



Blue Grama/Buffalo Grass Lawn in the Spring. Photo by R. Phillips.

June 2025

In this newsletter...

- **Beginner's Planting Information Video**
- **Feature Article: Colorado Native Plants that Tolerate Shade**
- **Plant Spotlight: Blue Grama Grass**
- **Plant Profile: Argemone polyanthemos (Prickly Poppy)**
- **Member Spotlight: Mary Hinton**
- **Chapter News**
- **Upcoming Events: Plant Swaps, Garden Crawls, and more!**

For Beginner Native Plant Gardeners

If you are truly a beginner, this video from Wild Ones National Is a primer you'll want to watch!

[Native Plants Planted Right: A Practical Guide for Beginners](#)

Colorado Native Plants that Tolerate Shade

By Deborah Lebow Aal; with help from Robert Greer, Jan Midgley and Jonathan Sciarcon

This is a revised version of our most popular toolkit entry.

Gardening in the shade with native plants requires quite a bit of creativity on the Front Range of Colorado. We did not have many native trees here on the plains, so there are not many native plants adapted to growing in shade. But, with the artificial shade we have created with the built environment, and the trees we have planted, we need to find native plants that will tolerate some shade. We may need to look to the mountains or the eastern/central great plains for regional, shade-tolerant native plants, as you'll see in the list below.

And, why native plants? If you're reading this, I am guessing you know how important they are to the ecosystem, but if not, [the best explanation is described here](#).

Considerations Before Selecting Plants

Partial shade and full shade are very different. Partial shade will allow more native species to do well. In fact, with our intense Colorado sun, many plant species with labels indicating they need full sun may do just fine in partial shade. Full shade will be more difficult. A really densely shaded area will probably support little, and what it does support will be mostly foliage. Four or more hours of direct or indirect sun a day will allow a much bigger palette of plants. So, assess the amount of shade under your tree or near your house before planting any of these recommended plants. A good rule of thumb is that plants with broad leaves will do well in the shade here, though there are of course exceptions.

In addition to the shade it casts, we do need to remember that a large portion of a tree's biomass is underground. We need to be cognizant of the density of the root structure to know what can happily grow under a tree canopy. If plants are competing with a dense root structure, they will have a more difficult time. And, you may have to water more, as plants under a tree canopy get less rain water or snow than those out in the open. Obviously, not much will survive with no water.

One or two more considerations. If your shade is facing north, the plants that will survive are different than if facing south. The temperature difference can be substantial, so assess that as well before planting. And, consider the edge, or transition zone, from shade to sun, differently than the area completely under a tree. You will have to experiment with these plants, so our suggestion is start with just a few and assess how they do. And, as with all plantings, there are no guarantees, but here are a few suggestions.

[To Read the Rest of the Story](#)

Plant Spotlight: Blue Grama Grass

By Karen Vanderwall

Popping into a local nursery one day a few years ago, a very interesting tall ornamental grass caught my eye. With closer inspection I noticed that the seed heads resembled blond eyelashes – it was spectacular!

The grass was 'Blond Ambition', a specific cultivar of blue grama grass*. Upon further reading I discovered that blue grama grass is an important *native* plant of Colorado. It is so important that it happens to be Colorado's state grass!



The seed head of Bouteloua gracilis (blue grama) looks like an eye lash. (Photo by Linda Hellow)

Blue grama grass, *Bouteloua gracilis*, is a perennial warm season bunchgrass which, unlike spreading grasses, has a bunching or clumping growth habit. Blue grama, also known as mosquito grass (and **not** because it attracts mosquitos!), grows to 6-24 inches tall (including seed heads), spreading from 12-18 inches wide and develops pinkish horizontal seedheads (resembling eye lashes) in late summer. It then turns a light tan and if left un-cut, continues to shine through winter.

This perennial grows in full sun and does not need watering after it is established. It is drought tolerant and grows easily from seed. Blue grama is a great option for those areas that are difficult to maintain (looking at you parkway strip), where there can be more limited maintenance (mowing just a few times a year) and in areas with little foot traffic, due to its clumping growth habit. It is commonly planted as a turfgrass when mixed with buffalo grass. Because of its bunching habit, it mixes well in sunny perennial gardens. Blue grama actively grows from April – October.

[To Read the Rest of the Story](#)

Plant Profile

Argemone polyanthemus (Prickly Poppy)

By Deb Lebow Aal



Prickly Poppy. (Photo from Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center)

Some ask whether this a weed or a wildflower. Well, it has prickly leaves, like a thistle (some in fact call it a thistle), and pops up in places where you did not plant it... hmmm

It is no weed. Always looking for some showy native annuals in my garden, I love this prickly plant with its large white flower. It's a desert plant, so if you're thrifty with water in your yard, this is a good one for you. The stunning white, papery flowers have a bright yellow center. It's sometimes called Cowboy's fried egg, as that's what it looks like. Plant a few, and it will self seed (I am told – see below) in different places in your yard. It will not stay where you planted it but will bloom from spring till frost. In fact, it blooms in the hottest months, when other plants seem to wilt, and its white flowers show so beautifully. Despite being an annual, it has a deep taproot, which makes it super drought tolerant. It can grow 3-5 feet tall.

Now, all parts of this plant are poisonous, including the seeds, so be careful with it, but bees, butterflies and beetles depend on its abundant pollen and nectar, and don't mind the prickly stems. Native Americans used all sorts of poppies, or members of the Argemone family, as a source of medicine. Concoctions from poppies were used for anything from anesthetizing fish to treating cold sores, cuts, scrapes, and congestion associated with colds and flus.

And, if you're looking for a plant deer and rabbits won't touch, this fits the bill!

My only issue with it is I cannot get it to stay in the garden, despite reports of it self seeding for others all over their yards. I have them around for a few years, and then they are gone. So, I get some more... if you have success keeping this lovely flower in your yard, we'd like to hear what you're doing! Email us at FrontRangeWildOnes@gmail.com.

Member Spotlight

Wild Ones Member Mary Hinton



While living in Nashville, TN, I read an article in the *Tennessee Conservationist* about the Wild Ones Tennessee Valley Chapter. It made such an impression on me that I searched for a local chapter and found (and joined) the Middle Tennessee Chapter. I really enjoyed meeting the folks leading the chapter. They were experts in their professions, enjoyed friendly rivalries regarding their native gardens, reached out to neighboring Wild Ones chapters, and were generous with their knowledge and hands-on help.

After thirty-two years of living in Nashville, where I retired from teaching public high school math, I moved to Denver in 2021 to be close to my young grandchildren. As soon as I landed in Denver, I transferred my Wild Ones membership to the Front Range Chapter (WOFR). I met Deb Lebow Aal and several other WOFR members at the Ekar Farm Demonstration garden. Their enthusiasm for native plants was catching, and over coffee at the Copper Door, I told Deb that I could help send out the New Member Welcome Packet. That has evolved into my role of maintaining the WOFR online membership list based on daily updates from the national Wild Ones organization.

In Nashville, I helped other volunteers tend the memorial garden at my church's campus. The garden's "east of the Mississippi" plants included arborvitae, azalea, nandina, iris, and oak leaf hydrangea. In Colorado, where I saw some of these old familiar plants, I also saw lots of irrigation lines and lots of irrigation water running into the street. In Denver's beautiful open spaces that connect miles of neighborhoods, I also saw grasses and small trees. I clearly remember an "aha" moment at Bluff Lake Nature Center in Central Park. Looking out over the meadow one afternoon, it seemed to me that when I looked closely, I could see every color of the rainbow in the grasses, shrubs, and trees. It caused a huge shift in attitude about living in and loving the West. The second big shift was learning to see the beauty in these native plants all year long – literally through every season.

That motivated me, in 2023, to get approval from my HOA to create an 81 sq. ft. native garden just outside the front door of my condo. Caleb Gruber of All Beings Ecoscapes helped me design and install the garden. Most of the original plants came from Resource Central's Garden In A Box "Colorado Oasis." Having the pre-selected plants and Caleb's help, was the perfect way to get started. New plant species, given by WOFR propagators, have been intentionally added. I've labeled the plants, a practice encouraged by WOFR member Ayn Schmit, and I love to watch passers-by stop to read the labels.

This year, again with Caleb's help, I am expanding the garden, working within some limitations set by the HOA. The plants will be native, with a few natives. I hand water only, which is a bit of a job, but I do believe I am using less water each year.

Making friends through WOFR has given this Colorado transplant the opportunity to make connections with wonderful people, learn about Western native plants and water issues, volunteer at both WOFR and Denver Parks and Recreation demonstration gardens, and support the many other volunteers who make WOFR thrive.

This is my original garden, beginning its third full growing season.



Colorado Oasis

Plant List

Colorado Oasis			Qty.
1	<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i>	Blue Grama Grass	2
2	<i>Campanula rotundifolia</i>	Blue Native Harebell	1
3	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	Common White Yarrow	1
4	<i>Penstemon eatonii</i>	Firecracker Penstemon	3
5	<i>Ratibida columnifera pulcherrima</i>	Prairie Red Coneflower	2
6	<i>Penstemon strictus</i>	Rocky Mountain Penstemon	3
7	<i>Panicum virgatum</i>	Switchgrass	1
8	<i>Aquilegia chrysantha</i>	Yellow Columbine	2

This is the original Colorado Oasis Garden plant list.

Chapter News

Planting Time is Here! Check out the [Events](#) section of the website to locate a Plant Swap Event near you!

There's a simple way you can contribute financially to WOFR, without spending any money! A free donation! Link WOFR (Wild Ones Front Range Chapter) with your King Soopers Card. Their [Community Rewards Program](#) will then make a contribution to WOFR at the end of the year, based on the total amount of purchases by the people who have linked their card to our organization. Do it today!

Our next Board Meeting is June 18, from 6-8 pm. If you have any interest in joining our board, consider attending our meeting this month to see how we operate. [Email us](#) to get an invitation.

Upcoming Events

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

Northern Region's Loveland Garden Crawl (*member only*)
June 1

Pikes Peak Region Native Plant Swap (*member only*)
June 1

Boulder County+ Region Bumping Volunteer Event/workshop (*member only*)
June 1

Jeffco Regional Native Plant Share (*member only*)
June 14

NoCO Native Plant Swap & Giveaway
June 14

WOFR Monthly Board Meeting
June 18

BoCo+ Regional Social: BYOB and Blue Mist Penstemons (*member only*)
June 20

Denver Metro Region Native Plant Swap (*member only*)
June 21

Jeffco Garden Crawl (*member only*)
June 22

BoCo+ Regional Garden Crawl & Social: Rocky Mountain Botanic Gardens in Lyons
(*member only*)
June 22

Northern Region's Greeley Garden Crawl (*member only*)
June 29

Annual WOFR Chapter-Wide Membership Potluck (*member only*)
August 23

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 | 6901 East Walsh Place | Denver, CO 80224 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email marketing for free today!