

Firecracker Penstemon in the Landscape



Graham Hunter

Penstemon eatonii

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 overwatered.

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.
- **Color:** May - mid-July
- **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

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fourColumnCarousel inside embed-feed const
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=> { // If the image alt attribute is empty or missing,
set it to "Article thumbnail" if (!img.getAttribute('alt') ||
img.getAttribute('alt').trim() === "") { img.setAttribute('alt',
"Article thumbnail"); } }); }); // Closes the IIFE
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References

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Published January 2009
Utah State University Extension
Peer-reviewed fact sheet

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