



Low-Flammability Landscape Plants

Fact Sheet 6.305 | Wildfire Mitigation Series, Landscaping and Planting

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Introduction

In Colorado, in the wildland-urban interface (WUI), it isn't a matter of if a wildfire will impact residences and properties, but when. The WUI includes any areas where structures and other human developments meet or intermingle with wildland vegetative fuels, including grasses, shrubs and trees. Wildfires are a natural part of Colorado's varied ecosystems. Planning ahead and taking action to reduce the risk of wildfires can increase the likelihood a home survives when wildfires do occur. Firefighters do their best to protect residents, but ultimately, it's your responsibility to protect your property and investments from wildfire.

This fact sheet is a part of a series of three publications created to help homeowners focus on actions that are effective in reducing wildfire hazards on properties. These efforts should always begin with the home or structure itself and progress outward. Defensible space is the area around a home or other structures that has been modified to reduce fire hazards by creating space between potential fuel sources.

In the defensible space, natural and man-made fuels are treated, removed or reduced to slow the spread of wildfire and alter fire behavior. Plants that are low flammability are selected for planting, especially closer to the home.

Creating an effective defensible space involves establishing a series of management zones. Develop these zones around each building, including detached garages, storage buildings, barns and other structures. Recognize that fuel continuity and density play a critical role in wildfire behavior. Zones are defined from the structure edge in feet:

- **Zone 1: 0-5 feet**
- **Zone 2: 5-30 feet**
- **Zone 3: 30-100 feet**

This fact sheet covers plants in zones 1 and 2; a different publication; the Fire-Resistant Landscaping fact sheet, discusses plants in zone 3. For a defensible space plan for properties, contact the nearest Colorado State Forest Service field office or local CSU-Extension office for guidance. Consult with a forester, fire department staff or community organization appropriately trained in wildfire mitigation practices.



Illustration: Bonnie Palmatory, Colorado State University



Quick Facts

- The right plants around structures are important for wildfire safety.
- Management of defensible space and plant types is essential.
- This fact sheet is one of a series of three.
- Plants rated 10 have the least flammability.
- This fact sheet recommends low-flammability plants for zones 1 and 2.
- Refer to the Colorado State Forest Service's Home Ignition Zone guide for further details on home ignition zones.

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Low-Flammability Plant Characteristics

Recommendations on this list are based on a methodology developed by Idaho Firewise in Boise, Idaho. The methodology rates the flammability of plants based on specific characteristics ranked on a scale of 0-10 with 0 the most flammable and 10 the least flammable. To create the highest degree of protection for structures, the recommendation is to plant only plants with scores of 8, 9 and 10 for zones 1 and 2 within the first 30 feet from the home. These species are the least flammable plants to plant near structures, but keep in mind that there are no truly “fireproof” plant species. Existing vegetation with scores below an 8 (indicating more flammability) is addressed in the Fire-Resistant Landscaping fact sheet (6.303). Plants that have lower flammability and are more resistant to wildfire and plants that have a higher flammability and are less resistant to wildfire have these specific characteristics:

Attributes that decrease flammability

- **Low oil or resin content**
- **High moisture content**
- **Soap, latex or pectin content**
- **Compact growth form**
- **Green stems**
- **Drought tolerant**

Attributes that increase flammability

- **High oil or resin content**
- **Low moisture content**
- **Tall growth**
- **Open form**
- **Fine wood (twiggy) stems**
- **High water need**

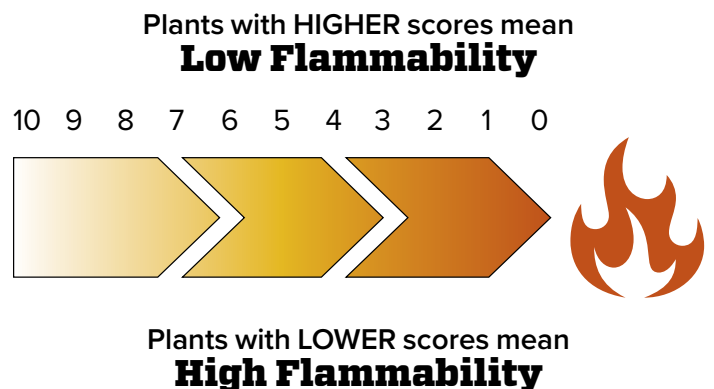
Many plants are highly flammable during different seasons of the year. At such times, left unmanaged, they can accelerate the spread of a wildfire that can harm communities. All vegetation, naturally occurring and otherwise, is potential fuel for fire. Its type, amount and arrangement have a dramatic effect on fire behavior.

There are no “fireproof” plant species. Plant choice, spacing and maintenance are critical to reduce the risk adjacent to the structure.

There are many concepts to consider when choosing low-flammability plants. A plant’s moisture content is the single most important factor governing its volatility. However, resin content and other factors in some species render them flammable even when the plant is well watered. Conifers tend to be flammable due to their oil and pitch content, regardless of their water content. Deciduous plants tend to be more fire resistant because their leaves have higher moisture content and their basic chemistry is less flammable. Also, when deciduous trees are dormant, there is less fuel to carry fire through their canopies.

In some cases, there is a strong correlation between drought tolerance and fire resistance. These plants offer less fuel or have a higher moisture content, both of which help reduce fire hazard. There also appears to be a correlation between a plant’s salt tolerance and natural fire resistance. Plants adapted to salty conditions, and actually growing in salty situations, may better resist burning.

Most of Colorado’s native vegetation is adapted to fire and is flammable. Common flammable plants have flammability scores less than 8. Common flammable trees are junipers, pines, firs and spruces. Common flammable shrubs are Gambel oak, three-leaf sumac and mountain mahogany. Planting of these species is discouraged adjacent to the home in defensible space zones 1 and 2. If they’re already present, consider replacing them with some of the recommended species included in this fact sheet. If you decide to keep a flammable plant in your landscape, keep it pruned and thinned, remove dead material regularly, and keep it at least 30 feet from any structure or other plants. See the Fire-Resistant Landscaping fact sheet (6.303) for more information on these mitigation measures.



Don't Forget Maintenance

A landscape is a dynamic, constantly changing system. Plants considered “fire resistant” and that have low amounts of flammable vegetation can lose these characteristics over time. Your landscape, and the plants in it, must be maintained to retain their low-flammability properties. Maintenance is addressed in further detail in the Fire-Resistant Landscaping fact sheet (6.303).

Supporting Publications from CSU Extension, the Colorado State Forest Service and Idaho Firewise

The following publications are available and are referenced. The CSFS Home Ignition Zone (HIZ) guide describes the concepts of structural ignitability and defensible space. Low-Flammability Landscape Plants (6.305) recommends fire-resistant plants for zones 1 and 2 identified in the defensible space section of the CSFS HIZ guide. Fire-Resistant Landscaping (6.303) recommends design features for zones 1, 2 and 3 and recommends plants with mitigation measure for plants and existing vegetation in zone 3.

The CSFS HIZ guide, Low-Flammability Landscape Plants and Fire-Resistant Landscaping are considered a package that can help with developing actions to reduce wildfire risk and impacts. The Idaho materials provided the basis for the addition of the flammability scoring and approach for this update.

1. CSFS Home Ignition Zone Guide, 2021 (Replaces 6.302, Creating Wildfire-Defensible Zones) <https://bit.ly/COHomeIgnitionZone>
2. 6.303, Fire-Resistant Landscaping (Updated 2023) <https://bit.ly/FireResistantLandscaping>
1. Idaho Firewise, Fire-Resistant Landscapes – Plant Materials <https://idahofirewise.org/firewise-landscapes/firewise-plant-materials/>

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Opuntia (Photo by I. Shonle)



Rocky Mountain Penstemon (Photo by I. Shonle)



Purple Ice Plant (Photo by S. Carter)

KEY

Water Needs	VL = very low	L = low	M = medium	H = high
Sun/Shade	S = sun	PS = part sun	Sh = shade	Prt Sh = part shade

Native, low-water plants**Native, low-water flowers and ground covers**

Scientific Name	Common Name	Approx. Water Needs	Sun/Shade Preference	Approx. Mature Height	Flower Color	Elevation in 1,000' Increments	Approx. Bloom Time	Low Flammability Rating
<i>Achillea lanulosa</i> , <i>now A. millefolium</i>	common yarrow	L-H	S/PS	1.5-2'	white	5-10 K	Jul	9.5
<i>Allium cernuum</i>	nodding onion	L-H	S/PS	1'	pink/purple	5-10 K	Jun	10
<i>Allium geyeri</i>	Geyer's onion	L-H	S/PS	1'	pink	5-10 K	Jun	10
<i>Antennaria parvifolia</i>	small-leaf pussytoes	M	S/PS	<.5'	creamy white	5-10 K	Jun	8
<i>Antennaria rosea</i>	rosy pussytoes	M	S/PS	<.5'	rose	5-10 K	Jun	8
<i>Aquilegia chrysantha</i>	golden columbine	M-H	S/PS	1-2'	yellow	5-10 K	Jun-Aug	8
<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>	common butterfly weed	L	S	1-2'	orange	5-6 K	Summer	8
<i>Symphyotrichum (f. Aster) laeve</i>	smooth aster	L-H	S/PS	1-3'	blue/ lavender	5-10 K	Aug-Sep	8
<i>Symphyotrichum (f. Aster) porteri</i>	porter aster	L-M	S	1'	white	5-10 K	Aug-Sep	8
<i>Astragalus utahensis</i>	Utah milkvetch	L	S	.5'	pink/purple	5-6 K	Spring	8
<i>Callirhoe involucrata</i>	poppy mallow	L	S	5"	pink/white	5-8 K	Summer	8
<i>Calochortus gunnisonii</i>	Gunnison's mariposa lily	M-H	S	.5-2'	white	5-10 K	Jul-Aug	8
<i>Campanula rotundifolia</i>	harebell; bluebells of Scotland	M-H	S	.5-1'	blue	5-10 K	May-Oct	9.5
<i>Claytonia lanceolata</i>	western spring beauty	M	Sh	.5-1.5'	white	5-10 K	Mar-Apr	9.5
<i>Coreopsis tinctoria</i>	plains coreopsis	L-M	S	2.5-3'	yellow	5-9 K	Summer	8
<i>Erysimum capitatum</i>	western wallflower	M	S/PS	1'+	yellow	5-10 K	Jun-Jul	9
<i>Gaillardia aristata</i>	blanketflower	L-M	S	1-1.5'	yellow-reddish	5-10 K	Jul-Sep	8
<i>Galium boreale</i>	northern bedstraw	M-H	Sh	<1'	white	5-10 K	May-Jun	8
<i>Geranium caespitosum</i>	Rocky Mountain geranium	M	Sh/PS	2'	pink/purple/ white	5-10 K	May-Oct	8
<i>Geum triflorum</i>	prairie smoke	M-H	S/PS	1.5'	reddish pink	5-10 K	Jun	8
<i>Leucocrinum montanum</i>	sand lily	L-M	S	<1'	white	5-8 K	May	10
<i>Linum lewisii</i>	Lewis or blue flax	L	S	2.5'	blue	5-8 K	Late Spring- Early Summer	8
<i>Lupinus argenteus</i>	silvery lupine	M	Sh/PS	1-3'	blue	5-10 K	Jun-Jul	8
<i>Mertensia lanceolata</i>	prairie bluebell	M	Sh/PS	1-2'	blue	5-10 K	May-Jun	10

Scientific Name	Common Name	Approx. Water Needs	Sun/Shade Preference	Approx. Mature Height	Flower Color	Elevation in 1,000' Increments	Approx. Bloom Time	Low Flammability Rating
Native, low-water flowers and ground covers cont.								
<i>Oenothera speciosa</i>	evening primrose	L-M	S	1-1.5'	white-pink	4-7 K	May-Jul	8
<i>Penstemon caespitosus</i>	mat penstemon	L-M	S	<.5'	purple	5-10 K	Jun	8
<i>Penstemon secundiflorus</i>	sidebells penstemon	L-M	S	1-2'	blue/violet/pink	5-9 K	May-Jun	8
<i>Penstemon teucrioides</i>	germander beardtongue	L-M	S	.5'	purple/violet	5-10 K	Jun-Jul	8
<i>Penstemon spp.</i>	penstemon species, cultivars	L-M	S	1-2.5'	blue/purple/violet	5-9 K	Summer	8
<i>Penstemon strictus</i>	Rocky Mountain penstemon	L-M	S	2-2.5'	purple/violet	5-10 K	May-Jul	8
<i>Penstemon virens</i>	Front Range beardtongue	M	S/PS	.5'	blue	5-10 K	May-Jun	8
<i>Sedum lanceolatum</i>	yellow stonecrop	M	S/PS	.5'	yellow	5-10 K	Jul-Aug	10
<i>Thermopsis rhombifolia</i> var. <i>divaricarpa</i>	spreadfruit golden banner	M-H	S/PS	2'	yellow	5-10 K	May	8

Native, low-water shrubs, trees and cacti								
<i>Amelanchier alnifolia</i> v. <i>utahensis</i>	Utah serviceberry	VL-M	S	4-6'	white	5-7 K	May	7.5
<i>Cylindropuntia spp.</i>	Cholla	VL-M	S	3-5'	pink	5-6 K	Jun	8
<i>Opuntia spp.</i>	prickly pear	VL	S	.5-1'	yellow/pink	5-7.5 K	May	10
<i>Philadelphus lewisii</i>	Cheyenne mock orange	M	S	2-3'	white	5-9 K	Jun	8
<i>Populus tremuloides</i>	aspen	M	S	8-25'	catkins	5-10 K	n/a	9
<i>Rhus glabra</i>	smooth sumac	L	S	3-5'	yellow	5-8 K	Apr	8
<i>Rhus trilobata</i> 'Autumn Amber'	Autumn Amber sumac	L	S/PS	1'	yellow	5-7.5 K	Apr	8
<i>Symphoricarpos albus</i>	snowberry	M	S/PS	2-3'	white/pink	5-9 K	n/a	8
<i>Yucca baccata</i>	banana yucca	VL-L	S/PS	2-3'	white	5-6 K	Jun	8
<i>Yucca glauca</i>	soapweed, Great Plains yucca	VL-L	S/PS	2-3'	white	5-7 K	Jun	8

Non-native, low-water plants								
Non-native, low-water flowers and ground covers								
<i>Aegopodium podagraria</i> "Variegatum"	variegated bishop's weed, goutweed	M	S/PS	8"	white	5-8 K	not showy	8
<i>Ajuga reptans</i>	bugleweed	H	Sh	<.5'	blue	5-10 K	Jun-Jul	8
<i>Alchemilla mollis</i>	Lady's mantle	M-H	PS/Sh	1'	yellow	5-9 K	Jun-Jul	8
<i>Arabis spp.</i>	rockcress	L-H	S	<1'	white	5-10 K	May-Jun	8
<i>Armeria maritima</i>	sea thrift	L-H	S/PS	.5'	white	5-10 K	Apr-Jun	8
<i>Aubrieta spp.</i>	false rockcress	M	S	1'	pink/white/purple	5-9 K	Apr-May	8
<i>Aurinia saxatilis</i>	basket of gold	M	S/PS	1'	yellow	5-9 K	Apr-May	8

Scientific Name	Common Name	Approx. Water Needs	Sun/Shade Preference	Approx. Mature Height	Flower Color	Elevation in 1,000' Increments	Approx. Bloom Time	Low Flammability Rating
Non-native, low-water flowers and ground covers cont.								
<i>Bergenia cordifolia</i>	heartleaf bergenia, pigsqueak	M	PS/Sh	1'	pink/purple	5-9 K	Spring	8
<i>Centranthus ruber</i>	Jupiter's beard	L-H	S/Sh	2-2.5'	red	5-9 K	May-Oct	10
<i>Cerastium alpinum v. lanthanum</i>	alpine mouse-ear	M	S/PS	1'	white	5-10 K	May-Jun	8
<i>Cerastium tomentosum</i>	snow-in-summer	L-M	S/PS	1'	white	5-9 K	May-Jun	8
<i>Ceratostigma plumbaginoides</i>	plumbago	L	S/Sh	.5'	blue	5-6 K	Fall	8
<i>Convallaria majalis</i>	Lily-of-the-valley	H	Sh	<1'	white	5-9 K	May-Jun	8
<i>Coreopsis spp.</i>	tickseed, coreopsis	M	S	1.5-2'	yellow	5-8 K	Summer	8
<i>Delosperma nubigenum</i>	hardy yellow ice plant	M-H	S	.5'	chartruese-yellow	5-8 K	Jun	10
<i>Delosperma spp.</i>	ice plant	L	S	1.5-2'	yellow	varies	Spring	10
<i>Dianthus spp.</i>	pink	L-H	S	<.5'-2'	pink	5-10 K	May-Aug	9
<i>Diascia integerrima 'Coral Canyon'</i>	Coral Canyon twinspace	M	S/Prt Sh	1-1.5'	rose-pink	4-7 K	Summer	9
<i>Doronicum spp.</i>	Leopard's bane	H	S/PS	2-3'	yellow	5-9 K	Jul-Aug	10
<i>Echeveria spp.</i>	hens-n-chicks	L	S/Prt Sh	1-2'	varies	5-9 K	Summer	8
<i>Ephedra regeliana</i>	Regel's jointfir	L	S	6-12"	yellow	5-12 K	Spring	8
<i>Erysimum linifolium</i>	wallflower	L	S	1-3'	varies	4.5-12 K	Spring-Summer	9
<i>Euonymus fortunei</i>	winter creeper	M	S/Prt Sh	3'	green-white	4.5-8 K	Spring	8
<i>Euphorbia polychroma</i>	cushion spurge	L	S	12-18'	yellow	5-8 K	Spring	10
<i>Euphorbia x martini 'Mini Martini'</i>	Martini's spurge	L-H	S	1.5-2'	chartruese	4-6 K	Late Spring	10
<i>Fragaria spp.</i>	wild strawberries	M	S/Prt Sh	.25-.75"	white	5-11 K	Summer	9
<i>Geranium spp.</i>	hardy geraniums	M	Sh/PS	2'	blue/pink/purple/white	5-10 K	May-Oct	8
<i>Helianthemum nummularium</i>	rockrose, sunrose	M-H	S	<1'	pink	5-8 K	May-Jun	8
<i>Hemerocallis sp.</i>	daylilies	L-M	S/PS	1-3'	yellow/red/orange	5-7.5 K	Summer	10
<i>Iberis sempervirens 'Little Gem'</i>	Little Gem evergreen	M	S	.5-1'	white	4.5-9 K	Spring	8
<i>Iris germanica</i>	bearded iris	L-M	S	1-3'	numerous colors	5-10 K	May-Jun	8
<i>Kniphofia uvaria</i>	red hot poker	L	S	3'	red/yellow	5-6 K	Summer	8
<i>Lamium spp.</i>	spotted deadnettle	M-H	Sh	<1'	white/purple/pink	5-10 K	May-Jun	8
<i>Lilium spp.</i>	lilies	M	S/Prt Sh	1-8'	varies	4-6.5 K	Summer	10
<i>Lupinus spp.</i>	lupine	L-M	S/PS	2-3'	lavender blue	5-10 K	Summer	8
<i>Marrubium rotundifolium</i>	silver-edged horehound	VL-L	S	1.5-2.5'	white	5-6 K	Early Summer	8

Scientific Name	Common Name	Approx. Water Needs	Sun/Shade Preference	Approx. Mature Height	Flower Color	Elevation in 1,000' Increments	Approx. Bloom Time	Low Flammability Rating
Non-native, low-water flowers and ground covers cont.								
<i>Muscari armeniacum</i>	grape hyacinth	M	S/PS	6-9"	blue	4.5-10 K	Spring	10
<i>Nierembergia gracilis</i> 'Starry Eyes'	Starry Eyes' cupflower	M	S	10"	purple (lt. lav.)	4.5-5.5 K	Summer/ Late Summer	8
<i>Nierembergia repens</i>	creeping white cup	M-H	S/PS	2-4"	white	4.5-5.5 K	July-Sep	8
<i>Oenothera berlandieri</i>	Berlander's sundrop	L-M	S	1'	yellow	4.5-6.5 K	Early Summer-Fall	8
<i>Pachysandra terminalis</i> 'Green Sheen'	Green Sheen pachysandra	M-H	Sh	6-8"	white	4-8 K	April-May	8
<i>Papaver orientale</i>	Oriental poppy	H	S/Sh	2-3'	orange/ pink/red	5-10 K	May-Jun	9
<i>Polemonium spp.</i>	Jacobs ladder	H	S/PS	1-2'	blue/white	5-10 K	May-Aug	8
<i>Polygonatum commutatum</i>	great Solomon's seal	M-H	PS/Sh	2'	white	4-10 K	May-Jun	8
<i>Salvia officinalis</i>	common or garden sage	L-M	S/PS	2'	blue- lavender/ pink/ lavender	5-8 K	Jun	7.5
<i>Saxifraga hirsuta</i>	saxifrage	H	S/PS	.5'+	white	5-10 K	May-Jun	8
<i>Scutellaria alpina</i> 'Moonbeam'	alpine skullcap	M	S/PS	.5-1'	white/ purple	4-8 K	May	8
<i>Sedum spp.</i>	stonecrop	M	S/PS	1-1.5'	yellow	5-10 K	Jul-Aug	10
<i>Sempervivum spp.</i>	hens and chicks, houseleeks	L-M	S/PS	.5'	pink	5-10 K	n/a	10
<i>Solidago sphacelata</i> 'Golden Fleece'	Golden Fleece goldenrod	VL-M	S	1-1.5'	yellow	4-8 K	Aug-Sep	8
<i>Thymus serpyllum</i> 'Minus'	Elfin thyme	L	S	1-3"	pink	4-10 K	Early-Late Summer	8
<i>Trifolium spp.</i>	clover	M	S/PS	1-2'	white/ purple/pink	varies/spp.	varies: May-Oct	8
<i>Veronica pectinata</i>	woolly creeping speedwall	L-M	S	<.5'	blue	5-9 K	Apr-Jul	8
<i>Vinca minor</i>	common periwinkle	H	Sh	<1'	white	5-10 K	Apr-Jun	8
<i>Waldsteinia spp.</i>	Barren strawberry	M-H	Sh/PS	<1'	yellow	5-9 K	May-Jun	8

Non-native, low-water trees and shrubs								
<i>Berberis thunbergii</i> 'Atropurpurea Nana'	crimson pygmy Japanese barberry	M	S	2-3'	yellow	5-7.5 K	Spring	8
<i>Ceanothus americanus</i>	New Jersey tea' ceanothus	M	S/PS	2-3'	white	5-7.5 K	Summer	8
<i>Lonicera tatarica</i>	Tatarian honeysuckle	M	S/PS	4-6'	white/pink	5-10 K	May-Jun	8
<i>Malus spp.</i>	crabapple	M	S	10-15'	pink/white	5-9 K	Apr-May	8
<i>Yucca filamentosa</i>	Adam's needle	M	S/PS	2-3'	white	5-8 K	Jun	8

Scientific Name	Common Name	Approx. Water Needs	Sun/Shade Preference	Approx. Mature Height	Flower Color	Elevation in 1,000' Increments	Approx. Bloom Time	Low Flammability Rating
Turf grasses								
<i>Bouteloua dactyloides</i>	buffalograss	L	S	mow to 2"	n/a	5-6.5 K	n/a	9
<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i>	blue grama	L	S	mow to 2"	n/a	4.5-7.5 K	n/a	9
<i>Festuca ovina</i>	sheep fescue	M	S	mow to 2"	n/a	5-9 K	n/a	9
<i>Lolium perenne</i>	perennial ryegrass	M	S	mow to 2"	n/a	5-8 K	n/a	10
<i>Poa compressa</i>	Canada bluegrass	M	S	mow to 2"	n/a	5-8 K	n/a	9
<i>Poa pratensis</i>	Kentucky bluegrass	M	S	mow to 2"	n/a	5-9 K	n/a	10

Low-flammability plants with higher water needs								
<i>Aconitum columbianum</i>	Columbian monkshood	M-H	S	2'	blue/purple	5-10 K	Jun-Jul	7.5
<i>Aconitum spp.</i>	monkshood	M-H	S	2'	blue/purple	5-10 K	Jun-Jul	7.5
<i>Aquilegia caerulea</i>	Colorado blue columbine	M-H	S/PS	1-2'	blue-lav./white	5-10 K	Jun-Jul	8
<i>Aquilegia spp.</i>	columbine	M-H	S/PS	1-2'	varies	5-10 K	Jun-Jul	8
<i>Corylus cornuta</i>	beaked hazelnut	H	S/Sh	5-6'	yellow-brown	5-7.5 K	inconspicuous	8
<i>Hosta spp.</i>	hosta	M-H	PS	2-3'	varies	varies	Summer-Fall	8
<i>Iris missouriensis</i>	Missouri or native iris	M-H	S	1-2'	violet blue	5-10 K	May	9.5



Blue Grama Grass © Larry Allain. USGS NWRC @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database



Geranium and Rocky Mountain Columbine (Photo by I. Shonle)



Wallflowers and Blue Mist Penstemons (Photo by I. Shonle)



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