

# Albuquerque Chapter Newsletter

## Native Plant Society of New Mexico

Volume 3, Number 2

April-June 2011

### From the President: Landscape Design Course “Ahas”

After eleven months of work on the Landscape Design course as its “headmistress,” I had, not surprisingly, some “ahas” about the event and its importance.

No doubt about it – the course was a roaring success. To start with, we had eight extremely talented and knowledgeable instructors, 100 eager and enthusiastic participants, and about 35 NPSNM volunteers invested in making the two-weekend course a success. Solid planning preceded the course. Many, many meetings worked out potential kinks, and a willingness from everyone to go the extra mile assured the course’s success.

Special recognition needs to go, however, to the efforts of Lolly Jones, who served as registrar, problem solver of all things computer, and my advisor, and to Bob Hass, who served as editor of the materials I created and as my other advisor. Their contributions were exceptional and unending. The event could not have happened without them. George Miller also went beyond by organizing the educational files and presenting them as a running slide show on two computers. His presentation never lacked an interested audience.

Additionally, all of the chapter chairs (Bettie Hines, Tom Stewart, Lisa Driscoll, Sandra Lynn, George Miller,



Attendees socialize during a break at the Landscape Design Course.

and Carolyn Dodson), and co-chairs (Beth Herschman, Peggy Wells, Bill Dodson, and Hubert Davis) carried out their tasks superbly. And, whenever I asked anyone for help, they somehow found the time to give it.

Quite frankly, however, the big “aha” was that although we gave a gift to community-members through

this class, which they clearly wanted and needed, we also gave a gift to ourselves.

That gift was the act of service. The reality is that after high school, adults rarely get to be part of something big, to bond with others on a project that is challenging, difficult, and productive for a community,



Four of the presenters at the Landscape Design Course (L to R): George Radnovich, Beth Herschman, Virginia Burris, and Wes Brittenham.

whether it be a school, a neighborhood, or a city. Although the chairs and their committees and the instructors worked hard and met way too regularly, the bond and commitment that grew out of this effort motivated us to touch something of our human potential. That’s something we don’t often get to do.

It felt good to stretch, to be part of something greater than ourselves. It felt good to know our efforts would have a lasting impact on members of the community. It was fine to know we were playing a part in something important. It felt exhilarating to know that a seemingly impossible goal (100 participants, 35 volunteers, two weekends of commitment) actually happened because we made it happen.

The gift was in the giving, in the doing of something valuable. So, I would urge you, whatever your interests, to commit to the projects of your organizations. Be a part. Don’t miss out on the giving part.

Like the dog who buries his bone and digs it up occasionally to see if it is still there, we waste our talents when we bury them. We need to burnish them, to let them shine by using them to make good things happen.

**Frances Robertson, President  
Albuquerque Chapter, NPSNM**

## Musings of a Habitat Gardener: Children in the Garden

by Virginia Burris

The first visit by a group of schoolchildren to my garden convinced me of the power of a habitat garden. Once a week, the class was led by their teacher on “get acquainted” walks around the elementary school neighborhood. My garden was one of their walks.

As soon as the first child stepped over the threshold into the backyard habitat, she yelled happily and started running down the gravel path. The rest of the class quickly followed. One little boy suddenly veered toward a rosemary plant covered with midnight-blue blossoms and came to a screeching halt. “Look, the bees are mating!” With that beginning I knew the field trip would be a success. The naturalistic garden had touched some innate feelings deep inside the children.

Several years later, the spring rains were kind to my garden. The Palmer’s penstemons along the cement sidewalk were in their glory, standing at least three feet tall. A third grade class from the neighborhood elementary school was coming to visit. I hoped an interesting butterfly or bird would fly by to show the children the delight of having wildlife in the garden.

The children approached a stand of penstemon buzzing with bees of all sizes and kinds. Spell-bound by the action, the children stopped. As bees moved from flower to flower, more and more lemon-yellow pollen covered their fuzzy bodies. A large bumble bee moved slowly and assuredly as if he were king of the pollen patch. The children watched intently. Birds and butterflies would have easily been startled by movement of children, but the bees were so engrossed in harvesting nectar and pollen they did not notice 20 pairs of little eyes taking in every movement. Bees were the perfect wildlife for introducing children to a habitat garden.

That same year, a young medical student moved next door with her five-year-old son. I invited them over to see my garden. Her son walked to the edge of my deck and silently surveyed the garden. I thought to myself, “He does not like this garden. It’s too cluttered, too messy, not enough bright colors.” Just then my negative thoughts were interrupted as he turned his head, looked at me, and said in a very quiet, forthright voice, “I like it!”

I also meet children in the natural habitat garden I designed for the Unitarian Church in Albuquerque. One Sunday morning while I was working in the garden, a three-year old girl led her mother down the path. “She insists we walk through the garden each time we come to church,” the mother told me, smiling.

Adults I meet in the garden tell me the many ways children connect to the garden. A teacher from a nearby school told me about a young child who, in spite of the teacher’s efforts, showed no interest in reading. The frustrated teacher decided to follow the child’s interest and let her spend time outside. Each time, the child walked closer to the garden. One day, the child walked close enough to notice a metal sign in front of a tree. Pointing to the sign, the child asked, “What does that say?” The teacher said this was the first time anyone could remember the child showing the slightest interest in reading.

On their way home from school, students from a middle-school walk by the garden. Instead of taking the shortest way home, which is a hard cement sidewalk along a busy street, they choose to walk through the garden, down the curving gravel path lined with shrubs and trees, bunch grasses, and wildflowers. Even though the path is only 70 feet long, this short “trip in the natural world” seems to bring something special into the students’ lives, for I’ve seen them repeat it again and again.

Do children like to be in habitat gardens? The resounding answer is “YES.”



*Penstemon palmeri*. Photo courtesy of Plants of the Southwest, Santa Fe, NM.

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**Virginia Burris** is past president and current conservation chair of the Albuquerque Chapter, NPSNM, and consults on habitat landscape design.

## Landscaping with Natives: Hardy Shrubs

By George Oxford Miller

After Arctic temperatures embalmed New Mexico this winter, I'm anxiously waiting to see how my landscape plants fared. New plants with tender branching, and many mass-grown plants that come from southern Texas and Arizona growers, may not be hardened against the sub-zero temperatures that gripped New Mexico. Local native plant nurseries overwinter plants outdoors so they're proven cold-hardy. Here are three guaranteed freeze-proof natives that will beautify your yard.

### Serviceberry, *Amelanchier utahensis*



Reaching 15 feet high and wide, this deciduous tree grows from high-desert pinion-juniper to high mountain slopes (3,000–9,000 feet). Abundant white flowers add early spring color and fall turns the tiny leaves red and yellow, but don't expect a pageant. Winter exposes the intricate branching, making this plant a four-season attraction. Serviceberry complements evergreen pines and junipers and shrubby Gambel and scrub oaks. Serviceberry needs gravelly, well-draining soil, full sun to partial shade, and occasional deep watering in Albuquerque. Deer browse the leaves.

### Cliffrose, *Purshia stansburiana*

From high-desert scrubland to pinion-juniper and ponderosa forests (3,000–8,000 feet), this member of the rose family thrives in full sun to partial shade and coarse, well-draining soils. Showy, creamy flowers cover the wand-like branches from April to September, and seeds with feathery tails accent the tiny, ever-



green leaves through the fall. Fast growing to 3–6 feet tall, cliffrose complements deciduous three-leaf sumac, desert olive, serviceberry, and desert willow. Cliffrose needs occasional deep watering in areas with less than 12 inches of rain per year. Deer browse cliffrose heavily.



### Sand Sage, *Artemisia filifolia*



This small shrub loves the wind-blown sand of the West Mesa. Silky, ever-gray, thread-like leaves wave in the spring winds and accent walls, wildscapes, and mixed plantings. Sand sage provides low-strata interest for the ornate trunks of desert willow, mesquite, and desert olive, all of which grow in similar habitat. It eventually reaches 4 feet by 4 feet and needs occasional pruning to keep it dense. Sand sage likes full sun and sandy, well-draining soil. Once established, after two growing seasons, sand sage doesn't need watering to survive but a few good drinks in drought keep it shipshape in the landscape.

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**George Miller** wrote *Landscaping with Native Plants of the Southwest*, available from the Native Plant Society and local bookstores.

## The Landscape Design Course: A Student Perspective

By Dianne Boles-Scott

Arriving at Albuquerque Academy's performing arts auditorium for the first day of the landscape design course, the approximately 100 students received packets of materials. The packet included a syllabus, instructor biographies, various plant lists, an additional resource list, and planning materials. We also received the Native Plant Society of New Mexico publication *Central New Mexico Gardens* and the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority's guide to xeriscaping.

Session one was an overview of the landscape design course featuring George Miller, an NPSNM member, frequent contributor to this newsletter, photographer, and author of several books on native plant species. George began the overview session by defining the Chihuahuan high desert, punctuating his talk with his own wonderful photos. George discussed the philosophy of using water-wise, native plants in an area that averages less than 12 inches of rain per year. For the newly arrived to New Mexico, this was a revelation in the variety of landscapes found here. For a native girl who studied geography in college, it was a major "aha" moment to realize I'd lived in the piñon-juniper landscape zone my whole life. How could I have not realized that?

Next, Beth Hershman, President of the Council of Albuquerque Garden Clubs, presented "Bare Ground to Finished Landscape." Beth presented our homework assignment for the week, designing our own landscapes, and walked us through her landscape design process. She showed us how to map things using x-y coordinates on a grid (think algebra). Brilliant! Beth advised putting everything on our grid. "Do it for absolutely everything...doors, windows, sun, shade, everything." She went on to discuss the rest of her process – creating a wish list of ideas, planning hardscape, choosing plants, and finally adding irrigation to the plan.

What a great start. The lovely lady sitting next to me and I agreed, we were going home overwhelmed with really good information.

The next morning we began with an engaging presentation on permaculture given by Jim Brooks, president of Soilutions, Inc. Jim began with an interesting scientific presentation on reversing desertification; the meaning of permaculture; and the stacking of function in nature. He used catch phrases like "the problem is the solution" and "least change has greatest effect" to present a different way of thinking about and observing nature. To demonstrate this idea, Jim entertained us with a story about turning a

"problem" slope into a very functional compost heap. Organic refuse was deposited at the top and slid down to the bottom to become compost. In Jim's example, illustrated with pictures, chickens were used to speed up the process. The audience was delighted by the idea of chickens as the best weed control, pest control, compost facilitators, and manure makers. All that and eggs too – who knew chickens could multitask?



Participants get to mingle during a refreshments break at the Landscape Design Course.

Judith Phillips was up next with "Companion Planting in the Design." Judith is an activist, teacher, and landscape designer, and the author of several books on gardening, including *New Mexico Gardener's Guide*. Judith advised using plant combinations that were sustainable with a bare minimum of input once established. Judith emphasized the importance of roots and the reciprocity between canopy and carpet. She compared mountain plants that will not do well against a hot, west facing wall to chamisa, which doesn't like the mountain cold. From a list in our materials, we could follow the lovely pictures Judith presented and mark the most appealing plants for our own landscapes.

Following Judith's presentation, we gathered in the lobby, which was edged with tables for plant orders, books, and the NPSNM education file, all hotspots of activity during breaks and lunch.

During the roundtable question and answer sessions with instructors, I discovered a common problem in Albuquerque was what to do with our very thirsty mulberry trees. Mine provides essential shade for the house in summer, but I really don't want to keep the lawn underneath. Judith suggested pruning out 10% of the tree each year and under-planting with less thirsty, shade-loving plants.

After lunch, we returned to another entertaining lecture from Jim Brooks, "Passive Irrigation."

(Continued on page 6)

## The San Juan Basin Badlands Photo Contest

By Mike Richie

*Editor's note: In Volume 2, Number 2 of this newsletter, Michael Richie introduced us to the beautiful and ecologically unique San Juan Basin Badlands. Mike is back in this issue to fill us in on an exciting badlands publicity event, the San Juan Basin Badlands Photo Contest, happening this May in Albuquerque. His previous article is available through the NPSNM website.*

Photography is both an art and a powerful educational tool: one picture is worth a thousand words, as they say. New Mexico's most accomplished nature photographers have agreed to use their art to educate and energize the public regarding the need to protect the San Juan Basin Badlands.

The San Juan Basin Badlands Photo Contest culminates on June 3rd with a Winner's Show gallery opening and Badlands Activist Rally. The event, which takes place at the Artistic Image Gallery in Nob Hill, will coincide with both the Nob Hill Artscrawl and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) public comment period for the badlands area management plan. The Winner's Show will feature the 40 best badlands images from the contest. Winners will be chosen from each of the five Cuba-area badlands (Mesa de Cuba, Mesa Chuijuilla, Mesa Penistaja, Ceja Pelon Petrified Forests, and Cejita Blanca) and from two categories: Artistic/Landscape and Educational.

The Educational contest category is designed to increase the types of images eligible for prizes, the kinds of photographers who compete, and the quality of information reaching the public. For example, submissions in the Educational category might include geological, paleontological, and botanical themes; macro (extreme close up) images; recreational action shots; or documentation of environmental destruction from woodcutting, grazing, or off-road vehicle (ORV) use. These images will be accompanied by a paragraph of explanation, making them an even richer educational experience for the public.

The first step in gaining enhanced protection for the five completely unprotected BLM badland areas west of Cuba has been taken. The fate of these areas is in the public's hands. The San Juan Basin Badlands Coalition's efforts has ensured that the BLM's new Resource Management Plan (RMP) Review draft contains strong provisions for increased protection for these badlands. The 90-day comment period for this RMP draft begins in mid April and runs through mid July. It is time for the Coalition to energize its members to make substantive

comments during the comment period on behalf of these unique areas. Be sure to show your support by attending the Badlands Photo Contest Winners Show and Activist Rally at the Artistic Image Gallery during the Nob Hill Artscrawl event on Friday, June 3rd.

For additional information, including the rules for entering the San Juan Basin Badlands Photo Contest and directions to Artistic Image Gallery, please visit the Artistic Image Gallery website at [www.PhotoArtNM.com](http://www.PhotoArtNM.com).



**Picturesque juniper trunk or firewood? Photo by Mike Richie.**

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**Mike Richie** is a retired science/math teacher and active outdoor writer/photographer who has become the leading advocate for the San Juan Basin Badlands.

### Refreshments Chair Needed!

We need a Refreshments Chair, a job that takes about 15 minutes each month. This volunteer does not bring the refreshments, but about five days before each meeting merely calls people to remind them that they have signed up to bring either the drinks or the eats for the evening. This is a wonderful way to get to know members, as well as to help our chapter continue having time to socialize during the meeting. Please call Bob Hass at 266-6136 if you can help out.

*(Student Perspective, continued from page 4)*

Taking some technical difficulties with the audiovisuals in stride, Jim demonstrated his other talent – stand-up comedy. Jim talked about the science of the velocity of water in erosion and the value of mulching. We learned mulch can prevent as much as 5 feet of evaporation from soil each year, helping to conserve our scarce annual rainfall. Jim advised using anything that isn't poison or ugly as mulch, including pyracantha. Really, pyracantha? I started to rethink my landscaping plan.



Saturday afternoon breakout session, featuring George Miller.

Our last presenter on Saturday was Virginia Burriss with “Creating Urban Habitat.” Virginia is past president and current conservation chair of the Albuquerque chapter of NPSNM, and a regular contributor to this newsletter. Virginia’s presentation included many slides of her yard, a certified National Wildlife Federation (NWF) habitat, and examples of her habitat designs. Virginia reviewed the five requirements for NWF certification, and offered the habitat layouts in our materials to use in our design homework.

Friday evening of the second weekend of the course began with “The Albuquerque Look: Gravel or Grass,” by George Radnovich. George is a principal in Sites Southwest, an integrated site plan and design company. George started by asking the question, “What makes a place a place”? His passion against the growing use of “zero-scaped” heat islands was evident.

George Miller wrapped up on Friday evening with more of his wonderful descriptions and photos of native plants. It felt somewhat like shopping a “runway” of native plants.

Carolyn Dodson, NPSNM member, writer, and educator, began our final day with “Attracting Pollinators,” a fascinating lecture describing species-specific coevolution and symbiosis. She gave us guidelines for attracting butterflies, which prefer small pink flowers, bees, which prefer flat-topped blue, yellow,

and white flowers, and moths, which eat at night, prefer white flowers, and find their food by scent. Carolyn presented a fascinating study confirming bees use color for efficiently obtaining nectar and pollen. In the study, researchers watched bees land on white wide-petal flowers and walk straight to dark stripes leading to pollen. To test whether the stripes were key, researchers painted over the natural stripes and created new stripes at a 90-degree angle. The bees landed, walked around, and finally walked right off the edge of the petal following the created paths.

Wes Brittenham, a landscape designer, sculptor, and lecturer, and the manager of Plants of the Southwest, presented “Design Choices for Difficult Areas.” Wes discussed challenges such as “hell strips,” or narrow areas typically next to driveways or between the street and sidewalk. Wes suggested hiking in wild areas nearby to see what was indigenous and using those plants in difficult areas. He advised using native rock as the bones of a landscape in the same way it appears in the wild. Wes also discussed soil types found in Albuquerque.

After an excellent lunch, we dove into the activity session to get hands-on help from our instructors. In addition to the lecturers, instructors included NPSNM resource staff. Each instructor was assigned a table specific to his or her expertise in a given soil type or location. At the Northeast Heights table we all collaborated on each other’s plans with suggestions and ideas. After asking a few questions of my own I finally accepted that I needed to scrap the landscape plan I had been working on for three years and start over.

Our final presenter was Wes Brittenham with “Trees, Shrubs, and Color.” Wes discussed using tree and shrub shape and color to set a visual tone or mood, to create focal points, and for seasonal interest. Wes suggested recreating naturally-occurring combinations. When using non-natives or not naturally-occurring combinations, he advised carefully matching plants of similar needs. Wes suggested shopping in fall for seasonal color plants and in winter for structural plants or evergreens. “Spring is better for hardcore desert plants,” Wes explained, because the soil needs to be warm for their roots to grow.

Amid applause and requests to have the workshop again next year, Frances Robertson, president of the Albuquerque chapter of NPSNM, closed the Landscape Design Course. I started this course full of excitement, and found interesting, knowledgeable people with a passion for xeric and native landscapes willing to share all they knew. I came away still excited and grateful for the many little and a few big “aha” moments I found. Same time next year?

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**Dianne Boles-Scott** is a NPS member, native New Mexican writer, editor, and gardener.

## UNM Herbarium Senior Collections Manager Hired

By Maya L. Kapoor

Not just anyone can go from seeking out the rarest of New Mexico plants to managing a collection of almost all documented plant species in the state. Phil Tonne, rare plant botanist at Natural Heritage New Mexico for the past ten years, is in the process of making that leap.



Phil Tonne, senior collections manager at the UNM herbarium, examines an herbarium specimen. Photo by Maya L. Kapoor.

As of April 1, Tonne is Senior Collections Manager at the University of New Mexico Herbarium. In his new role, Tonne will act as the herbarium's liaison to the public and the science community. "I will make sure people who need access [to the herbarium] and support get it, especially people who need help accessing the collection," Tonne clarified recently. A big part of his duties will be constantly improving the geographic component of the information stored by the herbarium. "We need to fill in gaps in our collection," Tonne explained. "For example, there are counties where we don't have common species [collected]."

### Pages of Plants

Simply put, an herbarium is a collection of actual specimens of the plant species in a particular location. In the case of the UNM herbarium, that region is New Mexico and surrounding states. Plant specimens are carefully identified, pressed, glued to durable sheets of paper, and stacked horizontally in cabinets. Specimens are arranged alphabetically by family, then genus, then species. About 90,000 of the approximately 118,000 specimens in the UNM herbarium are from New Mexico.

Herbarium collections are a reference to which you can compare a mystery plant as you work to identify it, but that's only the beginning. Tonne explains, "The Museum [of Southwestern Biology] in general, and the herbarium collection, are very important to understanding the natural world and our tie to that – who we are, what our role is on the planet. The herbarium represents the diversity, and sometimes abundance and distribution, of different plants." In fact, Tonne explains, the herbarium provides the "science behind our botanical understanding of the state. We get collections from all over the state for thousands of species, and we preserve them for hundreds of years for use in studies – ecological, botanic, taxonomic."

### Everyone's Herbarium

Think the herbarium is solely the territory of professional botanists? Think again. According to Tonne, "there's room for people of all walks of life to contribute to the botany and flora of New Mexico. We live in the fifth largest state and many parts are undercollected. To me, that's exciting – we still have a lot to do and learn. There's something new around every corner and people can help us with that."

A great place to learn more about the University of New Mexico Herbarium is at its website, <http://www.msb.unm.edu/herbarium/>.

If there is a particular plant or group of plants you'd like to see in person, The website of the New Mexico Biodiversity Collections Consortium is the place to go: <http://nmbiodiversity.org/>. This website allows you to do a search of all accessioned plant specimens in the state of New Mexico – which means those that Tonne manages at UNM, but also those located in herbaria at New Mexico State University, Eastern New Mexico University, and the Gila Center for Natural History.

If you would like to see plant specimens in the UNM herbarium, or speak to Tonne about donating plants you collected, you can set up an appointment to do so as described on the herbarium website.

*Note: Phil Tonne will be presenting a talk, "Rare Plant Recovery Efforts in New Mexico," at the October 5, 2011 meeting of the Albuquerque chapter of the NPSNM.*

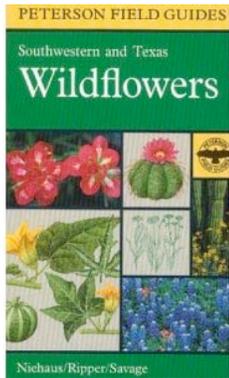
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**Maya L. Kapoor** is the editor of the newsletter of the Albuquerque chapter of NPSNM.



## The Book Corner

**A Field Guide to Southwestern and Texas Wildflowers**, by Theodore F. Niehaus. Houghton Mifflin, 1984, 449 pages, \$16.95.



A wildflower enthusiast new to New Mexico, or a long-time resident who has recently taken an interest in identifying native plants, will need a wildflower book to take into the field. With so many guides available, what do you look for to find the one that is right for you?

Local field guides listing only a few hundred plants will introduce you to the most prominent Southwestern plants. Large guides

for a more extensive part of the continent are cumbersome, with many listings that are not relevant to our flora. And, if the size and weight are inconvenient, the book will remain in the car while you are on the trail. Guides organized by flower color may seem to have a vague, messy arrangement, but they are easier to use than guides organized by family, which require previous botanical experience. Drawings present the typical form of a species with important details enhanced, in contrast to photographs, which show the true color of a flower, but can portray only one or a few individuals.

With all this in mind, Niehaus's guide, published in the Peterson Field Guide series, is an excellent choice for beginner botanists as well as for those with experience. It includes 1505 species within the area of New Mexico and the three surrounding states. To use Niehaus's guide, find your flower's color group. Then scan through the subsequent page headings to find the characters that fit – for example, “5 petals, flowers in umbel clusters, milky sap,” or “pea-like flowers, pinnate leaves.” Each page lists several plants that correspond with those characters. A short paragraph describes the distinguishing characters that mark each plant, as well as the ecological and geographical region where it is found and the season when it blooms. These descriptions are accompanied by detailed drawings, some in color, which are made even more helpful with arrows pointing to key field marks.

**Carolyn Dodson**  
Book Sales Coordinator

## Take Advantage of Member Discounts

The following local nurseries have agreed to give members of NPSNM a 10% discount on plants when you show your membership card:

### Coati Natives Nursery

320 Frost Road  
Sandia Park, NM 87047  
505-934-5396, [www.coatinativenursery.com](http://www.coatinativenursery.com)

### Great Outdoors Native Plant Nursery

10408 2<sup>nd</sup> Street NW (n. of Alameda)  
Albuquerque, NM 87114  
505-890-5311, [greatoutdoorsabq.com/home.htm](http://greatoutdoorsabq.com/home.htm)

### Mountain Gardens

12216-B Hwy 14N  
Cedar Crest, NM  
505-286-1778, [mountaingardensnm.blogspot.com](http://mountaingardensnm.blogspot.com)

### Plants of the Southwest

6680 4<sup>th</sup> Street NW (n. of Osuna)  
Albuquerque, NM 87107  
505-344-8830, [www.plantsofthesouthwest.com/](http://www.plantsofthesouthwest.com/)

### Santa Ana Garden Center

The Pueblo of Santa Ana  
157 Jemez Dam Road  
Bernalillo, NM 87004  
505-867-1322, [www.santaana.org/garden.htm](http://www.santaana.org/garden.htm)

Please support these nurseries and take advantage of the discount being offered to NPS members!

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