

## The Weekly Plant

### 24 March 2013

**Common names:** Parry's penstemon, Parry's beardtongue, desert penstemon

**Scientific name:** *Penstemon parryi*<sup>1</sup>.

**TAV location:**

Between the drive to Staff Parking and the Villa. Walk on the sidewalk going north from the Villa. There are several penstemon on the hillside, at or below eye level, next to the sidewalk.

**Discussion:**

Penstemons in the western US are glorious. Reds! Magentas! Purples! True, there are some western penstemons in the pale colors of the eastern species, but many have bright hues.

A quick look at web resources provides the following information. There are about 280 species of *Penstemon*, all native to North America<sup>2</sup>. The maps from the Biota of North America Program show about 240 species found in the US. What I find interesting is that most of the species are in the western half of the US and many of them have a very restricted range. For example, a species is found in only one or two states. Our Weekly Plant is shown as occurring in the US only in Arizona, and only in central, south central and southeastern Arizona<sup>3</sup>. It is found in Mexico as well.

Parry's penstemon is a popular landscape plant in desert areas. It needs little water and reseeds readily. Just make sure it has good drainage.

This penstemon is easy to recognize. The leaves are a pale bluish green. Basal leaves are about 5" long, wider toward the tip of the leaf. The leaves on the flower stalk become opposite, narrow and elongated, almost touching each other as they reach around the round stalk.



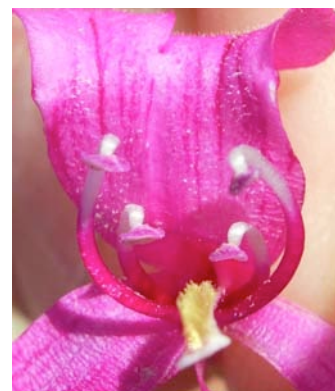
*Rounded basal leaves (left) change to long slender leaves on the flower stalk (right). Note flowers beginning to grow at base of leaves.*

The flowers are typical of many penstemon and are held in tall clusters growing from the base of a leaf (axial flowers). The five petals are joined into a tube that flares at the end, two lobes up, three lobes down. Peer down the flower tube and you'll see the beard tongue. This is a sterile stamen (called a staminode) that is hairy. This "bearded tongue" is a common characteristics of all penstemon. The other four stamens are fertile and in two pairs held at slightly different lengths.

Keep an eye out as you walk around the Village. I've seen Parry's penstemon in several yards as well as another penstemon species with bright red flowers (I didn't take a close look). Look for hummingbirds, too. Even white penstemon flowers are popular with these birds.



*L: tubular flower flared at end with 5 green sepals. C: Four stamens are visible plus the yellow beard on the "tongue".*



*The 3 lower petals also have hairs. R: Just the stamens - a short pair, a long pair, and the bearded staminode.*

<sup>1</sup> GRIN Online Database is the source of the currently accepted scientific name.

<sup>2</sup> American Penstemon Society: <http://apsdev.org/welcome.html>.

<sup>3</sup> see: <http://www.bonap.org/BONAPmaps2010/Penstemon.html>.

