



Here's the last word on flowers

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More wildflowers to see:

Last week we told you it would be our last column on wildflowers, but the botanist and artist working on the column were so enthusiastic they wouldn't quit!

The genus *Penstemon* is of particular interest to everyone who likes wildflowers, because of the large number of beautiful and varied species and also because so many of these are now available at most nurseries. Plant breeders have taken a great deal of interest for a number of years in developing penstemons that are more adapted to gardens. Since many of these plants are hybrids, they have been given their own names.

The genus name *Penstemon* refers to the fifth stamen which in all members of this genus is sterile, hence bears no anther, but may be more or less covered with yellow or white hairs. From this little brush-like structure comes the common name beard-tongue. Penstemons are perennials and do not bloom their first year, however, some of the varieties developed by the plant breeders do bloom their first year, and older plants continue to bloom much of the summer.

Penstemon pseudospectabilis connotifolius is a sturdy plant with several to many branches 2- or 3-feet tall. The leaves are unusual as they completely surround the stem except those near the base of the plant. Leaves are usually toothed around the edges.

The inflorescence is about one-half the height of the stem and consists of groups of four to eight flowers at each node of the inflorescence. The lower flowers open first and the upper flowers later, so the blooming period can last several weeks. In this species, flowers are usually deep rose colored, but are sometimes lighter or a darker rose-magenta. The tube of the flower is relatively

short, the throat longer and wider with the two upper lobes turned upward, and the three lower lobes downward. The four fertile stamens lie under the upper lobes and the sterile stamen lies in the throat. This sterile stamen may have a few yellow hairs at the tip or may be bare. *Pseudospectabilis* blooms in April but some blooms may persist into May. It can be found along the road leading into the hills, particularly the road to Horseshoe Dam.

Bush Penstemon, *Penstemon microphyllus*: This species of penstemon is a shrub growing 3, 4 or more feet tall with many branches and small light green leaves. The species name means small leaves. The inflorescence is short, being confined to twigs near the ends of the branches. This is the only bright yellow-flowered penstemon in Arizona. The flowers are strongly two-lipped, the tube is short and opens into a short wide throat. The two upper and three lower lobes are narrow and longer than the throat and tube together. The upper lobes project forward and the lower lobes turn abruptly downward. The upper side of the sterile stamen is heavily covered with long yellow hairs. A good place to see this beautiful shrub is along the road to Horseshoe Dam.

The third penstemon found in the Desert Hills is *Penstemon subulatus*. This species is found only in central and southern Arizona. The plants have few to several slender stems that branch from near the base. The stems are not tall — 18 to 24 inches or less. Leaves are very narrow with the lower longer than the upper. The scarlet flowers have a long extremely narrow tube, a short narrow throat and short roundish lobes spreading so the flower doesn't look two-lipped. *Subulatus* blooms from late February through April all through the Desert Hills, but scattered, and seldom more than a few plants at one locality.

