

What's On/Off the Approved Plant List

I didn't live in Albuquerque when the Approved Plant List was first created, but I believe the initial intent was to limit the list to native plants that would look appropriate in the foothills. Because of the limited number of choices, over time this list was expanded to include water-wise plants that maintained the same look as the natives, but allowed for more color. Some plants were removed from the initial list because the City of Albuquerque prohibited them for allergy/pollen reasons.

You might ask: what allows one plant to be acceptable for the list and another not? Part of the answer is that some plants don't fit within the water-wise desert native plant look that the High Desert developer wanted. Some require too much water/work for our environment, but they're well known and popular elsewhere – they feel familiar and comfortable to people coming from other areas of the country. Some are invasive like Tree of Heaven or Siberian elm; some were a “fad” plant that everyone wanted and then faded from the trade, no longer available for purchase.

My topic for this issue includes three types of plants: plants people think are on the list and use regularly but are not, plants that are on the list and probably shouldn't be, and interesting underused plants from the list.

Not on the list. One of the best examples of a plant not on the list is most roses. There are only four roses allowed: Austrian copper rose, Persian rose, Lady Banks rose, and Woods rose. Your favorite hybrid tea or garden rose isn't there. Other plants not on the list include spruce, palms, crape myrtle, euonymous, Japanese barberry, hollies (e.g. Burford), photinia, wax leaf ligustrum, boxwood, Indian hawthorne, daylilies, bearded iris, and trumpet vine. Trumpet vine is a one time decision which you can never get rid of if you tire of it – for that reason it's not included on the list. Fruit trees are also not included because the original developer felt they would attract bears. Other vines often used include wisteria, Boston ivy and Virginia creeper. The latter two vines can damage walls.

On the list. Some plants that are on the list and probably shouldn't be include invasive ones such as Russian Sage, hairy golden aster, Woods rose, and staghorn sumac; poisonous ones like gopher spurge; and short-lived ones like Bowles mauve. Other plants are from a higher altitude and have difficulty surviving at a lower altitude. These include bristlecone pine, limber pine, and quaking aspen which typically show signs of stress in the summer heat and get pests or disease as a result. Some trees such as purple robe locust have bad habits like dropping branches on you or your house! Cottonwoods need a higher water table than we have in the foothills to survive well so there are very few left on the list. Eastern redbuds don't enjoy the dry winds of the desert and get brown leaf edges in the heat. Chitalpa, a hybrid of desert willow and catalpa, drops its leaves in the heat. All chitalpas have a disease that was part of the original clone. While these plants are on the list, they don't make the best choice for your landscape.

Underused plants on the list. Some of my favorites that you might consider using include the following trees: hawthorns, fragrant ash (lovely blooms), hoptree, and western soapberry. Underused shrubs include: curry plant (foliage smells so good), winterfat (love the wooly white stalks in the fall), big flowered sage (gray foliage, but with a flower), bush penstemon (like white/pink phlox), bush morning glory (neon pink morning glory on a shrub), Nanking cherry (spring bloomer), littleleaf sumac (tall plant with little leaves), and littleleaf mock orange (the orange smell). Finally, underused perennials include:

buckwheat species (I love the *Jamesii* one), tufted evening primrose, Missouri primrose (gray foliage one), coral bells (needs shade), gayfeather, beebalm, zauschneria, desert mules ears, and verbenas. Many of the desert accent plants are interesting too. I love the hedgehog cactus in particular – White Sands variety that's a little taller.

My hope is that you can use this article as a guide to better, more interesting plants and that you'll consider removing those that make High Desert look like other traditional developments across America. We are a special place that fits appropriately into our natural environment.