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Native Shrubs for High Desert Landscapes

The definition of gardening has been slowly but steadily changing. In the new gardening ethic you'll often hear the phrase "sense of place" as gardeners begin to embrace their natural surroundings and attempt to replicate those surroundings in their home landscapes. This new gardening style has many benefits, including the use of plants appropriate to local climate and soils and maintaining a region's unique aesthetic.

Using native plants in the home landscape is the focus of this latest approach. In the high desert we have a wide selection of native trees, herbaceous perennials and shrubs from which to choose. In this article we'll concentrate on native shrubs.

Apache Plume (*Fallugia paradoxa*) is a signature shrub of our region growing at elevations from 3000 to 8000 feet. It is a semi-evergreen shrub best known for its pinkish, feathery seed heads. Pure white flowers with yellow centers appear April through late May. This shrub is often covered in both flowers and



seed heads simultaneously. It provides cover for quail and the flowers attract butterflies. It is extremely drought tolerant, needing only a deep monthly watering once established. Apache Plume tolerates reflected heat and is cold tolerant to -30 F. Grows to 3-8' x 3-8' (will stay smaller if not given supplemental irrigation).

Brittlebush (*Encelia farinosa*) grows in the lower deserts so in our area it is best planted in a protected location. This compact shrub has large, lance-shaped silvery-gray leaves that contrast with the bright yellow flowers that appear in spring. It is fast growing and extremely drought tolerant. Grows to 4' x 4'. Needs winter protection.

Curleaf Mountain Mahogany (*Cercocarpus ledifolius*) grows on arid, rocky slopes at higher elevations from 5000 to 10,000 feet. It is a large, evergreen shrub with dark green, glossy leaves. In spring it is covered with small yellow flowers that are followed by unique silver corkscrew-like seed heads.

This is an excellent shrub for providing shelter and food for birds. It is very drought tolerant once established. Grows to 18' x 15'.

Pink Fairy Duster (*Calliandra eriophylla*) is a showy, deciduous shrub covered in clusters of white to pink powder puff-like flowers in early spring. The flowers have long stamens that are white at the base and reddish purple at their tips. Hummingbirds are attracted to the flowers. It is extremely drought tolerant once established and can tolerate reflected heat. It is cold hardy to 5 F and possibly lower. Prune occasionally to encourage more compact, dense form. Grows to 3' x 3'.

True Mountain Mahogany (*Cercocarpus montanus*) is a large, evergreen shrub that grows on mesas and dry slopes from 3000 to 9000 feet. It has leathery leaves and shaggy red bark. The tiny, creamy white, spring flowers are followed by silver corkscrew-like seed heads (as with Curlleaf Mountain Mahogany). True Mountain Mahogany prefers full sun and is very drought tolerant once established. Grows to 15' x 8'.

Turpentine Bush (*Ericameria laricifolia* 'Aguirre') is a familiar shrub to Southwesterners – especially when it is covered in bright yellow flowers in late summer and early fall. This compact shrub is covered in rich green needle-like foliage. Turpentine Bush grows at elevations from 3000 to 6000 feet, prefers full sun, and can tolerate reflected heat. Once established it can survive on natural precipitation but would not mind a deep, monthly watering during the driest months. Grows to 2' x 3'.

