

# Wild Ones

NATIVE PLANTS, NATURAL LANDSCAPES  
FRONT RANGE



October is Seed Swap month! Spread the word!

Photo by Peggy Hanson

## October 2022 Newsletter

Edited by Colleen Lyon

### In this newsletter...

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Join or Gift a Wild Ones Membership  
today!

# Tips, Tricks, and Info for Planting Native Plants on the Front Range

by *Wild Ones Front Range Chapter Board Members*

This month we thought we'd go "trick or treating" for (i.e. do a deep dive into) nuggets of wisdom our Chapter Board Members (and prospective Board Members) have to hand out from their own experience planting natives in their landscapes - tips, tricks, and info that will make it easier to establish and enjoy natives, as planting on the Front Range is not the same as planting in many other areas of our country.

## ***Peggy***

- Nature is the best propagator. Observe the garden throughout the fall for ripening seed. When ripened, collect and spread seeds to increase your plant volume, or pot them up in the spring to share with friends, community gardens and local plant swaps. Ask neighbors if you can have some of their seed for plants you'd like to have in your garden. Spread seed just before a rain/snow or cover lightly with soil to avoid their blowing away.
- Design and install walkways BEFORE installing plant material in your garden. Also, pay attention to how traffic already flows through the space, as old habits die hard. Pathways ensure you can access all plants and eliminate the chance that plants will be unnecessarily trampled.
- Remember to reduce, redirect or eliminate the drip lines to native plants once they are about 3 years old. This is especially important if you continue to add plants—the water needs of new plants are different from the older, more established plants.
- When running water from the faucet (waiting for it to get hot), collect it in a vessel you can easily take outdoors to water one of your newly planted natives!

## ***Jen***

- Try growing natives from seed. Plan to attend one of the Wild Ones' October seed swaps and try growing some natives. It's a fun and affordable way to get native plants for your garden. This past winter, I sowed seeds in milk jugs for the first time, and it was rewarding to discover seedlings germinating as spring arrived. When you are successful growing certain species, you may also have extra seedlings to share with friends or to donate to the plant swaps, where you may get even more plants!
- Get connected. Find opportunities to connect with other people who are passionate about rewilding our landscapes. Join a Wild Ones Front Range Chapter program, help to plan an event yourself, and/or participate in an online group. We learn so much from each other and the native plant community is full of people willing to share their successes and lessons learned. Tapping into this community can make native plant gardening more enriching - and less intimidating!

## ***Mary***

- *Maintain for change.* I heard on a podcast this expression about native plant landscaping. It implies that the human gardener may have plans, but they are not always realized.
- *Sleep, Creep, Leap.* This expression explains why it takes three years for perennials to establish themselves. The first year they sleep, but are really building their roots. The second year they creep, and begin to look like they are not on the verge of death. The third year they leap, and show all their glory in blossoms and growth. Garima, at Rocky Mountain Botanic Gardens in Lyons, CO, deadheads coneflowers and many other first-year plants in order to conserve the plants' strength for root development. I transplanted

some stressed bee balm from a farm to my home garden and gave it lots of water - to my surprise, it bloomed. I've been deadheading it and am seeing new growth. I know bee balm dies back in the winter, but I think in a month or so I should cut it back pretty severely.

### ***Deb***

- "Plant" your water first. In this dry climate, put in swales and dig down, rather than mound up, to keep whatever water we do get in your landscape. Swales can direct the water to where you need it.
- Plan for maintenance. Don't put your very xeric plants next to a tree that needs regular water, e.g.. And don't put your pea gravel mulched area right next to a tree that will drop a whole lot of leaves.
- Use pea gravel, rather than wood mulch. Who knew! Native plants seem to prefer the pea gravel. I know it seems counter-intuitive and seems like it would contribute to the heat island effect of urban areas, but it doesn't. Both pea gravel and wood mulch are hot to the touch, on a hot day, but pea gravel retains water better, and the roots of the plants stay cooler and wetter. Wood mulch seems to absorb the little moisture we get, rather than allowing the plants to absorb it.
- Not all native plants will do well in an urban environment. I've had rabbit brush die! It's hotter and drier in the heart of the city, so you have to water some of these plants more than they would need in a wilder setting.
- Use the edges around trees. A little bit of shade goes a long way here when it's hot and dry. My poppy mallow (*Callirhoe involucrate*), for example, does way better at the edge of a tree, shaded from the hottest part of the day, than it does out in the open.
- Don't use landscape fabric! The weeds seem to love it. I have said this before, but I have yet to see a yard where landscape fabric has prevented weeds from germinating. At best, it keeps the weeds at bay for a year.

***Danna (and John Murgel)***: This is more of a Q and A about cultivars (question Danna posed to John Murgel, horticulturist for Douglas County):

*Danna*: Do cultivars have as much ecosystem benefit as native species? My city plants Rudbeckia and Penstemon cultivars in park garden beds, amongst non-native annuals, as an example of how they are supporting pollinators. I'm wondering if these cultivars have as much benefit, or has that been lost in the breeding? Is there research that compares the benefit to pollinators of common nursery cultivars vs. their native species? I have heard that to native insects, these are like fast food versions of the native species that occur in the wild — but is this actually true? Is there any data?

*John Murgel*: This one is hard—you simply can't generalize. Some cultivars might actually be superior to straight-species plants ('Goldsturm' Rudbeckia for example, is a *sport* from straight species but flowers longer and more profusely). Breeding may or may not affect nutrition of pollen or nectar, or amounts produced. You have to evaluate case by case, and for so many cultivars, the research simply has not been done. If a cultivar is used, it's probably safest to go with things that are selections of naturally occurring species rather than with hybrids (which may be sterile, i.e., do not always produce fertile pollen). Perhaps sterile plants have more energy to devote to nectar production though? It becomes complicated quickly. One could make a case for planting non-native plants that benefit honeybees in order to relieve the pressure on the native plants for the native bees. And note, a paper by Baker and Potter in 2020 found that nativar\* (native plants that have been cultivated) milkweeds were equally good for monarch butterflies and wild bees as straight species wild types.

The generalizations that in my opinion are relatively safe are:

1. Avoid doubles, since stamens have been converted into petals in those varieties.
2. Plant plants that will make seeds, nativity notwithstanding—you know they're making pollen and nectar (as applicable) because they have functioning reproductive systems.
3. Plant a wide variety of things, because habitat diversity is a better supported indicator of invertebrate diversity, and you're not putting all your pollinator eggs in one basket of

flowers.

\*A “cultivar” is a cultivated variation of a plant bred by humans selecting for certain desirable traits such as color, size, growth habit, longer bloom time, disease resistance. Some cultivars do not produce seed or are sterile. A cultivar can be derived from native or non-native species. “Hybrids” are created by cross-breeding two or more entirely different species. Hybrids occur both in nature and through breeding by humans, and often have an X in their name. Hybrids can be a combination of native or non-native plants. Often a cultivar or hybrid derived from native species is called a “nativar.”

### ***Ayn (Potential Board Member)***

- This is painfully obvious and yet many of us gardeners still fall into the trap of over-planting. The result is that there are too many plants in too little space competing for sun, water, space and visibility and none are able to thrive and show their true beauty. One solution is to cut out paper or cloth circles representing the full diameter of the plant at maturity, and literally lay the circles out before planting to ensure that there will be minimal overlap with adjacent plant canopies when the plants are full grown. It takes patience, and likely several years, to wait for the plant to reach its full size. Once it does, you can always fill in with low compact plants or ground covers (think fleabane or sulphur buckwheat) if your plant coverage ends up a little thin.

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## Member & Garden Spotlight

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### ***Dan Rink***



*Editor's note: The following article is written by WOFR member, Dan Rink, who responded to our request for personal stories of growing native plants, and whose home garden is beginning to flourish with them. Thanks, Dan, for sharing! We look forward to following your journey.*

When I first started this garden in Centennial, CO, I was mostly interested in growing vegetables and edible forest gardens with fruit trees, berry bushes, culinary herbs, veggies, and fruiting climbing plants, all woven together, intermingling. Over time, I became more enthralled with the plants in my garden that were attracting the most pollinators. I just loved to see the garden swarming with all different kinds of life! Also, I was always looking for ways to use less water in the garden. The result is a wild, mixed planting of edible plants and native plants, a dynamic work in progress.

After a few setbacks from the rampant rabbit population in our neighborhood (the front yard is now a jungle of anti-rabbit chicken wire cages, which I'm hoping to remove when the plants mature and can hopefully fend for themselves), native plant gardens have begun to take over. Participating in Wild Ones events has inspired me to continue to add wonderful native plants to the garden.



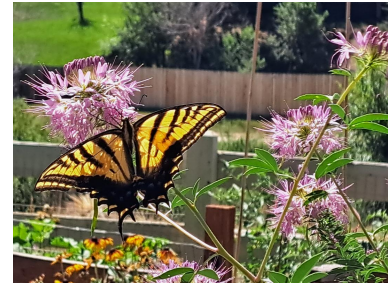
Enjoy these photos of what's currently thriving in my garden!



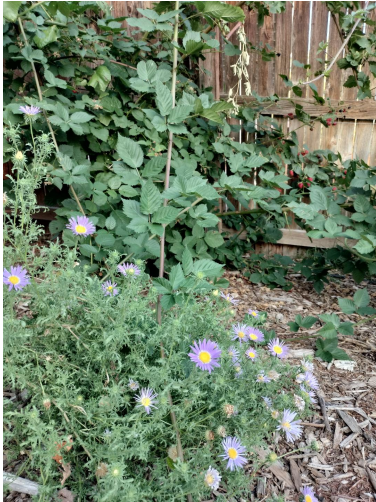
Garden Midday



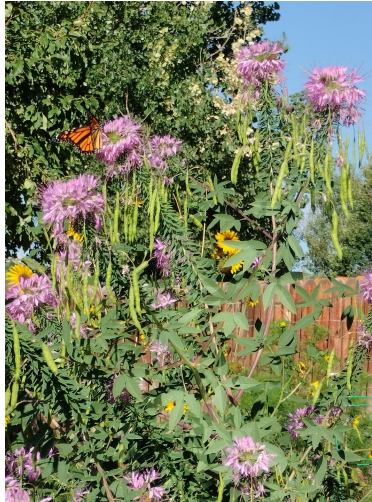
Culinary herbs, Chocolate Flower, and  
*Asclepias tuberosa*



Swallowtail and Rocky Mountain Bee  
Plant



Blackberries and  
*Machaeranthera tanacetifolia*



Monarch and Rocky Mountain Bee  
Plant



Culinary herbs, Pale Evening  
Primrose, California Poppy, Chocolate  
Flower, Rocky Mountain Bee Plant

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## Event Spotlight

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### October Seed Swaps

*It's Seed Swap season! Spread the word!*

WOFR is partnering with other organizations to put on three seed swaps along the Front Range this month (Fort Collins, Denver, and Colorado Springs). Please get involved by attending, donating seed, volunteering at the event, and spreading the word. Who is going to be handing out native seeds in addition to (or instead of) candy this Halloween?





### *Find a Swap near you!*

#### DENVER

**Saturday, October 15, 2022**  
The Table Public House  
10:00 am - 1:00 pm

#### COLORADO SPRINGS

**Saturday, October 22, 2022**  
Garden of the Gods Visitor & Nature Center  
10:00 am - 1:00 pm

#### FORT COLLINS

**Saturday, October 29, 2022**  
Wolverine Farm Publick House  
10:00 am - 1:00 pm



### *Volunteer at a swap!*

**Work an event:** Come help set up, during, and taking down the seed swaps.

**Collect native seeds:** We can use all the seed you can collect from your gardens. Please follow these instructions:

- ONLY NATIVE SEEDS
- Seeds must be in containers or envelopes
- Mark the envelopes with: Latin name; common name; year collected; elevation; your first initial and last name.

Contact [Peggy Hanson](#) to volunteer!



## Other Upcoming Events

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***Important notice: We announce many of our events to members first, as our events are popular and sell out fast. So, if you are not a member, please consider becoming one!***

### Native Plant Sales

Check out a few more opportunities to buy native plants this season.

#### **City Park Farmers Market**

Saturdays, 8:00 am - 1:00 pm  
October 1, 15 & 29

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

**Local Nurseries:** When shopping at local nurseries, **ask for Colorado native plants!!** The more we ask, the more they'll stock.



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## WOFR welcomed 7 new members in September!

*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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Wild Ones Front Range Chapter | <https://frontrangewildones.org/>

