



*Ribes aureum* (Golden Currant)  
Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

## November 2024

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- **Upcoming Events:** Ekar Garden Rock Collecting and Transfer; Seed Shares and Swaps; "Planting for Picky Eaters" Webinar

Become a member today!

## WOFR is now accepting new board member nominations!

We have particular need for a new Treasurer. If you'd like to nominate someone (including yourself!), [email us](#) and scroll down for more info!



## November is Seed Swap Month!

Check out our activities below, for dates and locations.

## Tips and Tricks for Gardening with Native Plants on the Front Range

*Compiled by Karen Vanderwall*

This month we thought we would update something we've done before and ask our Chapter Board of Directors for nuggets of wisdom from their experience planting native plants in their own landscapes – passing on tips and tricks that will help you establish and enjoy your native garden in the diverse and complex climate of the Front Range. For the complete list of Tips and Tricks, see the full blog post linked below.

### Peggy Hanson



- 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.

**Deb Lebow  
Aal**



**Ayn Schmit**



- 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.

- 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 involucrata*), 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.
- Not all very xeric native plants will do well without water in a very urban environment. I've had rabbitbrush 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 non-urban setting. The heat-island effect is real.

- Learn and use the bare root planting method (demonstrated by me in this [video](#), also posted in the WOFR article [Best Practices for Establishing & Maintaining Colorado Native Plants](#)) - it really works!
- Many of us gardeners fall into the trap of over-planting in an effort to get to a 'finished' looking garden sooner. 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 trick 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 plant canopies will touch but not overlap when the plants are full grown. This creates the 'living mulch' that is ideal for plant health. It takes patience, and likely several years, to wait for the plants to reach full size. Once they do, 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.



*Eriogonum umbellatum* — Sulfer Buckwheat forms a dense mat with tiny, upright leaves and flowers that change to reds in autumn (photo courtesy of swcoloradowildflowers.com)

### Kristin Laux



- Research and learn each plant’s needs for water, sun, and soil type and plant those with similar needs together. It’s so much easier to give the plants what they need when all the plants in an area desire the same conditions.
- I find that all my newly planted sun-loving plants greatly benefit from shade cover for their first 6 to 8 weeks. My favorite shade material is burlap, which allows some light and plenty of airflow. I reuse the same burlap year after year and it stores easily.

### Kristine Johnson



- Plant in the fall. While selection can be spotty in the fall, plants may be on discount. The ground is warm and air temperatures are often still quite warm as well, without the overpowering heat of summer. Whatever you plant should be coming with a decent root system, and the plant will focus on growing those roots. They have a better likelihood of survival than things planted in the summer and compare favorably to things planted in the spring.
- Leave the leaves in your flowerbed, but if you have an excess of leaves, [make leaf mold](#). This can be as simple as making a hoop with chicken wire, filling it with leaves, and moistening it periodically.

### Vicki Saragoussi Phillips

#### Remember the Five Senses

*So, you’ve planted your native plant starters and sowed your native plant seeds, what’s next?*

Don’t forget to take some time to immerse yourself and celebrate your contribution to caring for the planet by



creating a sustainable biodiverse habitat in your own landscape. As your garden is growing and showing itself off, be sure to:

- **Smell:** the soil after a rain, or the sweet fragrance of your blooms, ie – chocolate flower (*Berlandiera lyrata*) or bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*).



*Berlandiera Lyrata* (photo by Pam Schulz)

- **Listen:** to the birds chirping away as they are munching on the seed heads of your native plant flora or the Gambel oak (*Quercus gambelii*) leaves rustling in the wind.
- **Taste:** If you are 100% positive on the identification of an edible native plant, give it a try! My favorite is the golden currant (*Ribes aureum*)! Check out this plant list developed for members of the Front Range Wild Ones in 2014 by Brian Elliott — [Landscaping with Edible Colorado Native Plants](#).
- **Touch:** Feel the native grass between your toes or brush up against your legs. One of my favorite things to do is to stroll through my now well-established blue grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*) meadow!
- **Sight:** Observe how the feathery corkscrew seed heads of mountain mahogany (*Cercocarpus montanus*) swirl to the ground or how the sunlight travels through your space throughout the day.

**Time spent in nature can be healing, and introducing small pieces of it into our daily lives is one way we can feel more connected and grounded.**

*Want all the Tips and Tricks?*

## Adding Microhabitats to Your Landscape

*Compiled by Deb Lebow Aal*

Bugs are in trouble, and our yards, both the plants we put in and the way we garden, can be part of the solution. The Xerces Society had an article I particularly liked on using your landscape to make a difference to bugs by adding microhabitats. I am summarizing and paraphrasing many of the good points [that article](#) made, here.

First and foremost, though, is the notion that all of us can make a difference to the plight of these tiny creatures, even if you have only a balcony or a tiny yard. Think about providing these three microhabitats to your space.

### **Leave Bare Space for Ground-Nesting Bees**

Colorado has a whopping number of native bee species – up to 1,000 in a recent estimate. A majority of them require bare ground for nesting. So, leaving open bare patches, with few or no plants, is a good thing. And leaving thick mulch down is not leaving bare ground. Bees need to get to the soil easily. Using some native plants, grasses, or sedges that grow in clumps or bunches is a great solution to having space for bees but not leaving a completely bare area. And, don't till or turn the soil in this area, once it's established. The bees need the soil to remain stable. Fun fact: baby bees spend up to eleven months of the year underground.

I did already say don't heavily mulch the area you're leaving for ground-nesting bees, and maybe this is obvious, but don't use plastic mulch, plastic grass, landscape fabric, or heavily treated or colored wood chips in this area. Impenetrable layers are just that; not good for ground-nesting bees. They will, however, do well in pea gravel, which they can easily get below, as well as compost, leaf litter, and plant debris. I particularly like the vision of ground nesting bees having a cozy home, burrowing under leaf litter.

So, how do you know those bees have arrived? Watch for small mounds of soil around a tunnel opening. And you'll see those nesting mother bees making many trips bringing pollen back to the hole.



## Leave Dead Plant Material

This one is easy – tidy up less! Fallen leaves, brush piles, stems, twigs, and old logs are such good material for pollinators. Many bugs take the leaves and recycle the leaf nutrients back into the soil. Others use leaves as a blanket to cozy into in the winter. So, find an area where you can keep some leaves over the winter, or spread them in your flower beds, and around your trees and shrubs..Don't bag them off and send them to the landfill. I know we keep harping on this, but it is that important to helping insects survive. You can even keep a layer of leaves in a deck or balcony planter, to see a more diverse bug community come spring.

Leave the stems of your perennial plants. The seed heads will feed goldfinches and other birds, and the stems will provide some shelter. Some say plant stems are much healthier options than bee blocks or hotels. They break down naturally over time, avoiding diseases and pests. In the spring, you may be rewarded with stem-boring moths, carpenter bees and leaf-cutter bees, all beneficial insects (as most insects are!)

A brush pile in your “back 40” (I have a back 4 inches, which still works), can provide an area for hibernating butterflies, as well as nesting bees and wood-eating insects. And the brush pile will break down into gorgeous nutrient-rich soil or compost you can add to your yard.

## Provide Some Rocky Shelter

Many bugs like a rocky outcropping for shelter. Leaf cutter bees (*Megachile spp.*) make nests in the cracks or crevices of rocks. Other tunnel-nesting bees, such as digger bees (*Anthrophora spp.*) use water to soften sandstone and excavate it. Bumble bees (*Bombas spp.*) make homes in protected cavities inside rock piles and walls, while ground beetles (family *Carabidae*) and numerous other beneficial insects make their homes in gaps or burrows dug out from the soil under a stone.

Why rocks? Rocks are a great medium for shelter as they keep conditions beneath them relatively stable. On a dry, hot day, they keep the space below shaded, cool and damp. On a rainy day, bugs under rocks are likely to be dry. Rocks can help stabilize the body temperature of bugs, to stay warm when it's cold out, and cool when it's hot. Many bugs overwinter in rock cracks and crevices, and often bugs who build their own structures to live in, like to use rocks as an anchor.

If you have space to set aside for a rock pile, great. Use different types and sizes of rocks, with lots of spaces and crevices in between. If you want a sturdy foundation, dig a shallow hole in the ground and pile the rock on top. This provides a cave-like space for overwintering bugs. If possible, have several rock pile areas, some in the sun and some in the shade to give these little creatures different options. You can boost the quality of the habitats by incorporating native grasses and forbs nearby, for easy access to food and nesting materials.

A stone wall, or retaining wall, works well too. Use dry construction methods, that is, don't fill the crevices and gaps with mortar. Let the bugs fill the holes in.

And, how do you know bugs are using your rock piles? You'll begin to see little mounds of soil at the base of a rock from mining, leafcutter, and bumble bees. If you can check your rock piles at dawn or dusk, you 'll most likely see lots of activity from ground beetles and other night-time bugs. And, of course you'll see evidence of spiders and perhaps jumping spiders on sunny rocks.

Read the full blog post here!

## Ask CSU Anything (About Native Plants)

**QUESTION:** When do I remove last year's stems and leaves?



*Aquilegia chrysantha* (Golden Comumbine) — Planted in a home garden last May, it sent out new green leaves about three weeks ago, our questioner asked, “Is it okay to remove the old now, or wait until April?”

**ANSWER:** You can choose based on your aesthetic preference. The dead material can be removed now without issue, but try not to cut live plant material. Possible advantages of leaving dead material include the slight insulating effect it can have on the crown of the plant (once we finally arrive in winter), plus the possible overwintering habitat it provides to invertebrates. Because you have additional leaves that will also die back, though, you have every reason to expect still to gain those advantages even if you were to remove what is dead currently, with the added benefit of having the garden be a bit tidier in these last few weeks of fall.

*Answer developed by: John Murgel, Extension County Specialist, Horticulture and Natural Resources, Douglas County, Colorado State University Extension*



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## Chapter News

### Now Accepting Board Member Nominations

WOFR is now accepting nominations for new board members. If you'd like to nominate someone (including yourself!) to serve on our board, [email us](#). Let us know the person's name and member number, and provide a brief description about why they are interested in serving on our board of directors. Watch for an email about casting your vote for our chapter's 2025 Board Members. Voting will take place from December 1 to December 15.

We have particular need for a new Treasurer. This position manages our finances, annually reports to national, and facilitates the annual budget process with input from chapter leaders. Attendance at our monthly board meetings on the third Wednesday of the month from 6-8 pm is required. Our current Treasurer will provide training. Accounting/bookkeeping experience is beneficial, but not required.

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### Colorado Gives Day

Thanks to your incredible donations each year, we are able to empower more Front Range residents to transform their outdoor spaces into *Coloradoscapes* with native plants. Donations enable us to educate and motivate people to take action to heal the earth, right where we live.

As a volunteer-run chapter of Wild Ones National, Wild Ones Front Range greatly appreciates your generous donations during our annual Colorado Gives campaign between now and December 10.



[Click here to donate!](#)

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### Saying Goodbye to a Beloved Demo Garden

*By Kristin Laux and Ayn Schmit*



Photo by Kristin Laux

As many of you know, our chapter has had a beautiful demo garden at Ekar Farm in Denver since 2021. As Ayn Schmit wrote in her 2022 article: “Ekar Farm, located on land belonging to the Denver Academy of Torah, is a non-profit organization that fosters community and connection to the land and grows food for distribution to metro Denver organizations that are feeding people in need. Ekar is a Hebrew word that means the most important things. For those of us committed to gardening with native plants, that act of healing the land IS one of the most important things.” Read the entire article about the [garden’s history here](#).

Our volunteers designed, installed, and maintained the garden. What started as a field of weeds transformed into a vibrant landscape full of flowers, grasses, and shrubs that attracted birds, bumblebees, and countless other pollinators. Volunteers gathered regularly to pull weeds, chat about native plants, develop friendships, and share our deep appreciation for the little wild space in the middle of a big concrete city.

Sadly, our time at this site has come to an end as Denver Academy of Torah has plans to develop the land on which our demo garden and Ekar Farm sit. In the words of legendary singer Joni Mitchell, they will “pave paradise and put up a parking lot.” Our wonderful members have salvaged pretty much all the native plants to give them a chance at a new life in another location. Soon we’ll be collecting the river rocks to store until a new garden opportunity develops. All that remains is a large boulder that, sadly, we don’t have the means to save. (If any of our readers can volunteer to move it for us, we’d appreciate it! [Email us here](#).)



Photo by Ayn Schmit

Ekar Farm has been a collaborative, supportive partner for Wild Ones Front Range over these past few years. By the end of 2024, they also have to move vegetable beds and perennial plants to a new location to continue their laudable mission to feed people in our community. We wish them the best and invite you to [support their capital campaign fundraising efforts for the new space](#) so they can “get perennials/native gardens in over there as soon as next Spring!”

As we say goodbye to this demo garden, we look forward to a new opportunity and new partners in a different location to continue our mission by showcasing the beauty of native plants and having a space for camaraderie and education. Once we find it, we’ll share that journey with you too.

This time around, we envision a larger group of actively committed Chapter volunteers being involved with the design, installation, and maintenance of a new demo garden. Watch our events and volunteer opportunities to be involved in the deeply satisfying journey of creating a new garden to showcase native plants and share our vision of Coloradoscapes!

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## Upcoming Events

*Check out our website's [Events](#) section for registration links and full event details!*

**Ekar Garden Rock Collecting and Transfer**  
Saturday, November 2  
*Members only*

**Pikes Peak Region Seed Share**  
Sunday, November 3

**NOCO Native Plant Seed Swap and Giveaway**  
Sunday, November 10

**"Planting for Picky Eaters"**  
Wednesday, November 13  
*Online/virtual*

**WOFR November Board Meeting**  
Wednesday, November 20  
*Members only*



Volunteers from WOFR 2024 Seed Collection and Cleaning Events — so many seeds ready for sharing and swapping!

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**We love hearing from you!**  
If you would like to comment on anything in this newsletter or write an article, please [email us](#) your comments or ideas.

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Wild Ones Front Range Chapter | <https://frontrange.wildones.org/>



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