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# Firecracker Penstemon in the Landscape

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## *Penstemon eatonii*

### Firecracker penstemon



Graham Hunter

**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        |

- Maintenance Do not over-water or over-fertilize. Reseeds freely, so clip stalks after final bloom to prevent spreading.
- Problems Susceptible to lodging (stalks fall over) and root rot diseases if over-watered.

**Landscape Value:**

- Use in the Landscape Borders, accents, rock gardens; often recommended as cut flowers.
- Foliage Basal leaves are ovate, upper leaves are opposite and lanceolate and slightly curled.
- Inflorescence Showy. Will re-bloom if spent flowers are removed.

	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct
• Color							

- Fruit (seedheads) Capsule
- Form Clumping, erect, few to many stems
- Texture Medium
- Ultimate Size 10-40 inches
- Rate of Growth Medium to fast; flowers in second year.
- Plant Community Most communities from subalpine to salt desert shrub.
- Availability “Utah’s Choice” selection; (visit <http://www.utahschoice.org/natives/wheretobuy> for more information).
- Cultivars ‘Richfield Selection’

**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:**



USU Herbarium

## References:

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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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