

Intermountain Native Plant Growers Association



ABSTRACT

The Intermountain Native Plant Growers Association (INPGA) was founded in 2003 to facilitate producing and marketing plants native to the Intermountain western US for landscape use. The association currently has 90 members, including 65 member nurseries. The Utah's Choice plant tagging and education program is the flagship program of INPGA. It features plant tags, signage, and other marketing materials for 40 key species. Membership in INPGA is open to all interested parties and has many benefits for member nurseries, such as reduced prices on Utah's Choice marketing materials and access to the INPGA Seed Bank.

KEY WORDS

Utah's Choice, plant tags, nursery, education, marketing, point-of-purchase

NOMENCLATURE

USDA NRCS (2004)

Yard

Photo by ?

A NONPROFIT TRADE ORGANIZATION PROMOTING LANDSCAPE USE OF NATIVE PLANTS

| Susan E Meyer

For many years, nursery people in the Intermountain western US interested in growing and selling native plants have worked in isolation, marginalized within their own industry, and without adequate resources to promote their cause. Their business has come mostly from the reclamation and landscape contracting markets, with sales to retail nurseries or directly to home landscape consumers accounting for a very small part of the total. But with the recent combination of explosive regional population growth and long-term drought, the use of native plants in home and commercial landscaping is receiving unprecedented attention. People are beginning to recognize that the use of traditional cool-season turf-dominated landscapes is wasteful of water and other resources, and is not necessarily appropriate in the high desert climate where most urban centers are located.

Unique regional landscapes that reflect a strong sense of place are gaining appreciation. The many national

parks of the region are another measure of our esteem for natural landscapes, including native plant communities. It is a welcome step then to bring these plants into the human-created landscape, where they can be beautiful and satisfying reminders of our connection to the land we now call our home.

Native plants are not petunias, however, and in order for consumers to be successful with these plants, they need knowledge as well as plants. This is also true of the nursery industry. Many retail nurseries would like to carry these plants because of perceived market demand, but plants are sporadically available and difficult to manage in a traditional nursery setting. The Intermountain Native Plant Growers Association (INPGA) was established to address these problems (Figure 1).

Rural Utah has been home to 2 small native plant nurseries for a number of years. In spring 2003, Janett Warner, owner of Wildland Nursery in Joseph, and Merrill Johnson, owner of Great Basin Natives in Holden, decided to

found a trade organization and invite other growers in the region to join. At the second annual membership meeting held in September 2004, the group had grown to 70 members, including 55 plug, container, and retail nurseries, as well as landscape design firms and other interested parties. Most of these businesses are in Utah, but we have member nurseries in New Mexico and Idaho as well, and we welcome new members from throughout the region.

The organization has several institutional members that provided start-up money to get INPGA programs off the ground. These include Utah State University's Center for Water Efficient Landscaping and Utah Botanical Center, the Utah State Division of Water Resources, the Central Utah Water Conservancy District, and the Utah Native Plant Society.

The centerpiece of INPGA is a plant tagging and education program called "Utah's Choice" (Figure 2). We started by picking 40 species out of the very large number of Intermountain natives wor-

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Figure 1. Intermountain Native Plant Growers Association logo.



Figure 2. Utah's Choice logo.



Figure 3. Example of a Utah's Choice plant tag.

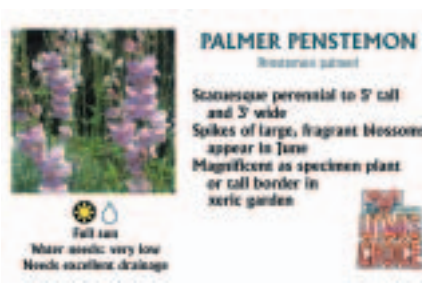


Figure 4. Example of a Utah's Choice retail nursery display sign.

thy of landscape use (Table 1). These were chosen primarily on 3 criteria: outstanding beauty, ease of propagation, and proven success in a landscape setting. We included some plants that were already at least somewhat available and included many more that are deserving of much wider use. We chose a set list of plants for marketing purposes in an effort to create demand for these plants while attempting at the same time to increase and stabilize supply. A key component of building supply is the INPGA Seed Bank, where member-growers can buy reasonably priced, quality seeds of many hard-to-obtain Utah's Choice species.

We consider "Utah's Choice" to act as a brand name. The marketing program consists of several components. Point-of-purchase marketing materials include color photo plant tags for each of the 40 species (Figure 3), plant signs suitable for retail display (Figure 4), a free informational brochure, and a how-to booklet for home landscapers (*Utah at Home: Landscaping with Native Plants*, suggested retail price US\$ 2). We have sold approximately 90,000 plant tags so far, and the tagging program is now self-supporting.

Another primary component of the marketing effort is obtaining publicity and media coverage for the program. This includes an Internet site (<http://www.utahschoice.org>) and an educational outreach effort that has resulted in excellent coverage in the local media, particularly newspapers. We also participate in garden fairs and other public venues. We plan to further increase the public outreach program as plant supplies stabilize. Because of our nonprofit status, we are able to avail ourselves of many resources that would not be available to member nurseries on their own.

The steady increase of member nurseries is clear evidence that these businesses recognize the value of group cooperation in building the market for native plants. Rather than competing for dollars from the tiny segment of the public already committed to native plant landscaping, member nurseries work together to reach

an ever-increasing market for low-maintenance, non-invasive, drought-tolerant plants. These words are perfect descriptors of native plants and that is the message we are trying to deliver.

From the point of view of some dedicated native plant huggers like myself, the motive behind INPGA is love not money. If we can get Jane Q Public to grow these plants in a garden setting, the plants may begin to earn the respect they deserve. These tough, beautiful creatures are longtime survivors on our planet, and I want to take part in ensuring their continuing survival—in the wild as well as in human-created landscapes.

For more information about INPGA, to order Utah's Choice marketing materials including *Utah at Home: Landscaping with Native Plants*, or to become a member, see our Internet site at <http://www.utahschoice.org>.

REFERENCES

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AUTHOR INFORMATION

Susan E Meyer
 Executive Director
 Utah's Choice Program
 Intermountain Native Plant
 Growers Association
 1827 Princeton Avenue
 Salt Lake City, UT 84108
semeyer@xmission.com

TABLE 1

Species included in the Utah's Choice plant tagging and education program.

	Common Name	Scientific Name	Authority	Family
PERENNIALS	Sundancer daisy	<i>Achnatherum hymenoides</i> (<i>Hymenoxys acaulis</i> according to Welsh and others [2003])	(Pursh) Parker	Asteraceae
	Utah ladyfinger	<i>Astragalus utahensis</i>	(Torr.) T. and G.	Fabaceae
	Showy sandwort	<i>Arenaria macradenia</i>	Wats.	Caryophyllaceae
	Indian paintbrush	<i>Castilleja chromosa</i>	A. Nels.	Scrophulariaceae
	Firechalice	<i>Epilobium canum</i> (<i>Zauschneria latifolia</i> according to Welsh and others [2003])	(Hook.) Greene	Onagraceae
	Sulfurflower buckwheat	<i>Eriogonum umbellatum</i>	Torr.	Polygonaceae
	Sticky geranium	<i>Geranium viscosissimum</i>	Fisch. And Mey.	Geraniaceae
	Utah sweetvetch	<i>Hedysarum boreale</i>	Nutt.	Fabaceae
	Maple mallow	<i>Iliamna rivularis</i>	(Dougl.) Greene	Malvaceae
	Desert four o'clock	<i>Mirabilis multiflora</i>	(Torr.) Gray	Nyctaginaceae
	Little beebalm	<i>Monardella odoratissima</i>	Benth.	Lamiaceae
	Fragrant evening primrose	<i>Oenothera caespitosa</i>	Nutt.	Onagraceae
	Wasatch penstemon	<i>Penstemon cyananthus</i>	Hook.	Scrophulariaceae
	Firecracker penstemon	<i>Penstemon eatonii</i>	Gray	Scrophulariaceae
	ORNAMENTAL GRASSES	Palmer penstemon	<i>Penstemon palmeri</i>	Gray
Utah penstemon		<i>Penstemon utahensis</i>	Eastw.	Scrophulariaceae
Whipple penstemon		<i>Penstemon whippleanus</i>	Gray	Scrophulariaceae
Gooseberryleaf globemallow		<i>Sphaeralcea grossulariifolia</i>	(H. and A.) Rydb.	Malvaceae
Blue grama		<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i>	(H. B. K.) Griffiths	Poaceae
SHRUBS	Little bluestem	<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>	(Michx.) Nash	Poaceae
	Alkali sacaton grass	<i>Sporobolus airoides</i>	(Torr.) Torr.	Poaceae
	Indian ricegrass	<i>Tetaneuris acaulis</i> (<i>Stipa hymenoides</i> according to Welsh and others [2003])	R. and S.	Poaceae
	Utah serviceberry	<i>Amelanchier utahensis</i>	Koehne	Rosaceae
SHRUBS	Mountain big sagebrush	<i>Artemisia tridentata vaseyana</i>	(Rydb.) Beetle	Asteraceae
	Shadscale	<i>Atriplex confertifolia</i>	(Torr. and Frem.) Wats.	Chenopodiaceae
	Fernbush	<i>Chamaebatiaria millefolium</i>	(Torr.) Maxim.	Rosaceae
	Green Mormon tea	<i>Ephedra viridis</i>	Cov.	Ephedraceae
	Apache plume	<i>Fallugia paradoxa</i>	(D. Don) Endl.	Rosaceae
	Creeping Oregon grape	<i>Mahonia repens</i>	(Lindley) G. Don	Berberidaceae
	Littleleaf mockorange	<i>Philadelphus microphyllus</i>	Gray	Saxifragaceae
	Cliffrose	<i>Purshia mexicana</i>	(D. Don) S. Welsh	Rosaceae
	Golden currant	<i>Ribes aureum</i>	Pursh	Saxifragaceae
	Oakleaf sumac	<i>Rhus trilobata</i>	Nutt.	Anacardiaceae
	Desert sage	<i>Salvia dorrii</i>	(Kell.) Abrams	Lamiaceae
	SUCCULENTS	Dwarf yucca	<i>Yucca harrimaniae</i>	Trel.
SHRUBS		White fir	<i>Abies concolor</i>	(Gord. and Glend.) Lindl.
	Bigtooth maple	<i>Acer grandidentatum</i>	Nutt.	Aceraceae
	Curlleaf mountain mahogany	<i>Cercocarpus ledifolius</i>	Nutt.	Rosaceae
	Pinyon pine	<i>Pinus edulis</i>	Engelm.	Pinaceae
	Gambel oak	<i>Quercus gambelii</i>	Nutt.	Fagaceae