

Penstemon

The American reading his Sunday paper in a state of lazy collapse is perhaps the most perfect symbol of the triumph of quantity over quality.... Whole forests are being ground into pulp daily to minister to our triviality.
~ Irving Babbitt

What's in a name: Foxglove
Penstemon; Beardtongue
Penstemon -> “five” “stamens”

Family: Scrophulariaceae
~224 genera; 4450 species

Common names in Mexico:
Jarritos, boteya, chupamirto,
Frente al sol, hablarias, hierba
del chincual; cebadilla falsa;
lengua de arista

Penstemon species in the monarch
overwintering sanctuaries:
Penstemon campanulatus, *P.*
gentianoides and *P. roseus*

Caterpillar Café:
Purple lined Sallow
Chalcedon checkerspot
Baltimore Checkerspot

I wish I knew how to quit you:
Penstemons (and their Indian
Paint brush cousins) are
considered secondary selenium
accumulators. Horses grazing
on these plants can become
lame from grazing on
Penstemon from the selenium.

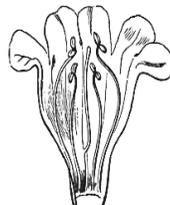
DINO-MIGHT!: Some theorize
that selenium may have been
the main cause for the
extinction of dinosaurs.
Selenium, deposited from
volcanic lava and absorbed by
plants, might have poisoned the
diet of the herbivorous (plant-
eating) dinosaurs.

The joy of specks: *Penstemon*
was North Carolina Wildflower
of the Year for 1984 and 2002.

Deep throat: There are tufted
stamens in the throat of the
large tubular flowers. This is
curious as most common names
of the *Penstemon* genus
mention “beards”.



Foxglove Beard-tongue
(*Penstemon digitalis*)
photo by D. Gordon E. Robertson,
wikipedia.org



What's that red dot on your
sweeter?: Sometimes there are
reddish-violet lines within the
corolla which function as nectar
guides to visiting insects. There
is little noticeable fragrance.

Oh give me a home where the
antelope roam: Shoshone
natives called a native
Penstemon, *timbah-hay nut-
zoo* or “bad disease medicine.”

They are maniacs, I tell you,
maniacs: This garden perennial
is such a favorite that an entire
organization, the *American
Penstemon Society*, has been
created for *penste-maniacs*. :)

If you can't pick a *Penstemon*
you like, well,
you're just too picky: :)
Here's a handful of *Penstemon*'s
common names from
across the U.S.:

Blue mountain & mountain blue;
handsome, tiger, azure; blue;
bluestem; blueleaf; upright blue;
variable-color; Foxglove beard-
tongue; lilac; Yellow; Scarlet, Pink
plains; big red sage; Western
white; white river; white wand;
Black canyon, black river;
rockledge; rockvine;
threadleaf; bunchleaf, stiff leaf;
waxleaf; thickleaf; firleaf;
smoothleaf; larchleaf; lanceleaf;
cutleaf; heartleaf; sharpleaf;
twoleaf; littleleaf; sawleaf;
broadleaf; bellflower; longflower,
littleflower, manyflower;
closedthroat; broadbeard;
beardlip; beardtongue;
fuzzytongue; nodding; pincushion;
swollen; tufted; scented;
shortlobe; littlecup; smooth;
showy; superb; fleshy; dusty;
compact; firecracker; large,
small; dwarf; stemless; sharp
sepal and alpine sawsepal; high
mountain, lowland; upland;
sandloving; cliff, meadow; Snow
Mountain, Rocky Mountain;
Navajo Mountain; Guadalupe
beardtongue ... and the list keeps
on going and going and going...
270 species & counting...
www.plants.usda.gov

It is the largest genus of
flowering plants
endemic to North America.