Firecracker Penstemon in the Landscape

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**Penstemon eatonii**

Firecracker penstemon

**Description:** Bright scarlet flowers that shower from arching stems of firecracker penstemon have made this plant a favorite of many penstemon enthusiasts. The species is found throughout the West at elevations from 3,000 to 11,000 feet. It is adaptable to various soil textures but thrives in low-fertility soils. Like most penstemon species, its roots require excellent soil drainage. The bright red tubular flower makes it a favorite nectar source for hummingbirds. The common name for penstemon is ‘beardtongue’, named for the infertile stamen that protrudes from the flower and looks like a hairy tongue. Firecracker penstemon is cold-hardy all over the Intermountain West, and preliminary common garden trials indicate that seed source should not influence its hardiness.

**Cultural Requirements:**

- **Native Habitat:** Widely distributed throughout the West.  
- **Soil:** Well drained, low fertility, pH 7.0-8.0  
- **Cold Tolerance:** Zones 3 - 7  
- **Drought Tolerance:** High  
- **Salt Tolerance:** Unknown  
- **Sun/Shade Preference:** Full sun to part shade  
- **Propagation:** Seed, stem cuttings, or division
Propagation: To start seed indoors, cold-moist stratify for up to 112 days, and sow into container to a depth of 1/8 inch. For sowing seed outdoors, sow seed in fall and cover with 1/8 inch soil. Pre-soaking seed with 500 ppm gibberellic acid (GA) prior to cold-stratification may improve germination rate. Division of mature plants may be done in spring or fall.

Additional Photos:
References:


USDA Plants Database. 2008. URL: http://plants.usda.gov


This fact sheet belongs to a series of fact sheets about Intermountain West native trees, shrubs, perennials, and grasses called “Native Plants in the Landscape.” Look for others in the series by visiting http://extension.usu.edu/htm/publications, then clicking on ‘Horticulture’ and ‘Native Plants’.

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