



*Pasqueflowers, *Pulsatilla nuttalliana*, are among the first natives to bloom in spring, providing rest and food for the earliest native bees. Photo and text by Sue Dingwell, CONPS*

March 2025

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Questions to Ask a Native Plant Landscaper

By Kristine Johnson ([article link](#))



Designing and installing your native plant garden can be daunting. Professional help is available!

While many members of Wild Ones Front Range are totally on the DIY (do it yourself) bandwagon--for various reasons or for various portions of our space--we may also reach out for help from professionals. Native plant landscaping can feel daunting. So how do you find someone who is a good fit for you and who truly knows native plants? I interviewed some folks in the biz, including some of our very own Wild Ones Front Range leaders. Consensus came out about things to ask, red flags and more. This is a diverse panel of passionate, dedicated, intelligent, hardworking people working in a physically demanding field that requires a lot of smarts and a lot of skills. If you don't understand why they do what they do or why something costs what it does, ask them. They were so generous with their time with me, and they all want to help make our communities better places.

Mimi and Larry Elmore have owned and operated [Wild by Design Habitats](#), a design/install landscaping company in Lyons for over 15 years. The Elmore's were inspired by entomologist Douglas Tallamy's work on how native plants support pollinators and ecosystems, and they work to convert home landscaping to water-conserving, pollinator- and bird-supporting, science-based, aesthetically pleasing landscapes. They design for the full growing season (spring, summer, fall, winter interest) and in multiple plant layers.

Kimberly Lehman owns and runs the [Boulder Barefoot Gardener](#), a landscaping business in the Boulder area (she is also a WOFR Boulder Regional Co-Coordinator). Her focus includes permaculture, sustainability, pollinators, water conservation, fire mitigation and equity. She's been in the Boulder area for about 15 years. Most of her

work is maintenance, rejuvenation and renovation of home gardens. She has been “into” plants since she was a child, gardening with her grandmother in Ohio and does a lot of giving back to her community.

Danna Liebert owns and runs [Grounded Growth Landscape Design](#), a landscaping design and install business in the Denver area (Danna is also a WOFR Board Member). She specializes in low-water, native plant-focused landscaping, turf to native habitat conversion, crevice gardens, and naturalistic designs that provide ecological value and nourish ecosystems. She dove into native plant landscapes when she relocated to Denver from New York City and became a habitat advocate and practitioner. She considers Kenton Seth to be a mentor and Douglas Tallamy to be a major inspiration.

Curtis Manning co-owns and runs [Curtis Manning Design](#) and [Meadow Pro](#), two design/install/maintain landscaping companies in Lafayette; one company focuses on outdoor living spaces, while the other focuses more on water conservation (including rain gardens), and providing habitat for pollinators, birds and other wildlife. Curtis has spoken at the Landscaping with Colorado Native Plants Conference about soil and has taught seminars at Denver Botanic Gardens about low water and native plant gardens. He has been in the native plant landscaping business for over 20 years and has a background in horticulture and civil engineering.

Eryn Joy Murphy owns and operates [Restorative Landscape Design](#), a design/install landscaping company in Denver. An active WOFR member, Eryn’s focus is native plant landscaping, permaculture, crevice gardens, and prairie matrix gardens. She focuses on Denver but will travel further for projects with bigger community impact. We’re reviewing her guide for DIYers next month. She includes services to make native plant landscaping more accessible for those on a budget or who wish to do the labor themselves, including [Garden in a Truck](#), a native plant sourcing service she operates, which allows DIYers to source large numbers of plug/small-sized native plants at near wholesale cost.



Be sure to share what plant species are important to you so your preferences are reflected in the design.

Questions and Discussion Points:

How to find someone. All our panelists get most of their clients via word of mouth and referrals. When you see a yard you like, talk to the owners and get a referral. It’s a good way to get something similar. Danna says that visiting past projects of a prospective landscaper is important: while photos (especially in the form of before and after pictures) can be helpful, a personal visit is best. Curtis finds many clients through the educational presentations he gives; you will see him and other panelists speaking and teaching throughout the year.

How to find someone you click with. Both Kim and Danna say the initial communication is an opportunity to determine if a prospective landscaper is in alignment

with what you are seeking. You'll determine what they can provide, communication style/preferences, time frame, budget, your experience level, their experience level, how much effort/expense you can put into maintenance, how the landscaped area will be used. Larry said at the end of a consultation, both parties generally know if the fit is there. Curtis underscored this, but he emphasized keeping your eyes open through the entire process; communication helps. Larry and Mimi stressed that you should be honest about plant species or specimens you're very attached to and how much time for care you have. Eryn pointed out that winter is the perfect time to talk to people because they are less busy and are lining up projects for the following season.

Landscaping is expensive. Smaller companies may have lower overhead and be more affordable, while larger companies can generally handle all the aspects of a complicated job without involving subcontractors. All our panel members have a philosophy around habitat and the importance of this work, and they are more than happy to share it with you.

What you must cover. There are some challenging areas that you should ask about up front. What is your cancellation policy? What are things that could go wrong with this project? What could cause delays or cost overruns? What do you do to clean up after yourself? If you have kids, dogs, environmental allergies, an HOA, and/or if you travel a lot, you **MUST** mention it.



Where do you walk in your yard? What kind of path do you like?

Our pros have questions themselves: Kim asks what impacts your yard, for example, animals, people, the environment (wind, neighbor spraying herbicides, etc.)? Do you have any current plants with high emotional/sentimental value? What is buried (water/electrical) should I know about? Where do you walk in the yard? How do you move through this space? Do you need accommodations? Curtis stresses that you must be honest about your needs, your skills and your time. Do you need something low maintenance or do you need referrals for garden maintenance professionals?

Our experts conveyed that you need to establish what portions of the landscaping project a candidate is qualified to do. Some landscapers only do design and installation or just installation and maintenance. Not everyone does hardscaping, fencing, retaining walls, irrigation systems or ponds, but everyone we spoke with can provide referrals. Eryn has tried to put a great deal of information on her website to be as transparent as possible with clients; she does the same with invoices.



Where will the plants be sourced? Generally, smaller plants survive better and mature faster.

Red flags. Be sure to ask about the use of landscape fabric and artificial turf. Our pros generally don't use them and will educate clients about the ecological pitfalls and limitations associated with them. Ask how plants are planted and what happens to excess yard waste and soil (to compost facilities or for reuse whenever possible). Ask where they source their plants and what sizes they recommend and why. Generally smaller plants (forbs and grasses) survive better, cost less and mature faster. Native plants grown without pesticides tend to come from smaller and/or specialty nurseries or wholesalers. Danna recommends asking about the density of planting (or the total number of plants going in) and when the landscape will mature. Kim says landscapers should be candid about their expertise and demur when something you ask for is out of their scope, and it's okay if they don't immediately know the answer to something. Habitat gardening with native plants in the end is about ecological landscaping, and how and why soil in a particular area is prepped, with what, and what materials are sourced and how matters.

The project itself. Some of our pros help with grants and habitat certification, and some don't—it's worth asking upfront. Most can also break the project into phases over years. Our pros work with everyone from first-time gardeners to people who are habitat experts needing help with design and implementation. Don't be afraid to really interact with our professionals. Larry says designing your yard is a very personal experience keyed to your desires and your space. Eryn says starting the process far in advance allows for better communication and plant availability. For example, depending on timing, she can have plants custom grown for your project, and you may have more flexibility in scheduling.

The bottom line. The sense that I have from our professional panel is that this is special work that they strive to do well. Just as being members of Wild Ones ends up being a lot about building relationships and sharing information, working with a native plant landscaper is similar, but on a more personal level. Talk to your WOFR friends, ask whom they've worked with, and start the conversation yourself.

Disclaimer: The Front Range Chapter of Wild Ones does not endorse the use or work of any of the landscaping contractors included in this article. WOFR encourages anyone interested in native plant landscaping projects for their own property to do their own search and evaluation of potential contractors.

Grants You May Be Eligible For, and Other Ways of Getting Free or Cheap Native Plants

By Kristine Johnson

Did you know that there are organizations which give away money for native plants, or packages of native plants, or discounts on native plants? Sure, we know you're getting really good seeds, propagation information, and plants from Wild Ones Front Range events, but the landscape (pun intended) is even larger.

People and Pollinators Action Network—December/January

PPAN has a winter grant cycle that awards \$500 to \$2000 to “community organizations, businesses, governments, schools, farms, Indigenous Nations, public housing, and other institutions to support the development of healthy pollinator habitat.” They state “we prioritize projects that: are located within marginalized communities; maximize community outreach; increase biodiversity; and that have matching funds or existing capacity to implement.” While this grant is closed for this year, you should keep your eyes open for next year. <https://www.peopleandpollinators.org/habitat-fund>

Colorado Native Plant Society—ongoing; education grant February 1/August 1

While CoNPS grants generally do not pay for plants, there **is** a grant (the Mission Grant) awarded up to twice a year which supports “projects that further education, stewardship, and advocacy for Colorado native plants and habitats” including “projects to protect or conserve native plants and habitats.” This might be a good option for some of our regional groups or affiliated partner groups to develop educational materials or work on demonstration gardens. Awards are \$1000 each. Applicants must be members of the Colorado Native Plant Society. <https://conps.org/conps-grants/>

Resource Central—lawn replacement program—ongoing, February-September

Many municipalities in Colorado support applicants in Resource Central's Lawn Replacement Program. Qualified applicants receive up to \$750 off of lawn removal services or up to 4 free Gardens in a Box of waterwise plants. (Many but not all of the plants are native; choose your boxes carefully!) Go to the link provided, select your water provider, and check out the FAQ. A little patience may be required; we did this at my home, and we applied in the spring but got our boxes in the fall. Even if you don't remove lawn, you may be eligible for a discount on a Garden in a Box if your water provider participates in Resource Central's programs. <https://resourcecentral.org/lawn/>

Landscaping with Colorado Native Plants Conference—March

Every year, grants are announced at this March conference, and applications are generally due by March 31st. In the past, recipients and categories have included private residents, HOAs, nonprofits, and municipal projects. The number of the grants varies, but generally at least \$500 is available for recipients, with public areas receiving more (up to \$2500). “The Landscaping with Colorado Native Plants (LWCNP) Conference is pleased to offer three grant opportunities annually to promote native plants in our landscapes to benefit pollinators and songbirds, reduce water use, and restore the beauty and health of nature in the places we live, work and play. Applications are accepted from home gardeners, HOAs, businesses, non-profits, local governments, community associations, schools, senior centers and others!” To land a grant, make sure to carefully read what the evaluators are looking for, and emphasize that in your design and description.

<https://www.landscapingwithcoloradonativeplants.org/grants>

Colorado Garden Foundation—August

These are grants for organizations, municipalities, and other nonprofits and governmental agencies. The annual grant program awards up to \$15,000, and the major grant program awards up to \$75,000. The grants fund “Capital Improvements; Matching; Project/Program Support; Research” and no design, administrative, or salary expenses.

“The organization supports horticulture and horticultural related projects and those groups that are involved or directly related. Education is emphasized. Areas of interest include horticultural-related research, education, therapy and community improvements.”
<https://www.coloradogardenfoundation.org/about/grants/>

Northern Water–Spring through Fall

These are also grants for larger entities: “cities, enterprises, non-profits, businesses, schools, multi-family complexes and HOA-managed landscapes.” Northern Water funds projects which are “Colorado climate-friendly landscapes that serve as regional demonstration and outreach efforts” which reduce “water use while expanding ecosystem services.” They provide matching funds up to \$25,000 for groups within their service boundaries.

<https://maps.northernwater.org/portal/apps/experiencebuilder/experience/?id=5db2a24f518e4f50b995654b0213a53b> To ensure a good fit, applicants must consult with Northern Water June through September and submit an application October 2 through December 2 of the same year; the process ensures a good match between projects and grant requirements. <https://www.northernwater.org/grants>

Chapter News

Join us at the Landscaping with Colorado Native Plants Conference!



March 8, 2025

8:00 am - 4:00 pm

Colorado State University

Fort Collins

This year’s theme is Beyond the Box - Growing a Culture of Native Plant Landscaping.

The conference offers a full day of educational programming that promotes the cultivation and maintenance of native plants in the landscape. Speakers include Jennifer Jewel, Jim Tolstrup, Maggie Gaddis, Joyce Kennedy, and our own Danna Liebert on topics related to native plant restoration, breeding cultivars, native plant availability, and many others.

For more information and to register, click [here](#).

A New Chapter in the Evolution of Wild Ones Front Range (WOFR) Plant Swaps

By Peggy Hanson

Over the past four years, Wild Ones Front Range (WOFR) has been strategically involved in hosting successful native plant swaps to improve accessibility to members and the public. We have built some great partnerships, amazing volunteer efforts, and investment in these outreach events, for which we are grateful. However, at the 2024 board retreat meeting, the WOFR board deliberated on the swaps and came to the realization that some of these events have become unsustainable given their size and the level of their demand on the chapter's volunteer resources.

For example, the 2024 Denver Plant Swap saw 700 participants, with over 7,000 plants shared and the support of 538 volunteer hours. From organizing and supporting individual efforts to propagate, providing supplies and support in transplanting and keeping plant material healthy, to finding venues with adequate space and parking, recruiting volunteers and curating the educational messages necessary for recipients to achieve success with their native plants... plant swaps of this size require more than our entirely volunteer-run chapter can provide. Compounding concerns around the heavy lift needed for large swaps was skepticism about the percentage of plants' survival at their new homes—how many of those 7,000+ plants given away at the Denver Swap survived and thrived in their new homes? We can't know with events of this type and scale. We'd love to know that we are truly living up to our mission of connecting people and building habitat in a more deliberate, and for our volunteer efforts, sustainable way. The board is shifting the plant swap format in an effort to realistically balance our goal of improving accessibility to and getting more native plants into Front Range landscapes in a way that fits with supporting our members' needs and working within our volunteer resources.

A New Format: In 2025, WOFR will once again host or co-host plant swaps in all of our six regions: Northern Colorado, Denver Metro, Douglas-Elbert Counties, Boulder County, Jefferson County (Jeffco) and Pikes Peak. However, many of these will be members-only events, as the leadership for such events shifts to regional coordinators who can best determine the scale and format of plant swaps which work best for their regions and their members. For some regions, this will be their very first swaps; starting small and taking the needs and considerations of their local members, climate, and resources will improve the success of these swap events in terms of replicability, connection between members, and building habitat successfully. We hope to inspire ongoing community involvement and replication as regional swaps, no doubt, gain popularity and attendance, but we aim to work within the human and other resources we have. We feel that more small swaps will be more manageable than a few large swaps. The WOFR board believes this is a much more sustainable model that will result in more and better community bonds, as plant donors will more likely know the recipients of their plant donations. We also hope to make propagation events and dig and donate events smaller scale, easier to manage, and wider spread, with the hopes of greater survival of plants in their new homes and better support for their adopters. We expect that plant donations in all six regions will continue to surge and result in even more native plants in landscapes along the Front Range, but hopefully in a manner that keeps members and volunteers engaged and helps empower more people to learn propagation skills on their own.

Tentatively, all regional plant swaps hosted or co-hosted by WOFR will be held in the month of June. We are still nailing down venues and specific dates/times for most, but the Northern Colorado Native Plant Exchange (WOFR is a founding member) is a public event scheduled for Saturday, June 14, as part of the Fort Collins EcoFest again. We will post these events on our website as the times and dates are secured. Events will have propagation, transplant, dig and donate, and day-of-event volunteer opportunities. Please consider pitching in.

PROPAGATION HELP WANTED! If you love to grow native plants and like to share your interest/passion, consider helping us propagate plant materials for plant swaps up and down the Front Range. Please contact Peggy Hanson at pegshanson@gmail.com or your regional coordinator to find out more. Even if it is only a flat or two, we can support you with seed, soil and recycled pots. We can also support transplanting efforts from jugs to pots. Spreading out the propagation efforts is hugely efficient and effective. Thanks for your consideration.

Wild Ones succeeds in part because we build community as we build habitat. We hope that with more intentionality, we can build better connections within regions and between people, and that our propagation efforts really take root as we get back to our roots (puns intentional).

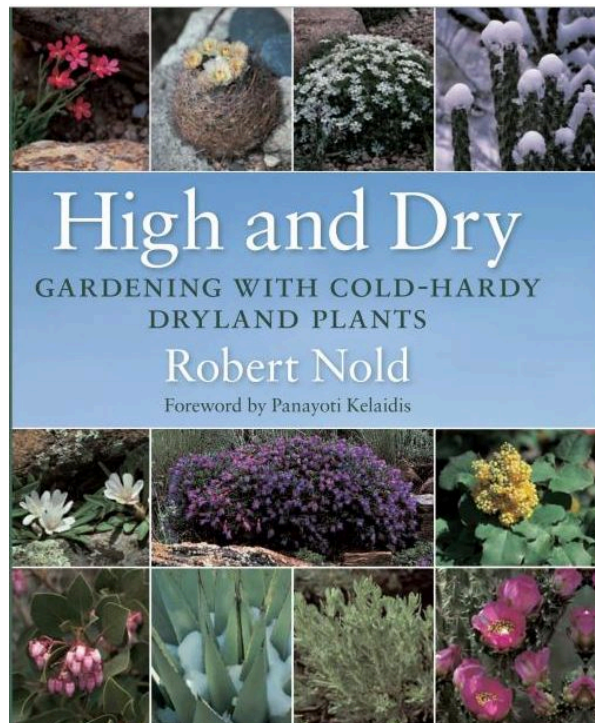
A great big thanks for the continued support from American Clayworks and Supply for generously donating nearly 24 cu ft of our favorite soil to support WOFR's propagation and transplant efforts for plant swaps along the Front Range. This soil is for all you potential volunteers who propagate and rescue volunteer native plants from gardens!



Book Review

High and Dry: Gardening with Cold-Hardy Dryland Plants

by Robert Nold



Review by Ayn Schmit

I loved this book; Bob had me laughing right from his “If the Pilgrims Had Landed at La Jolla” opening subtitle. He offers an acerbic– and familiar to us Colorado gardeners–rant about prominent horticulturalists’ pontifications on how we should garden with techniques and approaches right out of England and the northeastern US, which he entertainingly refers to as a sort of horticultural Manifest Destiny. Instead, he says, “imagine a gardening style where any plant needing summer watering would be automatically rejected...” What follows is an engaging, amusing and spot-on commentary on the vagaries of gardening in the dry High Plains, his absolute lack of planning or design in his own garden spaces (he claims the design work was done by border collies running back and forth in the yard), and the merits and joys of what he calls the wild garden. He has a wonderful discussion of rock gardens, with and without containers and troughs, complete with his own recipe for homemade troughs. He covers soil, transplanting, and propagating with the same amusing and discursive voice that is what makes this book an absolute joy to read–sometimes involving laughing out loud in that way that makes people look askance at you in coffee shops. It is a lengthy and weighty tome; one might consider reading the introductory chapter first, and then perusing the remaining plant-specific sections a bit at a time.

The book is full of beautiful color photos and exquisite illustrations of the flora–and sometimes their insect companions–by Cindy Nelson-Nold (see for example the beautiful rendering of beardlip penstemon, *Penstemon barbatus*, with the horse lubber grasshopper, *Taeniopoda eques*, on p. 63). Unfortunately, the book is currently only available in print on demand with black and white illustrations. I recommend doing some online sleuthing to find a used copy with the full color illustrations as they are absolutely beautiful. I will keep this book on my shelf and look at time and again; it will not disappoint as both a resource for High Plains gardeners and as a delightful reverie on the challenge Colorado gardeners face. I’ll leave you with a quote from the Introduction: “This book is the product of a gardener, who, after forty-five years of living in what he has always loudly proclaimed to be the most awful gardening climate on the planet, finally came to his senses and decided things were not as bad as that.”

Upcoming Events

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

Boulder Seedling Sowing/Bumping Volunteer Event/Workshop

Sunday, March 9

Northern Region Social: Growing Native Plants from Seed Indoors

Sunday, March 16

WOFR Board Meeting

Wednesday, March 19

Members Only

National Panel Discussion: The Advocacy Power of Public Native Gardens

Thursday, March 20

Pikes Peak Region Happy Hour Social

Friday, March 21

In Memoriam: Denise Lee



Wild Ones says farewell to Denise Lee, a beautiful person who lost her battle with a genetic condition a few weeks ago. She was a mom, wife, volunteer, friend, and homeowner who was converting her yard and her church's property into a native habitat. Denise was an active member of Wild Ones Front Range Chapter. A talented and conscientious grower, she contributed seeds and plants to our swaps, and helped dig up, care for, and cart plants to WOFR plant swaps. She also actively recruited people to join Wild Ones.

According to Peggy Hanson, most memorable were her banana yuccas. They were healthy and big, and we wish we had a picture of one of them!

She embodied WOFR's mission of connecting people and native plants for a healthy planet. As she said her final goodbyes, she even gifted her recently bought native plants to members in friendship. While many of us never met her in person, her love has been stitched into our gardens, and it will be carried forward.

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.

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



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