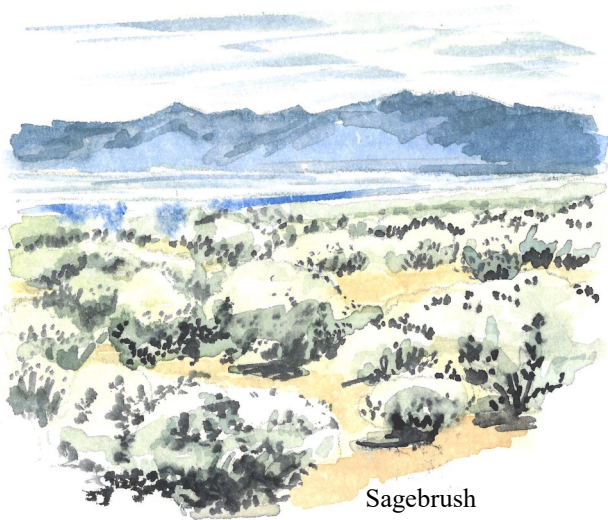


NATURE DETECTIVES

Spring 2023



Sagebrush

Native Plants Wake Up!

Here they come!

Have you ever
—after a winter
night's sound
sleep— poked
your head out
from under
the bedcovers
into the morn-
ing light?



Penstemon

Pull Out and Sav

If yes, you can understand the wild seed. After the dark night of winter underground, the tiny plant is now feeling its way out of its seed coat...up through the moist soil...stretching up to the warm sun... growing its first bright green leaves. The trees wake up and drink in the sun. It's Spring! Our native plants are growing again!

What are Native Plants?

Trees, grasses, flowers that have, for ages, grown naturally together in a certain place in nature—a rocky outcropping, for instance, or a high alpine meadow, a forest, or on the plains. Each has its own special kind and mixture of plants because it has its own special soil— some are full of sand, some sticky clay, others are rocky and still others are good earth for growing crops—and some are mixed. Each has its own special climate—dry, windy, snowy, sunny, shady, warm, cold and some are mixed.

These plants know how to create just the right kind of environment so they can all live well in their particular place. But that's not all...

What Else is Special About Them?

Have you ever worked out how to get along with your family members or with kids on the playground?

The plants in each special area have had *thousands of years* to work out how to get along really well with each other, the local insects, the birds, foxes, bear, deer and other animals... They both help each other and keep each other in check so no one takes over the whole space. The native plants can keep going and re-grow with each other and their animal and insect partners even in rough times.



Snowdrops



Poppy Mallow

Sometimes plants from afar come to join them, blown in by wind or transported on vehicle tires; some die out here and others find a place for themselves in the overall balance. (There are other plants from far away which start taking over once they're here. Why? They don't have their own plant and insect companions from back home to keep them in check. We call that action "invasive.")

Our native plants attract insects, people, and other animals with their beautiful colors, scents and patterns. Have you ever seen an all-blue tree? Did you know Colorado has one named

after our state? It's called the Colorado blue spruce. Its picture is on the next page.

And some of our plants have strong, pungent smells. Smell sage or sagebrush—you won't forget those! Smell a pine forest in the foothills or the bark of just one ponderosa pine in the warm sun! Many people think it smells like vanilla or butterscotch. What do you think?

The pollen and nectar of our native plants attract and feed insects and other animals who have evolved with them throughout the centuries. Their stems provide cozy homes for insects sleeping through the winter.

Many native grasses and flowers have roots that go deep into the earth to find water. They hold our precious soils in place. And they don't need any help with fancy special garden soils or fertilizers. They have learned to make do over thousands of years here. They keep our precious water in the ground so it doesn't run away. (Many people like to plant native plants around their home for all these reasons.)

Plants and People



Serviceberry

Do you live in a home or have furniture made of wood? If it's pine or Douglas fir or Colorado blue spruce, these native plants of ours may be sheltering and helping you, just as they provide shelter for birds and raccoons.

Native people for many thousands of years and the settlers in the 1800's made their homes from trees' wood and bark, grasses and earth.

Did you know people have also made sun hats from native plants called reeds? And baskets and waterproofing from roots of certain trees such as spruce. And soap from yucca leaves!



Prairie Turnip



Sunchokes

Do you like to pick and eat raspberries? People who lived here before us did, too! They gathered food and drink from wild native raspberries, strawberries, plums, serviceberries, currants, sunroot (Jerusalem artichokes), prairie turnip, yucca root, wild onions and many more wild plants. They made medicines from native plants such as American licorice, evening primrose, elderberries, and so many more.

What's the best way to get familiar with our local native plants? Stay tuned to Boulder County Parks & Open Space website for plant programs or request one for your group. And you can start right now with the activity "Finding Your Tree!" on the next page.



Colorado Blue Spruce

Activity: Finding Your Tree!

This is an all-time favorite of both children and adults.

To play:

- Take one blindfold per person. Many people like to use bandannas.
- Go to a forest or group of trees with one other player or if you are in a class, pair up. Choose one special “base camp” in that area and go there.
- Now the first person in a pair (A) puts on a blindfold.
- The second person in the pair (B) takes the first person by the hand and very slowly leads (A) to a tree. It can be close or far. You might want to do the first round with a close tree.
- The blindfolded player (A) feels and smells all around the tree until they are pretty sure they could identify it with their blindfold off. (But leave it on for now.) After a few minutes, when the blindfolded person (A) feels ready, the partner (B) again takes their hand and leads them back to base camp.
- Back at base camp, the blindfolded partner (A) takes off their blindfold. The partner (B) says, “Can you find your tree?”
- The blindfolded person (A) then tries to find their tree with their blindfold *off*. (No one believes they can, but most people do on the first try.) (B) tells them when they are not close or are getting close by saying ‘you’re cold...or warm... or hot!’ Once (A) has identified their tree and has had time to see it with open eyes, the partners both go back to base camp.
- Then they switch roles.
- People usually like to have at least two rounds each. Have fun!

