



# Casper demonstration site

These hardy trees, shrubs suited to Wyoming climate spread swagger to any landscape

By Donna Cuin

They bring the best of the Rockies to you.

Members that make up the Plant Select Cooperative Association test and recommend the best plants for the Intermountain West gardener or landscaper. The gardens around the Agricultural Resources and Learning Center (ARLC) in Natrona County continue to be demonstration and test gardens for Plant Select introductions and releases.

The Casper test site is on sandy, gravel river bottom soils at 5,125 feet elevation with a 90- to 110-day growing season and an annual average of 14 inches of precipitation.



Clear Creek yellowhorn

We receive plants for trial each year and are asked to rank the plants and describe the attributes we appreciate or dislike. Several have become proven favorites, and several others have been known to stop traffic when in bloom.

Take time to consider some of these plants for the coming growing season if looking for plants tough enough to weather the harsh conditions of Wyoming's arid high plains and relatively low organic matter soils and still provide often stunning displays in gardens.

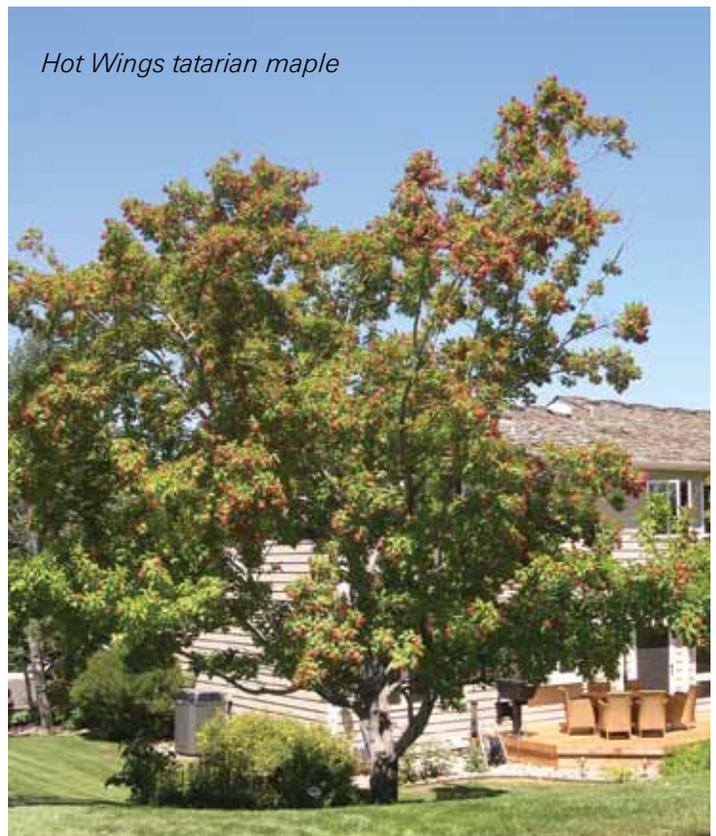
## Terrific Trees

These three trees are great assets for any garden: Russian hawthorn (*Crataegus ambigua*), Hot Wings tatarian maple (*Acer tataricum* 'GARANN'), and Clear Creek yellowhorn (*Xanthoceras sorbifolium*).

The **Russian hawthorn** is a great substitute for the overused crabapple tree in our regional landscapes. They, too, are covered with white blossoms and develop beautiful, glossy-red fruit but do not drop the fruit like crabapples. The fruit will attract birds to the garden through the

winter months but not leave the mess on the lawn and sidewalk like most crabapples. These trees are also less susceptible than the crabapple to fire blight bacterial infections. Height: 15 to 20 feet. Width: 12 to 20 feet.

The **Tatarian maple** is a beautiful tree – a show stopper. They might be best used as a specimen tree to highlight an area where you need visual interest or a focus in the landscape. Maples are well known for their fall color, but the Hot Wings variety develops bright color almost as soon as its fruits begin to develop. Each maple flower produces a set of dry, winged seeds called a samara. The seeds on this tree turn a hot pink color as they develop and are red-to-burgundy as the leaves change in the fall. Height: 15 to 18 feet. Width: 15 to 18 feet.



Hot Wings tatarian maple

# evaluates Plant Select releases



Fernbush

**Clear Creek yellowhorns** are grown as a large shrub or small tree. They have a beautiful compound leaf, very similar to those on the staghorn sumac. The flowers are very large and grow in clusters looking like a bunch of orchids. There is some variation in the coloration inside the white flowers, some with burgundy and yellow inside the throat of the flower. The fruit develops into what looks like a very large, dry, kiwi fruit that breaks open to shed seeds that resemble malted milk balls.

Height: 18 to 22 feet. Width: 10 to 15 feet.

## Super Shrubs

We also have several shrubs that are great additions to regional gardens. The Apache plume (*Fallugia*

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Plant Select is a cooperative association of green industry businesses, Colorado State University, Denver Botanic Gardens, and a variety of demonstration gardens along the Rocky Mountains from Montana to New Mexico. The best of the Rocky Mountain west – plants for Wyoming, Colorado, and Montana, make up the Plant Select list.

*paradoxa*) and fernbush (*Chamaebatiaria millefolium*) are two examples.

The **Apache plume** is a good substitute for the common potentilla shrub used for decades in gardens across the West. The Apache plume has quarter-size, five-petal white blossoms that continue to appear even after the plant begins to set seed. You often see the flowers blooming while the seed heads produce their show of rose-colored fluff. Each seed head looks like a small, fuzzy feather duster on the ends of each branch. The color combination of white flowers and rosy pink seed heads is quite attractive and definitely unusual. Grows 4 to 6 feet in height and spread.

**Fernbush** is a plant that also blooms with five-petal white flowers, but these bloom in cone-shaped clusters at the



ends of each branch, all about the same time. The blossoms are wonderful for attracting a large variety of pollinators and, when blooming, they are abuzz with insect activity. Grows 3 to 5 feet in height and spread.

### Giant Grasses

Plant Select has begun adding ornamental grasses to their introductions, and one we are excited to showcase is the **giant sacaton** (*Sporobolus wrightii*). It is a wonderfully large grass with golden seed heads above broad, green, strap-like leaves. The best feature of the plant is the size it reaches once established and reaches maturity – 5 to 7 feet high and grows to 5 feet wide. We have been testing it as a plant suited for the borders of windbreaks, and it seems to handle the wind well.

### Perfect Perennials

There are two perennials I want to highlight because they are not only beautiful when they are in bloom but also fragrant. One is sunset hyssop (*Agastache rupestris*) and the other chocolate flower (*Berlandiera lyrata*).

Some might think **sunset hyssop** is a small shrub during the growing season because it does have hard stems, but it dies back to the ground each winter and should be cut back in the winter or spring. While in bloom, the plant produces long spires of burgundy-to-dark rosy pink flowers. The fragrance of licorice, mint, or root beer surrounding the whole plant will be evident when you walk into the garden and will stay with you if you touch or handle the plant.

**Chocolate flower** blooms with a golden yellow flower with brown-to-burgundy centers. They are a somewhat wiry plant with small, elongated oval leaves. Along with

the flowers, I particularly like the developing seed heads that are mostly green but are very attractive for floral arrangements when dried. However, the most attractive feature is the fragrance as you brush against it in the garden. The fragrance of a chocolate candy bar will fill the air if you walk through the garden in the early morning hours.

If looking for new plants for your home, give some of these plants a try. You can find these and many more plants on the Plant Select website at [www.plantselect.org](http://www.plantselect.org). Be attentive to USDA zones. Other examples of plants in our demonstration garden are available in a new UW CES guide at [barnyardsandbackyards.com](http://barnyardsandbackyards.com) *WyoScape Xeric Demonstration Garden Guide* on the Resources-Landscaping page.

### Additional varieties for consideration

**Sea foam artemisia** – *Artemisia versicolor* ‘Sea Foam’

**Silver fountain butterfly bush** – *Buddleia alternifolia* ‘Argentea’

**Winecups** – *Callirhoe involucrate*

**Mesa Verde ice plant** – *Delosperma* ‘Kelaidis’

**First Love Dianthus** – *Dianthus* ‘First Love’

**Sunset foxglove** – *Digitalis obscura*

**Spanish Peaks foxglove** – *Digitalis thapsi*

**Snow angel coral bells** – *Heuchera sanguine* ‘Snow Angel’

**Silverheels horehound** – *Marrubium rotundifolium*

**Hopflower oregano** – *Origanum libanoticum*

**Mojave sage** – *Salvia pachyphylla*

**Red Birds in a Tree** – *Scrophularia macrantha*

**Turkish veronica** – *Veronica liwanensis*

**Crystal River veronica** – *Veronica* x ‘Reavis’

**Orange carpet hummingbird trumpet** – *Zauschneria garrettii*



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