



Rocky Mountain Botanical Gardens (Lyons, CO)

Join us for a tour! See Events below.

## August 2022 Newsletter

*Edited by Colleen Lyon*

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Join or Gift a Wild Ones Membership

# Native Plant Garden Pairings

by Danna Liebert

As advocates for Colorado native landscaping, you may have claimed (as we have) that you can create any traditional landscape style with natives; the whole story, as many of us know, is complicated: not all CO native plants are low-water; some need space to roam (spreading by rhizomes or reseeding); some don't play nicely with others; others are stunning only briefly. It can be daunting to pull native plants together into pleasing compositions that provide a succession of color throughout the season. In our last member survey, we received feedback reflecting a wish for some design guidance on working with a native plant palette, so we have pulled together some pairings we like.

Keep in mind, this is not an article on companion planting. These plants are not paired together because of symbiotic relationships. These are colorful combos that we think look good together and have similar water/sun needs. Beyond a few general tips, our list is divided by bloom time, and has a few multi-plant combos at the end for multi-season bloom.

General tips:

- Planting en masse with large drifts is best for supporting pollinators.
- Everything looks better next to Artemisia! The pale blue-green of Artemisia makes colors pop, especially deep colors. Depending on the height you want, you've got ***Artemisia frigida***, ***filifolia***, and ***ludoviciana*** as CO natives to choose from, and if you have a large space, ***tridentata***, too. If you can find ***Krascheninnikovia lanata*** (Winterfat), it provides a similar look, in a slightly denser form.
- Good fillers that go with everything (in our opinion): Native flax (spring blooming, may rebloom), ***Oryzopsis hymenoides*** (Indian rice grass), ***Berlandiera lyrata*** (Chocolate flower) or ***Engelmannia peristenia*** (Englemann's daisy), ***Geum triflorum*** (Prairie Smoke), ***Antennaria neglecta*** (Pussytoes), ***Callirhoe involucrata*** (Purple Poppy Mallow)

## Spring

***Penstemon virens*** (Blue mist penstemon) and ***Erysimum capitatum*** (Wallflower): Great combination of blue and orange for smaller bumblebees and butterflies. Wallflower is a biennial, but it will reseed, and is also great paired with spring bulbs.

***Linum lewisii*** (Blue flax) and ***Salvia greggii*** (Furman's red sage): Again, everything goes with blue flax. California poppies are not quite a local native, but paired with flax make a spectacular blue and orange combo. Chocolate flower also goes well with blue flax.



## Summer

*Carilhoe involucrata* (purple poppy mallow) is a long-blooming, spreading groundcover that pairs well with any of the following: *Anaphalis margaritacea* (Pearly Everlasting), or for a total color riot, *Asclepias tuberosa* (Butterfly weed) or *Oenothera macrocarpa* (Missouri evening primrose). *Achillea lanulosa* (Native White Yarrow) is a nice mid-height foil for these bright colors.

*Asclepias tuberosa* (Butterfly weed) and *Purple Prairie clover* (*Dalea purpurea*): these also pair well with chocolate flower.

*Dalea purpurea* (Purple Prairie Clover) and *Sphaeralcea munroana* (Monroe's Globe mallow)

*Mirabilis multiflora* (Desert four o'clock) and *Berlandia lyrata* (Chocolate flower): Again, what doesn't go with Chocolate flower? These are both incredibly xeric, so a good pairing for the driest part of your yard. Englemann's daisy is an alternative to Chocolate flower. Know that *Mirabilis multiflora* needs a lot of space to spread once it is established, so site carefully.

*Penstemon strictus* (Rocky mountain penstemon) and *Gallardia aristata* (Blanketflower); again, orange or yellow with purple/blue. Great for larger bumblebees and butterflies and/or *Carilhoe involucrata* (Poppy mallow); the upright vibrant blue of the penstemon against the magenta sprawl of the poppy mallow is hard to beat.

*Opuntia* (Prickly pear) and *Asclepias tuberosa* (*Butterfly weed*): These won't necessarily bloom at the same time, but the plants look nice next to each other, and also pair well for watering. In other words, they don't need much. Both prefer to be dry and in gravel mulch as opposed to any other type of mulch.

*Salvia greggii* (Furman's red sage) or *Salvia darcyi* x *S. microphylla* (Salvia Windwalker Royal Red) and *Artemesia frigida*: Nice foliage contrasts. Actually any type of sage will look nice with the Salvia.

*Liatris punctata* (Dotted gayfeather), *Salvia Azurea* (*Pitcher Sage*), and *Solidago multiradiata* (Rocky Mountain Goldenrod) is a great native goldenrod which blooms earlier (mid summer) than other goldenrods. It blooms earlier (mid summer) than other Goldenrods and is about a foot tall.

*Yucca glauca* and *Amorpha canescens* (Leadplant): Odd pairing but the airy leaves of the Leadplant contrast nicely with the roundness of the yucca.

*Glandularia bipinnatifida* (prairie verbena), hard to find (please grow it again, High Plains Environmental Center!), provides constant color in low, loose mounds of spectacular pale purple flowers. Pair with native white yarrow and *Ratibida columnifera pulchera* (prairie coneflower), or it would go well with Chocolate flower or Englemann's daisy, too.

*Verbena stricta* (Hoary Vervain) is unusual and catches people's attention with its tall spikes of tiny pale purple flowers. It is a prolific re-seeder, starts blooming in mid-late summer, and pairs nicely with warm season, mid height grasses, and *Ratibida culmnifera* (either red or yellow), which blooms earlier than the verbena), or taller and later blooming *Ratibida pinnata* (Gray Headed Prairie Coneflower)

## Fall

*Ribes aureum* (Golden current) and *Artemesia tridentata* (Big western sage): The currant's leaves turn dark red in the fall which looks great against the pale green of the sage. Two low- spreading plants that turn dark red/maroon in the fall are *Prunus besseyi* (Pawnee Buttes sand cherry) and *Mahonia repans* (Creeping Oregon grape).

**Solidago** (Goldenrod) with **Aster laevis** (Smooth Blue Aster) or **Salvia Azurea** (Pitcher Sage): This is the classic yellow and blue/purple combination, so common in nature and so beautiful.

### Multi-seasons ideas:

#### #1

**Front:** Moonshine Yarrow (*Achillea* Moonshine), or ***Oenothera macrocarpa*** (Missouri evening primrose). *Achillea* Moonshine is a dependable, all-season color blast.

**Middle:** ***Bouteloua gracilis*** and ***Echinacea pallida***; and/or ***Angustifolia*** and prairie clover and/or ***Liatris punctata***. *Echinacea pallida*, a regional prairie native, is lovely with its droopy melancholy petals and it provides winter interest when planted amongst grasses. It is a subtler *Echinacea* and earlier blooming than the more robust looking *Angustifolia*. *Pallida* has never bloomed for long for me probably because I give less water than its midwest prairie ideal, but I still like it after it's done flowering, amongst airy grasses. This gives nice winter interest. Prairie clover takes its time to establish, don't give up hope.

**Back:** ***Artemisia Ludoviciana***, with ***Allium sphaerocephalon*** (drumstick allium) for color that comes on the tail of the *Pallida*. *Artemisia Ludoviciana* spreads aggressively but is easy to pull and transplant if it spreads too far. The flip side of being aggressive is it will fill in quickly.

**Late season bloom to add:** ***Salvia azurea***

#### #2

**Earlier season bloom to place (in front):** ***Zauschneria*** (Hummingbird Trumpet) and Blue Flax or ***Penstemon mexicali*** "Pikes Peak" (Pikes Peak penstemon) and Missouri evening primrose

**Mid-late summer bloom:** ***Agastache Foeniculum*** (Blue Giant Hyssop) or Blue Blazes, and ***Agastache rupestris*** (Sunset Hyssop), and ***Bouteloua gracilis***, little bluestem, or other warm season grass. You could go color crazy and add ***Salvia darcyii*** or windwalker too. *Echinacea* and *liatris* would add nice contrasting form.

**For tall Late season bloom (in back) :** ***Aster laevis*** or ***Solidago rigida*** (stiff goldenrod). I have been warned that stiff goldenrod is an aggressive spreader but that hasn't been my experience (so far, but time will tell!), perhaps because I keep it pretty dry.

There are so many more great pairings. We would love to know what has worked well for you. Please send us your favorites along with photos!

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## Artificial Turf - Why It's Not an Alternative

by Deb Lebow Aal

I am seeing more and more folks opting for artificial turf. Some have said to me that it's a great option for the Front Range as it does not require water. I realize there are many people out there who want a no maintenance yard - and not just low maintenance, but NO maintenance. First, unless you pave over your yard (really not a good idea), there is no such thing as a no maintenance yard. I have seen unmaintained patches of artificial turf, and they are weedy messes as pictured below.



Here are some of the reasons that artificial turf (also known as ‘plastic lawn’ or ‘fake grass’) is not a good alternative as a lawn:

- ***It’s lifeless:*** Replacing natural vegetation with plastic contributes to the immense loss of biodiversity and habitat for insects, birds, etc.
- ***It gets really hot*** and can burn the feet of dogs and barefoot children, and can actually melt in really high temperatures, which we are experiencing more and more. You actually have to water them to cool them down.
- ***It needs special cleaning products*** to get rid of smells and stains, like dog urine.
- ***It’s energy intensive*** being made from a coal and/or oil derived product
- ***It’s not easily recycled.*** In fact, probably not recyclable at all.
- ***It contributes to the heat-island effect of urban areas*** . It does not cool an area down, like natural vegetation does.
- ***It may pollute water:*** I don’t have proof of this, but since it is a plastic product, I have read that it breaks down into micro-plastic beads and enters into our waters, and then into fish, etc.
- ***It may contribute to water runoff issues*** . I know that many artificial turf options are porous so that water can sink in below the turf, but I have seen people put a concrete layer underneath the turf, to reduce the weed issue, which is the worst of all worlds. Instead of keeping the little water we get on your vegetation, it runs off, collecting road and other contaminants as it goes.

I have seen articles where criticism of artificial turf is paired with gravel. They equate the two, saying that both materials are heating up already hot urban areas. But I take issue with this. Pea gravel as mulch has been shown to be a wonderful mulch for native plants, keeping their roots cooler and wetter. While the top of the gravel does get hot, the soil underneath (and therefore the roots of the plants) stay cool. That is not true of plastic turf.

So, if your neighbor starts talking about putting in a plastic lawn, gently talk about the pitfalls of this rather lousy idea. Many cities have banned artificial turf. It might be time for cities along the Front Range to do the same.

## WOFR Event Recap

*by Peggy Hanson*

Oh, what fun being with plant people! Here is a look back at our most recent events that exemplify the mission and community of the Wild Ones Front Range chapter.

**Hikes!**

A big thanks to member Pam Schulz who scouted, coordinated, led and interpreted our hikes at Two Bridges Open Space (May 29) and the Larkspur Private Ranch (June 11). She created great plant lists, led tours to those plants and gave great perspective and history of the spaces explored. Amidst the expanse, participants got down low to investigate the unique traits of native plants in their natural setting.



*Two Bridges Open Space: A group investigates the keel of the flower to decipher *Astragalus*.*



*Larkspur Ranch: Participants get a closer look at *Geum triflorum* (Prairie Smoke)*



*Larkspur Ranch: Member Judy French studies *Penstemon virens* (Front Range Beardtongue) with a hand lens to see the "beard" in the flower.*



*Larkspur Ranch: Participants take in the views and see one of nature's rock gardens with loads of *Penstemon virens* (Front Range Beardtongue)*

## **Outreach!**

Wild Ones partnered with many like-minded organizations and native plant enthusiasts to pull off two successful plant swaps & giveaways in Denver (June 12) and Fort Collins (June 19). It took an army of volunteers to grow, pot up and deliver the plants, as well as set up and staff the events. Thank you to all who answered the call and shared your enthusiasm with participants! Despite the heat, we estimate a total of about 5,000 plants were given away at the two events with approximately 500 people attending.



Denver Swap: Group shot of some Denver Swap volunteers at our host venue, EarthLinks



Denver Swap: Susan Cleveland and company enthusiastically show off the plants



Fort Collins Swap: Emma Pett and Andrea Work setting up for the event.



Fort Collins Swap: Participants wait patiently in line to select their plants.

Wild Ones also participated in the Pollinator Celebration at the Gardens on Spring Creek in Fort Collins. Member Vicki Philips led participants in making seed balls and member Felicia Hirning introduced Wild Ones to event attendees. Thank you, both!



Gardens on Spring Creek: Vicki Saragoussi Phillips helps a family make seed balls. *Photo credit: Felicia Hirning*



Gardens on Spring Creek: Felicia Hirning and her mom staff the chapter's outreach table.

## Yard Tours!

Wild Ones Programming team, Jen Smith, Laurel Starr and Vicki Philips put on two garden tours in Golden (June 9) and Fort Collins (July 16) that offered participants two gardens to peruse at each event - double the pleasure.



Golden tour: Programming volunteer, Laurel Starr coordinated the two Golden garden tours.



Golden Tour: Members Pam Schulz, Erin Schoffner, Deb Lebow Aal, and Jenny McCoy with our host, Tom Schweich in his lush 'hell strip'.



Fort Collins tour: Participants learn about one of the hosts' most recent endeavors with native plants.



Fort Collins tour: Jen Smith, Chapter Programming Chairperson, orients participants at one of the gardens on tour. *Photo credit: Pam Schulz*

Volunteers make these events possible! As you can imagine from these photos, stepping up as an “event host” is an engaging and memorable way to volunteer with WOFR. Do you have a space with native plants that you know well and can be used for guided hikes or yard tours? If so, [contact us](#) to explore curating an event!

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## Volunteer Request

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### Fall Seed Swap Planning Committee

Our fall Seed Swap is just around the corner. As soon as possible, Wild Ones Front Range Chapter needs a volunteer to help the planning committee. This person will work with key volunteers from partnering organizations to plan the event which typically is held in late October. No prior experience needed, but prior involvement in a seed swap would be helpful.

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## Upcoming Events

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**Important notice: From here on out, we will be announcing our events to members only, first, as our events are popular and sell out fast. So, if you are not a member, please consider becoming one!**

## Rocky Mountain Botanical Gardens Tour

August 14, 2022

9:30 - 11:00 am

Lyons, CO

\$10 for Members | \$25 for non-members

Join us as we tour the new Rocky Mountain Botanical Gardens in Lyons, CO. Please register [here](#).

## WOFR Member Mixer

Sunday, August 28, 2022

9:00 - 11:00 am

Ekar Farm, Denver

*Add to your calendar - invite coming soon!*

WOFR current members are invited to tour the fabulous Ekar Farm and connect with fellow native plant enthusiast. We will also tour WOFR's demo garden in a corner of Ekar Farm. This garden is only one year old, but already draws people in with its beauty. Registration is limited, so please sign up as soon as you get the invite! We will have coffee and noshes.

## Native Plant Sales

Here are some other opportunities to buy native plants.

**City Park Farmers Market:** Urban Roots, a small space and sustainable landscape design company, will be selling xeric and native plants at the City Park Farmer's Market, located at Denver's East High School (Colfax and Columbine), the second and fourth Saturday of the month, May 14 through October 29, 2022, 8am - 1pm. A Wild Ones volunteer may be on hand to answer questions on planting native plants and the significance of having a native plant landscape.



**High Plains Environmental Center:** Place your orders on-line. For more information, please see their [website](#).

And of course, when you shop at our local nurseries, ask for Colorado native plants!! The more we ask for 'em, the more they'll want to stock native plants.

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**We love to hear from you, and we are always looking for people to write articles for the newsletter. If you would like to comment on anything in this newsletter or write an article, please send your comments or ideas to [FrontRangeWildOnes@gmail.com](mailto:FrontRangeWildOnes@gmail.com).**

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