Native and Drought-Tolerant Plants for Southwestern Landscapes
Apache Plume
*Fallugia paradoxa*

Native to Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and all four southwestern deserts - Chihuahuan, Sonoran, Great Basin, and Mohave.

Xeric plant with white flowers and pink plumes from spring through fall.

Shelters wildlife and attracts pollinators.

Size varies greatly, but assume 5’ x 5’. It grows fast! No pruning. Just remove dead material in the Fall.

Photo courtesy of BLM Nevada
Parry agave

*Agave parryi*

Blue-gray leaves form a striking rosette. Mature plants send up a 10’ to 20’ flower stalk with red buds that open to yellow flowers. After flowering the plant dies and leaves pups.

Native to NM, AZ, and northwest Mexico. Variety *neomexicana* is hardy to negative 20 degrees, grows in sun or part shade, and requires little maintenance.

The core of the plant, rich in sugars, is cooked, fermented, and distilled. Agave tequila, grown only in Mexico, may be processed and labeled tequila. ¡Salud!

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Photo courtesy of Raul654 / Wikimedia Commons
Chinese Wisteria

*Wisteria sinensis*

Used on trellises and to decorate gardens with cascading purple flower clusters.

Grows in full sun or part shade in well drained soils; requires little watering once established.

To train as a vine, attach an upright stem to a support; repeat process with new branches.

Attracts hummingbirds, and smells good!

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Photo courtesy of Piers Nye
Curl-leaf Mountain Mahogany

*Cercocarpus ledifolius*

A member of the rose family, this large shrub - or small tree - grows 12 feet tall and 8 feet wide.

Leaves are small, leathery, and evergreen, and a pinch in the leaf gives it its name.

Attractive white bark with eye-catching twisty, feathery seed plumes that decorate the branches after flowering.

Plant one and show off a New Mexico native! Or treat yourself to an autumn walk in the Sandias to see them.
Gray Oak, *Quercus grisea*

An evergreen oak that grows in the foothills of the Sandias and ranges from Colorado to Mexico.

Grows 20’ tall and 25’ wide in a multi-trunk form. Grows best in well drained soil and in full sun. A mature specimen will have a twisted series of stout trunks and branches.

Ethnobotanical uses: Used to protect ceremonial hogans from lightning, ghosts, and witches. Acorns have been a food source.

Photos courtesy of Homer Edward Price
Hollyhock

*Alcea rosea*

Tough, versatile, colorful plant variously described as a biennial, annual, and short-lived perennial.

Flowers in a variety of colors; single and double blooms from spring through fall.

In the Old West, used as an early wayfinding tool and to mark outhouses.

Self sows, attracts bees, iconic in NM.
Yerba Mansa
Anemopsis californica

Small perennial groundcover with conical white florets. Commonly found in wetlands and moist soil environments. Only 6-8 inches tall.

Native to Oregon and down to southern Texas.

This fleshy perennial needs some tending, but when treated well it will spread by rhizomes and seed itself.

The plant is edible. Tea made from its roots will help colds, coughs, and stomach aches. Yerba Mansa extract can be found in many new age herbal remedies.

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White Sands Claret Cup

Echinocereus triglochidiatus

Discovered in the White Sands region of NM. One of the largest species of claret cup!

Red flowers bloom in late spring.

Drought tolerant evergreen that attracts hummingbirds and bees.

Cold hardy up to zone 5. Grows about 2’ high and 2’ in diameter. Plant in full sun.

Photo courtesy of BLM Nevada
Turpentine Bush

*Ericameria laricifolia*

Long-lived evergreen shrub native to the Southwest and northern Mexico.

Covered in small yellow flowers in the fall. Loved by birds and butterflies.

Lightly crushed, the leaves smell lemony. Crush harder and they smell like turpentine!

Low water, no fertilizer, no pruning. Grows up to 3’ tall and wide.

Photo courtesy of Anne Reeves
Turkish Speedwell

*Veronica liwanensis*

Xeric evergreen that fills the gaps in flagstone paving and borders. Some find it to be more drought, heat, and cold tolerant than thyme.

Blue flowers in late spring and looks good year-round. Grows in shade and sun. You can have a party on it and it will survive.

Non-native, but extremely well-adapted for environments in the West.
Sulfur Buckwheat

*Eriogonum umbellatum*

Evergreen groundcover with bright yellow flower clusters. Leaves are smooth on top, woolly underneath, and turn purple and red in the fall.

Attracts pollinators, such as bees and butterflies!

Perennial grows in almost any soil. Forms a mat for border or rock garden plantings. Likes almost any type of soil. Plant with grasses, lavender, or even penstemon.

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Sotol, Desert Spoon
*Dasylirion wheeleri*

Evergreen succulent native to TX, NM, AZ, and northern Mexico. Drought and heat tolerant. Also known as desert spoon.

Long, sharply-serrated leaves form a rosette up to 6 feet wide. Flower in late spring to early summer; plants have either male or female flowers.

Native Americans wove dried leaves to make baskets and other items. The center heart can be eaten. In Chihuahua, sotol is cooked and distilled into an alcohol similar to tequila.
Purple Rockrose

*Cistus x purpureus*

Mediterranean native that is evergreen and has a resinous scent.

Waterwise and will tolerate poor soil with little maintenance.

Plant in full sun in spring or early summer with time to root before cold weather.

Cold hardy in elevations up to 5,000 ft. Grows up to 4’ high and 5’ in diameter.

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Photo courtesy of Forest Starr and Kim Starr
Prickly Pear Cactus
*Opuntia engelmannii*

Creates a bold, modern landscape that highlights native plants and celebrates the Southwest.

Adorned with beautiful yellow flowers and purple fruits.

Often observed with white foam which is “spit” from the Cochineal Beetle. Cochineal dye - used for centuries in fabrics and food - is red and comes from this foam.
Old Man of the Andes

*Oreocereus celsianus*

Who said plants can’t have hair?! This little cactus is native to the high lands of the Andes in South America. Its fluffy white hair helps protect it from intense light.

Pink flowers in late spring & early summer. Flowers attract hummingbirds.

Columnar cactus. Grows up to 4’ tall. Cold hardy up to 10 degrees. In the Southwest, grow as an indoor potted plant.

Photo courtesy of Drew Avery
New Mexico Olive

*Forestiera neomexicana*

Small, native tree about 20’ tall and 12’ wide. Typically multi-trunked.

Small, yellow flowers in spring and light green leaves. In autumn, the leaves turn bright yellow before falling.

Trees with female flowers produce small, blue-black fruits that are eaten by birds.

A low-water use plant that likes full sun. Plants can be pruned into a hedge for screening.

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Photo of berries courtesy of Erin E Willett
New Mexico Hops

*Humulus lupulus var. neomexicanus*

Native to the western US. Found growing wild in the Jemez Mountains in New Mexico and north of Albuquerque.

Grows along streams and rivers where shrubs, trees, or streamside rocks act as a support.

Female flowers enhance flavor of beer. Though this variety isn’t used extensively, one brewer says, “It smells of intense guava, passion fruit, lemon lime, and alfalfa notes.”

Thirsty yet?

Photo courtesy of Russ Kleinman & Danielle Walkup
Mexican Feathergrass
*Nassella tenuissima*

Soft, touchable, beautiful plant. It is a native of west Texas and eastern New Mexico. Contrast these grasses with other plants and architecture with strong, bold, and massive forms.

Grows about 30” tall and 24” in diameter. Growth rate is moderate. No need to prune! Likes to wander.
Lavender
*Lavandula angustifolia*

Xeric landscapes are more than just gravel and cactus. They can also include the woody herbs of the Mediterranean, which love the hot and dry climate of New Mexico and the Southwest.

Lavender, a flowering hardy perennial, grows in free draining sandy soils.

Plant in full sun and sandy soil. Lavender doesn’t like being fussed or over watered. Prune back in the fall.

Uses are too numerous to mention, suffice to say just a ‘whiff’ makes you feel better.
Juniper

*Juniperus* species

Versatile plants that grow as groundcovers, shrubs, and trees in almost any climate. Junipers include Alligator Juniper trees (named for the scaly bark), Bar Harbor groundcover juniper, and many more.

The one-seed juniper tree is cursed for its pollen.

Juniper has been used for kidney ailments and bronchitis, wounds and inflammatory diseases.

Juniper berries are used to make gin. Though the sloe gin berry of England is actually a plum!