden banner (*Thermopsis divaricarpa*) Boulder raspberry (*Rubus deliciosus*)
 - Leafy cinquefoil (*Drymocallis fissa*), wallflower (*Erysimum capitatum*) and blue mist penstemon (*Penstemon virens*)
- Blue flag iris (*Iris missouriensis*) and windflower (*Anemone multifida*)
- Firecracker penstemon (*Penstemon eatonii*), fringed sage (*Artemisia frigida*) and Cowboy's delight (*Sphaeralcea coccinea*)
- Blue mist penstemon (*Penstemon virens*), *La Veta daisy (*Erigeron vetensis*) and cutleaf daisy (*Erigeron compositus*)
- Prairie smoke (*Geum triflorum*) and red twig dogwood (*Cornus sericea*)
- Sticky geranium (*Geranium viscosissimum*), *showy locoweed (*Oxytropis lambertii*), *sidebells penstemon (*Penstemon secundiflorus*) and fringed sage (*Artemisia frigida*)
- Blue columbine (*Aquilegia caerulea*) and wild rose (*Rosa woodsia*)
- Lance-leaf chiming bell (*Mertensia lanceolata*) and Golden banner (*Thermopsis divaricarpa*) and prairie smoke (*Geum triflorum*)
- Blue flax (*Linum lewisii*) and foxtail barley (*Hordeum jubatum*)

- Strawberry hedgehog cactus (*Echinocereus coccineus*) and cliffrose * (*Purshia stansburiana*)
- Desert four o'clock and Prince's plume

Summer plants and combinations

- Purple prairie clover (*Dalea purpurea*) and Black eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*)
- Harebells (*Campanula rotundifolia*), showy daisy (*Erigeron speciosus*) and yarrow (*Achillea lanulosa*)
- Lupine (*Lupinus argenteus*) and Mexican hat (*Ratibida columnifera*)
- Prairie june grass (*Koeleria macrantha*) and Scarlet bugler penstemon (*Penstemon barbatus*) and black eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*).
- Columbine (*Aquilegia caerulea*) and Rocky Mountain penstemon (*Penstemon strictus*)
- Sneezeweed (*Helenium hoopesii*) and scarlet gilia (*Ipomopsis aggregata*)
- Chocolate flower (*Berlandiera lyrata*) and Prairie sage (*Artemisia ludoviciana*)
- Apache plume (*Fallugia paradoxa*)
- Rocky mountain penstemon (*Penstemon strictus*) and Black eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*)
- Rocky mountain penstemon (*Penstemon strictus*) and Blanket flower (*Gaillardia aristata*)
- Rocky Mountain penstemon (*Penstemon strictus*) and *paintbrush (*Castilleja linariifolia*)
- Bee balm (*Monarda fistulosa*)

Late summer/early fall

- Prairie gardens come into full glory: sunflowers (*Helianthus annuus*) and snakeweed (*Gutierrezia sarothrae*) and rabbitbrush (*Ericameria nauseosa*)
- Prairie zinnia (*Zinnia grandiflora*)
- Gayfeather (*Liatris punctata*) and Rabbitbrush (*Ericameria nauseosa*) – both are pollinator magnets
- Rocky mountain bee plant (*Cleome serrulata*)
- Maximilian sunflower (*Helianthus maximiliana*)
- For ultra-easy, on poor soil or waste places, and pollinator friendly, try gumweed (*Grindelia squarrosa*) and tansy aster (*Machaeranthera bigelovii*)
- Pearly everlasting (*Anaphalis margaritacea*)
- Prairie sage (*Artemisia ludoviciana*) and sulfur flower (*Eriogonum umbellatum*)

Fall

Fall reds: Cluster for maximum impact.

- Chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*)
- Western sandcherry (*Prunus besseyi*)
- Three-leaf sumac (*Rhus trilobata*)
- Smooth sumac (*Rhus glabra*)
- Serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*)
- Mountain-ash (*Sorbus scopulina*)

- Geranium (*Geranium caespitosum*)
- Waxflower (*Jamesia Americana*) turns red some falls
- Ninebark (*Physocarpus monogynus*)
- Gambel's oak (*Quercus gambellii*) turns red some falls
- Golden currant (*Ribes aureum*) and Western sage (*Artemisia tridentata*)

Prickly pear (*Opuntia phaeacantha*) fruit are striking in the fall

Native grasses shine in the fall

- Little Bluestem "Blue Heaven" (*Schizachyrium scoparium* "Blue Heaven")
- Blue grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*)
- Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*)
- Big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*)
- Giant sacaton (*Sporobolus wrightii*)
- Prairie switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*)