

Native Plant Society of New Mexico
April Newsletter

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Wild Flower Season Begins!

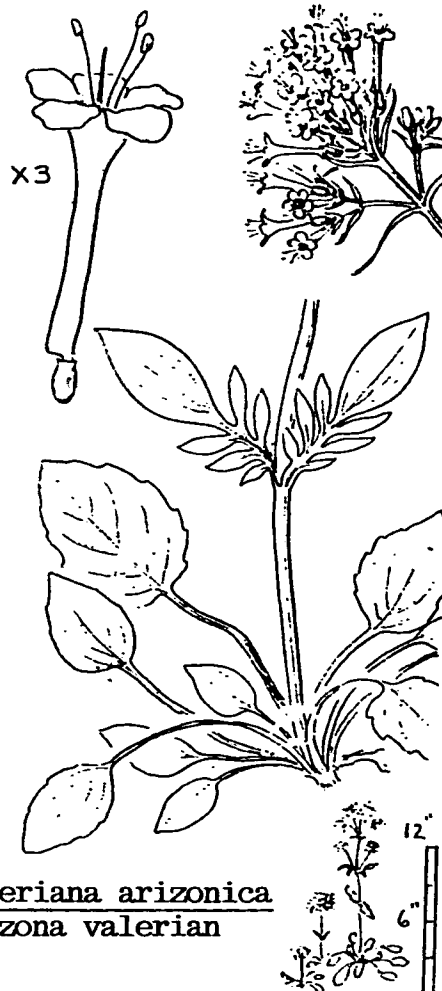
Irene Mitchell

Few people wander the woods in April, yet even in the northern part of the state, this month begins the wildflower season. On the mesas and in the canyons around the Los Alamos area, three perennial flowers are especially abundant during the month of April.

The earliest of the three is Valeriana arizonica, the Arizona valerian, which often begins to bloom in late March and can be found in bloom as late as early July. V. arizonica is a low-growing plant, its ovate leaves usually hugging the ground, and forming a symmetrical clump in favored places. It has two kinds of leaves, the broad, shiny basal ones and stem leaves that are lobed and somewhat resemble watercress. You'll find V. arizonica in the pine duff in Ponderosa pine and Douglas fir woods, and especially on steep-sided shaded canyons. It adapts beautifully to garden culture. At this time of year, it bears six to eight tall clusters (cymes) of tiny pale pink delicate-appearing flowers. New Mexico has other valerians, but this is, in my opinion, the most attractive.

Appearing from about the second week of April on are the other two spring flowers: Pulsatilla patens and Townsendia exscapa.

Pulsatilla patens is commonly called Pasque flower because it blooms around Easter time each year. Until it blooms it is hard to see as the fuzzy buds tend to hide among the native grasses. The whole plant is



Valeriana arizonica
Arizona valerian

quite hairy, a fact which protects it from cold and predators. Leaves are finely dissected and tend to stay somewhat folded until the plant blooms, after which both the leaves and stem tend to grow larger. P. patens is a much-beloved flower because it tends to defy our miserable April weather. It is sometimes listed as Anemone pulsatilla.

Though the blooms resemble large, lavender crocuses, P. patens is a member of the Ranunculaceae or Buttercup family. The colored part of the flower consists of sepals, not petals. And, contrary to common thought, this plant is a perennial with a fibrous root system, not a bulb or corm. It does not grow easily from seed or transplant. You'll find it on the north slopes of mesas and less-steep canyon sides, usually under Ponderosa pines.

Townsendia exscapa is a "belly flower", for it seldom grows over two inches in height, but may form clumps six inches across. The flower, which looks like a white daisy, is large compared to the whole plant and may be as much as $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches across.



Pulsatilla patens, or
Anemone pulsatilla
Pasque flower

Leaves are quite linear, which makes the plant hard to see as it nestles in the ground cover of pine needles or dried grass. It, too, has a common name appropriate to the season: Easter daisy. A member of the family Compositae, T. exscapa can be seen on both mesa tops and canyon bottoms.



plant
low,
with
no stems.
flowers
pinkish

Townsendia exscapa
Easter daisy

News and Notes

Field Trips

If you have a special place in mind for a field trip this summer and fall, please call Betty Milligan (983-4440) the NPS field trip coordinator.

Administrative Help Needed

The NPS needs help in a variety of areas to keep the machines rolling. If you have an inclination to get more involved in the workings of the Society—in publicity, membership, organizing a slide collection, mailing the newsletter, program planning—or any other area, please contact the Deardorffs (988-1520) or Melissa Savage (983-1113). There are so many things we could do with a little more help.

Booklets for Sale

A new booklet, Native Plants for Landscaping in Southern New Mexico, will be available for 50¢ at the Las Cruces Plant Sale. This booklet is the southern counterpart of the previously printed Native Plants for Landscaping in Northern New Mexico (50¢). Both booklets are available at 122 Mateo Circle, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501.



Las Cruces

Members of the Native Plant Society from throughout the state are invited to Las Cruces on Saturday, April 15th, for their chapter's Plant Sale. The sale will be held at the Farmer's Market which begins at 7 a.m. and continues through the day until all plants are gone. How to find the Farmer's Market: From Highway 25, take the Las Cruces west turnoff onto Main Street. Follow Main Street 2-3 miles into town to the newly remodeled Mall-Shopping Center. The sale will be in the center of the Mall. Turn left off Main Street onto Las Cruces St. to find a large, unpaved parking area. Following the sale, NPS people are invited to Carol Dimeff's home at 906 Luna for a potluck supper. After supper, Carol will show slides of native plants. There are camping facilities 20 miles from Las Cruces in the Organ Mountains; and, of course, numerous motels are available. There is limited camping space at Carol's house as well. Carol's home phone is 523-1906.

Santa Fe

April: Everyone head for Las Cruces on April 15th!

May: On Wednesday, May 24, Henry Carey of the John Muir Institute will speak on forest ecology.




Corydalis aurea
Golden smoke

This plant will be available at the Las Cruces plant sale, April 15th.

Santa Fe Plant Sale

On May 13th from 9 am to 5 pm the Randall Davey Botanic Garden Benefit Native Plant Sale will be held at the Institute of American Indian Arts on Cerrillos Road. For sale will be native trees, shrubs, wild flowers, bedding plants, hybrid tea roses, exotic landscaping plants, orchids, cacti, succulents, and various gardening publications. Volunteers are needed to transport plants to the sale, distribute posters, take money from sales, and clean up after the sale. Anyone interested please call Jan Bond at 983-6886.

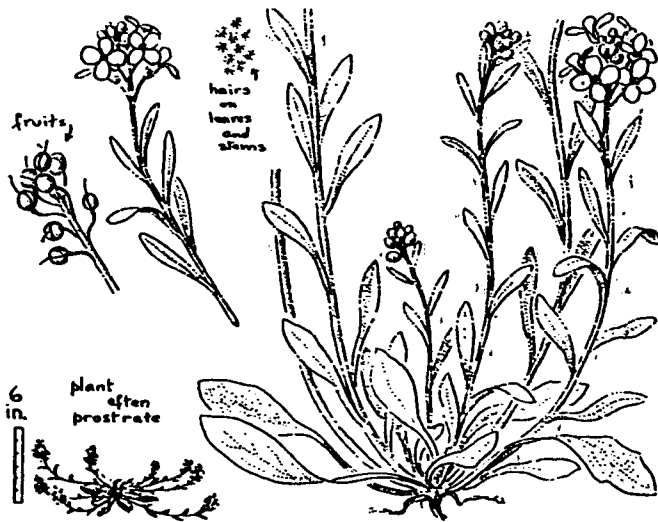


MEET ONE OF THE NATIVES
BLUE GRAMA
"The Queen of the Plains"
A fine-leaved grey-green, low growing grass with numerous seed heads like curly flags.
A warm season grass.
Make the lovely, genetically adapted native grasses of the Southwest a part of your urban landscape.

Native grasses need water only until established. Thereafter, they will last 'till the next ice age on precipitation alone.

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1 lb. covers 1000 sq. ft.

GRASSLAND RESOURCES
In the Old Railway Yard
Santa Fe, N.M. 87501 988-9747



Lesquerella gordonii
Bladderpod

The Mustard Family

Brassicaceae (Cruciferae)

This mostly herbaceous family is making a spring showing in areas of New Mexico. The name crucifer means "bearing a cross" which refers to the flower with its 4 petals forming a cross. The petals are distinct and there are 4 sepals, 6 stamens (4 long and short) and a single pistil which matures into a dry capsule with 2 chambers, the outer walls of which fall off at

maturity. This type of fruit is unique to the Brassicaceae and is called a silicle or silique.

Some plants in the Brassicaceae familiar to everyone are broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, brussel sprouts, collards, and kohlrabi, all of which are forms of Brassica oleracea.

The bladderpods, Lesquerella spp. are some of the earliest of spring flowers in the desert. The common name refers to the spherical fruit. Beadpod is another common name. Lesquerella gordonii is a low-growing, prostrate annual which can occur in extensive patches below 4,000 feet. Lesquerella intermedia is a somewhat taller, yellow-flowering perennial bladderpod which occurs from 5,500 to 7,200 feet. The blooms sometimes fade to a reddish color. Also blooming now is the white-flowering spectaclepod Dithyrea wislizenii. This species blooms from February to October and grows at elevations above 1,000 feet. The fruit, or silicle, resembles a tiny pair of spectacles, hence the common name.

Both bladderpod and spectaclepod are now blooming along the highway to Las Cruces. You'll certainly see them near Las Cruces if you drive to the Plant Sale on April 15th. See News and Notes for details.

March Conifers

A small group attended the conifer identification workshop on March 22nd. The informal workshop atmosphere stimulated socializing between participants as each labeled his samples of 12 conifer species.

After constructing a simple key to distinguish the plants from each other, participants listened to Roger Peterson discuss the cone-bearing plants in general. He also pointed out specific classification and identification problems in southwestern conifers. For example, in northern New Mexico, the range of Pinus flexilis overlaps with that of Pinus strobiformis. An individual tree from the mountains above Santa Fe may not fit the description of either species. Plant taxonomists disagree as to whether there are two pine species or really just one that has variable forms.

There will be more plant identification workshops held, with emphasis on keying. These may be scheduled in conjunction with summer field trips.

Classified Ads

BEAR MOUNTAIN GUEST RANCH
Guided wildflower tours.

Fred and Myra McCormick
Silver City, N.M. 88061
Phone: (505) 538-2538

AGUA FRIA NURSERY
Specializing in perennials
and native plants.

Philip and Bob Pennington
1409 Agua Fria
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501
Phone: (505) 983-4831

PLANTS OF THE SOUTHWEST
Specialists in native trees,
shrubs and wildflowers.

David Deardorff
Phone: (505) 988-1520 Santa Fe

Curl-leaf mountain mahogany,
fernbush, apache plume, several
Penstemon species now available

Correction for the last newsletter:
Apologies to Steven Brack
(not Breck) who gave the talk on
cacti at the January NPS meeting.