

MOUNTAIN FLOWERS

By Valerie Belding

How does that neighbor get the prettiest blooming yard? If ever you catch gardeners in their yard, ask! Most gardeners would love to talk (on and on) about their yards. Once they start, the information turns to Latin and it's all over! You've just encountered a plant nerd. It's safest to retreat to the store and buy one or two packs of petunias. Then you find it's just doesn't have the same impact! Chalk it up to another year of gardening over! Too much information can make simple flower gardening daunting.

Let's see if I can break it down so you can find your level of interest and enjoy it. The term "wildflower" can be deceiving. Blooming natives may come to mind. By some standards it defines annuals that bloom all summer and generate plants by seed the following years; examples: alyssum or California poppies. Blends of wildflower seed may contain "fillers" including clover. Unless you know the difference between flowers and weeds, this endeavor can become a nightmare! Individual seed packets solve that problem. Read the packets for ideal growing conditions. This route can be disappointing. Initially you water more. The water brings weed and grass seeds as well, leading to more weeding. Not all seed varieties do well.

Buying plants gets costly but there's immediate gratification. Annuals are cheaper and generally will bloom all summer but will not come back the following year. Biennials bloom all summer and will perform for two years, example: pansy, viola and dianthus. Perennials should come back from the root each year but may bloom only a portion of the summer. Perennials can be native, which is indigenous, but may not be as showy, example: pussytoes and delphinium. Other varieties are hardy to the region, introduced from elsewhere or a hybrid that can survive here. Some perennials are less tasty to deer (daylilies) and some prefer a little shade (hosta). Many can survive with less water than annuals once they have been established. Providing mulch and good soil amending can also reduce watering.

CSU offers publications for reference to help narrow the search. Start by finding the website <https://extension.colostate.edu/> There you'll find information on:

Wildflowers- publication #7233

Perennials- publication # 7405

Natives- publication #7242

Mountain flowers- publication #7406

Xeriscape- publication #7231

For yards with deer scroll down to Wildlife for publication #6520

Some rules of thumb are: 6-8 hours of direct sun is considered full sun; filtered light all day is partial shade or approximately three to five hours direct sun; shade conditions are less than three hours sun. We are USDA Zone 4 /5 on the latest classification and our altitude does make a difference! One season doesn't a garden make. It's takes a lot of effort and some money. The easiest start is grab a cup of coffee, read the CSU publications and highlight what suits you. That makes you a smarter shopper and better gardener!