

Come visit our Penstemon Garden!



Want to know more about Penstemons and see many species growing together in one area? The Penstemon Garden at the Berry Biodiversity Conservation Center was planted in June 2012, to showcase the beauty and diversity of this native wildflower. We're testing a number of species for their ability to grow and flourish in a Laramie garden. The Berry Center's green roof also features five species! The Berry Center is located at 10th and Lewis Streets, in Laramie.

The magenta flowers of *P. pseudospectabilis* are unlike any other penstemon. This species is native to elevations above 7000', New Mexico to Nevada.



Petite, white *P. laricifolius* var. *exilifolius* is abundant near Laramie and rare everywhere else. The one-inch tall plants are nearly invisible until they bloom in July—then they reach six inches.

In General...



Penstemons are drought tolerant wild-flowers and are fond of well drained, alkaline soils. Keep in mind that not all Penstemons will thrive here in Laramie, but with careful planning, they can do just as well as the natives!



Beardtongue refers to the often hairy, sterile staminode within the flowers of all penstemons. **Palmer's beardtongue** can be found along highways in Wyoming or in its native range to the west. It has fragrant flowers and golden-haired staminodes.

For lots more information on growing penstemons, visit the website of the American Penstemon Society:
www.apsdev.org

Brochure text by Joseph Sevcik, Berry Center garden intern.

A Gardener's Guide to Growing Penstemons



Penstemon, commonly referred to as **beardtongue**, is a large genus of wildflowers with all species native to North America. Wyoming has about forty native species, including the **wandbloom penstemon**, (*P. virgatus* var. *asa-grayi*) shown above growing in a local garden.



**Berry Biodiversity
Conservation Center**
www.uwyo.edu/berrycenter

Growing Tips

Penstemons native to Wyoming and Colorado are most often found on **dry, gravelly banks** in the mountains or foothills. You can simulate these conditions by mixing your top soil with small pea gravel so that about 1/3 of the uppermost foot of soil is **pea gravel**. This will help the soil drain quickly. Once planted, the plants should be watered every day or two until their roots are well established. If leaves are beginning to yellow or the soil is not draining properly, try **decreasing the amount of water**.

If your Penstemon is not native it may prefer a wetter soil with more organic matter.

When planning your flower garden keep in mind that penstemons with red flowers (like *P. pinifolius* and *P. barbatus*) attract hummingbirds, and blue and purple flowers attract native, beneficial bees and other insect pollinators.

Several Wyoming natives are readily available as plants—consider growing others from seed!



Bumble bees and leafcutter bees flock to the early spring blooms of *Penstemon nitidus*, aka **shining beardtongue**. This species usually puts on a stunning display then dies, a heart-breaker for gardeners.

Penstemon caespitosus

This beardtongue, native to southern Wyoming and states to the west and south, is usually found in sandy soils near juniper and sagebrush. Also known as **mat penstemon**, it typically grows only a few inches tall, but can spread quickly. The purple flowers will attract mostly bees and wasps. This is a perfect addition to a rock garden.



Penstemon glaber

P. glaber, or **smooth penstemon**, is distributed from the western North Dakota and eastern Montana, through Wyoming and Colorado, to northern New Mexico. *Penstemon glaber* var. *glaber* is an average of 2.5 feet tall in the wild and usually occurs on dry, rocky hillsides. Its close relative, *Penstemon glaber* var. *alpinus*, is only found in the wild from the Rockies in southern Wyoming (including the Laramie Basin) to central Colorado. Contrary to its name, it is not an alpine species, and does very well at moderate elevations.



Both varieties of smooth penstemon are habitat generalists and will do well as long as the soil is kept relatively dry.

Penstemon secundiflorus



Sidebells penstemon has beautiful bright purple to pink flowers that will add some spunk to your garden. It is distributed along the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains from southern Wyoming to northern New

Mexico. This penstemon grows to about 1 ft. tall. The only way to make *P. secundiflorus* unhappy in your garden is to water it!

Penstemon strictus

This penstemon is distributed in the wild from southern Wyoming, through Utah, Colorado and Arizona, to northern New Mexico. This wildflower is very popular in gardens in these areas for its vibrant purple flowers and easy care. It can be found at most nurseries and in wildflower seed mixes. Like other penstemons, **Rocky Mountain beardtongue** is a pollinator magnet, attracting hummingbirds, bumble bees, pollen wasps (in photo), and other insects.

