

## **Native Plant Month – Talking Points**

Consider writing a letter to the editor to your local newspaper advocating for native plants. Different papers have different formats for writing letters. Use local examples or an example from your own experience. Maybe your neighborhood or HOA has a newsletter where you can contribute an article about a specific topic. Or post a great native plant photo and some text to social media.

## **General Background**

New Mexico has the 4<sup>th</sup> highest plant diversity in the Continental United States due to its varied geology and geography. Plants provide food and shelter to wildlife, they support clean air, water, and soil, and provide many benefits to people and to the economy.

1. What is a native plant? A native plant is defined as one that has evolved over thousands of years in a specific geographic region, alongside local flora and fauna, without human intervention. Read about native plants at, <https://www.npsnm.org/native-plants/> and <https://nationalnativeplantmonth.org/why-native-plants-are-important>
2. Native plants have evolved with the other plants and animals in their community and often have special relationships with certain pollinators, seed dispersers, mycorrhizal fungi, and other plants and animals. Give an example for your region like the importance of piñon pines to piñon jays, or of agaves to nectar-feeding bats.
3. Plants support many ecosystem functions such as reducing soil erosion, cleaning and filtering air and water, storing carbon.
4. Plants are important to people! Plants supply us with food, fuel, shelter, medicines, shade, and beauty. Give a regional example of a native plant that has provided something you or your neighbors have appreciated.

## **Native Plant Conservation**

Because of the importance of native plants to wildlife and people, conservation is critical. New Mexico has over 100 species of plants that grow nowhere else on Earth. Plants and their communities are threatened by drought, urbanization, resource extraction, and overgrazing. Many organizations across the state are working to protect native plants and their habitats.

1. Talk about the major plant communities near you – for example, piñon -juniper woodlands, sagebrush steppe, Chihuahuan desert, Ponderosa pine woodlands, grasslands

2. Over 235 plants are considered rare or endangered in New Mexico. Learn more about endangered plants in your area at [rare.nm.org](http://rare.nm.org).
3. New Mexico has at least 110 species of “endemic” plants, plant species that occur nowhere else on Earth. These plants are often associated with particular habitats like soils high in gypsum, alpine peaks, or cienegas.
4. Highly endangered habitats include cienegas and alpine habitats. Cienega habitats are endangered because of overuse of groundwater, droughts, and development. Alpine habitats are threatened by climate change with reduced snowpack and a hotter, drier climate.
5. Plants support wildlife including pollinators, butterflies, birds, nectar-feeding bats in southern NM, hummingbirds, deer, elk, coyotes, and many other animals. Plants provide food and shelter for animals. Describe your plant-wildlife interaction experience and the joy or wonder it brought to you.
6. Many native plants support specialist insects including pollinators. Some butterflies and moth caterpillars only feed on a small group of plants or even a single plant species.
7. Learn about Institutions in your area that support native plant conservation: NPSNM has seven chapters around the state. The EMNRD Forestry Division Botany Program and Natural Heritage Program track and protect rare plant species. New Mexico’s Universities participate in plant conservation research and NMSU, Highlands University, and UNM have herbaria. The Albuquerque Biopark, Santa Fe Botanical Garden, and Institute for Applied Ecology participate with the Center for Plant Conservation to study and conserve rare plants.
8. Rare Plant Watch – join a new community science program to monitor rare plants. This new program is in its pilot year training volunteers to monitor rare plant populations across the state. The information can be used to develop better conservation plans. Information available at, <https://nmrareplants.unm.edu/nmrareplantwatch>

### **Gardening with Native Plants**

Including native plants in our gardens helps to support birds, pollinators and other wildlife. Many native plants are well-adapted to our soils and climate, requiring fewer inputs of water or fertilizers. Native plants reflect the surrounding beauty of our local landscapes.

1. “Native Plants are special because they have evolved over thousands of years alongside native bees, birds, and wildlife. The intricate relationships that have developed between local flora and fauna are extremely specialized and cannot be replaced with ornamental,

non-native plants. Our landscapes today often contain plants collected from around the world, but many of our insects, caterpillars, and birds have not evolved quickly enough to be able to eat these strange, exotic foods.” NationalNativePlantMonth.org

2. Include a variety of native plants that bloom spring to fall and that have different flower colors and shapes to support the widest variety of pollinators possible.
3. Reduce lawn and “zero-scape” areas of gravel and pavement, replacing them with a diversity of flowering plants.
4. Shade gravel and pavement with native shrubs and trees to reduce the heat-island effect.
5. Ask for native plants at your local nurseries to let them know there is demand for these plants.
6. Do not buy wild-collected plants. Look for reputable suppliers and nursery-grown plants. If you want to collect seeds or plants from the wild, ask permission from the landowner or land manager and collect responsibly. State and federal lands require collection permits.
7. Reduce use of pesticides to better support native pollinators and other insects.
8. “In gardening with nature we are creating peaceful, fascinating refuges for ourselves as well. Scientific studies repeatedly show a physical and mental health benefit, not only for the gardener but for children and others living in more green, biodiverse surroundings. “  
NPSNM