

GILA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

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Betsy Kaido and Jeff Boyd, Editors

Bulletin 2025: Quarter 2

This quarterly Bulletin of the Gila Native Plant Society of Silver City, New Mexico provides the latest communications between the society and the members. It is also available on the GNPS website <http://www.gilanps.org>.

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President's Message

Just Direct Your Feet to the Sunny Side of the Street

I don't need to tell you how alarmingly dry this winter has been. For residents of southwest New Mexico, that spells anxiety about wildfires threatening our homes and forests. For native plant enthusiasts, it also means reconciling ourselves to a meager spring wildflower



season. Alas, we won't be wandering lovestruck in stunning fields of Mexican poppies (*Eschscholtzia californica*).

But, as with other unwelcome circumstances, we have a choice in our approach. We can take this opportunity to refresh our memories on spring weed identification. I confess that every year I'm condemned to relearn how to distinguish London rocket (*Sisymbrium irio*) from flixweed (*Descurainia sophia*). These yellow-flowered weedy mustards come up early in disturbed areas, and I attempt to welcome them as harbingers of spring, longer days, and warmer weather.

In our longing for spring plants, we may acknowledge, if not actually appreciate, weedy trees. Maybe this is the year for trying a recipe for Siberian elm (*Ulmus pumila*) samaras, those round, papery fruits that litter Silver City streets in the spring. In these times of expensive groceries, Siberian elm seeds are free for the foraging.

More pleasant, though, is greeting the emergence of some stalwart native plants: lime green cottonwood leaves, deep green leaves of desert beardtongue (*Penstemon pseudospectabilis*), and numerous tiny buds of three-leaf sumac (*Rhus trilobata*).

Over the years, I've witnessed lovely native plants growing despite very scant moisture. A few that come readily to mind are scarlet penstemon (*Penstemon barbatus*), Wright's deervetch (*Acmispon wrightii*), and stemless evening primrose (*Oenothera cespitosa*).

I imagine it's obvious that I'm trying to convince myself, as well as you, of the hidden joys of a skimpy spring wildflower season. Let's direct our feet to the sunny side of the street. That's where the hardy plants await our admiration.

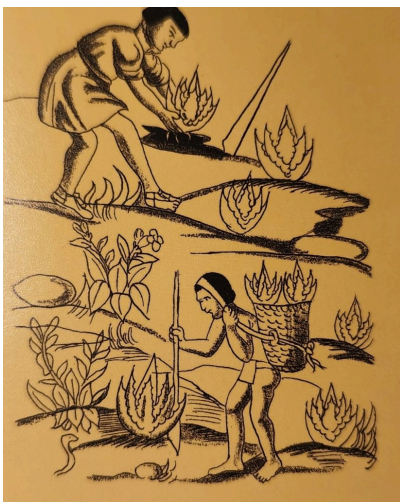
-- Donna Stevens

email: gnpspresident@gmail.com

Activities for This Quarter

Program:

Friday, April 18, at 7:00 pm. Carlos Martinez del Rio will present on "Pollination, fermentation, and distillation: The biocultural coevolution of mezcales, bats, and humans". The program will be live in Harlan Hall, Room 111, on the WNMU Campus and also available online. Members will receive an email with the Zoom link about 10 days ahead; all others may request a link from gilanative@gmail.com.



Community Events:

As part of Whiskey Creek Zócalo's two-year anniversary celebration, GNPS members and friends can drop by the Zócalo on **Saturday, April 12, 11:00am --**

1:00pm. Learn about how our native plants and native bees depend on each other for survival. Various stations will be set up in the nursery for exploring this interaction. This is a family friendly event and the Zócalo will also have other events throughout the day!



The Gila Native Plant Society will have a booth at Continental Divide Trail Days in Gough Park on **Saturday, April 19, 10:00am -- 3:00pm.** We will have literature to give out, books for sale and an activity for kids; and we often get questions from trail hikers about plants they have seen and photographed.

GNPS will also participate in the **Give Grandly 2025 fundraiser for local nonprofits at Main Street Plaza on Saturday, May 3.** We have found it a great way not only to raise funds but also to connect with people in the community who may not know what we do. We will be calling for volunteers.



Home Landscaping Tours:

Saturday, May 17, 9:30am – 10:30am. Tour a Homeowner's Wildland/Urban Interface (WUI) Landscape. Landscaping in the WUI presents several challenges: providing for fire safety, managing water resources, protecting plants from predators, and choosing native plants that thrive in difficult conditions. See how this homeowner addressed these problems, and continues to learn from her mistakes. You'll see:



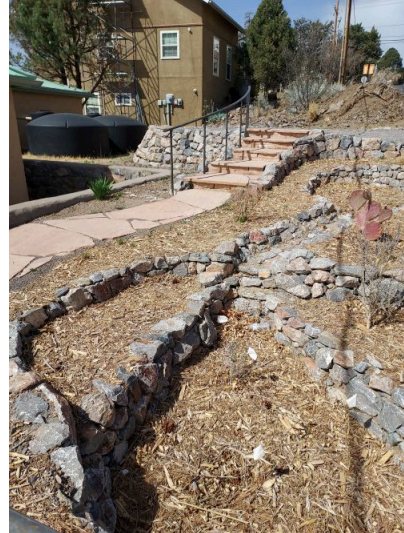
- A variety of native shrubs, vines, grasses and flowering plants
- Drystack stone and adobe walls
- Landscape responses to the extreme dry conditions over the last couple of years
- Water delivery systems

Limited to 15 participants. This tour is a repeat of one from two years ago.

Saturday, June 7, 9:00 -- 11:00 am. Tour a city property designed to collect and manage water, and generate power from the sun. These homeowners have incorporated several features to collect and re-direct rainfall. They're also using the solar power for power and shade. Here's what you'll see:

System for gathering rainwater via gutters

- Two 1200-gallon water storage tanks
- Curb cut re-directing water from street to infiltrate into ground via 3 rock basins planted with natives
- Metal grate bridges to allow water flow in front yard as needed
- Rock wall garden beds taking in water from back yard down spouts
- Off grid solar panel system
- Solar Panels providing shade structure
- Shed for battery storage



For more information and to register, email gilanative@gmail.com.

Field Trips:

Andrew Tree will organize a field trip each month as and where interesting plants appear.

-- Don Graves

Field Trip Committee

The Iconic Tank at the Silva Creek Botanical Garden

In April, you may be surprised to see a lot of activity around the iconic tank at the garden. We'll be building a wall around it, in preparation for a very exciting event. The Youth Mural Project will design and install one of their wonderful murals, under the direction of another local icon, Diana Ingalls Leyba, as well as ceramic artist Patricia Countryman. The young people will be illustrating the garden's three themes, in colorful tiles... the relationships



between native plants and the people, wildlife and climate of the region. GNPS will provide some education to the youths prior to construction. After the educational tiles are installed, the wall will be stuccoed, and we'll be adding donor appreciation tiles for those who've helped us with our capital campaign.

In addition to all of this, look for the changes at the front entrance that I mentioned in the last newsletter. And, of course, come by often to see

what's in bloom!

-- **Marty Eberhardt**

Plant of the Quarter

Preserve Our Native Thistles

Many of you have already noticed the green, sharply-pointy leaves of thistles on your property or around town and may be wondering what you should do, if anything, about them. This time of year, early spring, my advice is to watch them grow to produce a beautiful purple or pink composite flower, then sit back and watch the diverse array of pollinators that they will attract. Thistles get a bad rap and incite a strong urge to dig them out or to fetch the machete. Resist the temptation unless you are absolutely sure they are not native. One excellent resource for New Mexico thistles, both native and non-native is former NM state botanist Bob Sivinski's thistle identification booklet on the Native Plant Society of New Mexico's website, which can be downloaded at no cost at <https://www.npsnm.org/books-and-booklets/thistle-identification-booklet/>.



Thistles are in Family Asteraceae, the sunflower family. Two of our native species are the first thistles to bloom in our area and you should be aware of them. They are both biennial, with a ground-hugging basal rosette of leaves the first year and then sending up tall flowering stems the second. The first to bloom is New Mexico Thistle (*Cirsium neomexicanum*), with its purple-lavender inflorescence or flower head and a tall stem that branches over halfway up

the stem. This thistle blooms April to May. Check out this link from Gila Flora, created by Dr. Russ Kleinman at https://wnmu.edu/gilaflora/cirsium_neomexicanum.html.

Next in line to bloom in the spring is Martin's Thistle (*Cirsium ochrocentrum* var. *martinii*), usually somewhat shorter than the New Mexico Thistle above, with multiple branching from the bottom of the plant and a deeper pink-red color. Martin's Thistle is truly beautiful and mostly blooms in May and June. Check it out at https://wnmu.edu/gilaflora/cirsium_ochrocentrum.html.

Our twelve species of native thistles in New Mexico are so important to pollinators,

including native bees, moths, butterflies, beetles, flies and hummingbirds! Put down the shovel and machete, learn to identify New Mexico's native thistle species and educate others about their importance in our desert/high desert ecosystems.

photos courtesy of the Dale A. Zimmerman Herbarium, WNMU

-- *Don Graves*



Works By Members



Les Brandt contributed this lovely group of leaves from trees in our region.

Our mailing address is:

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The Gila Native Plant Society is committed

- To promoting education, research, and appreciation of the native flora of the Southwest
- To encouraging the preservation of rare and endangered plant species
- To supporting the use of suitable native plants in landscaping.

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