

# Weekly Plant Photo Edition

16 March 2020

**Common Names:** plains flax

**Scientific name:** *Linum puberulum*

**In our community:** across the street and to the right of the mailbox stand for 7904-7934 S. Galileo (lots 173-176). The areas with the plants, near the base of the slope, are marked with green tape.

**Discussion:** You won't notice this plant until it flowers, and maybe not even then. The stems are thin, the leaves are thin, and the flowers can blend into the color of the soil. But once you see the 3/4 inch orange and red flowers, you'll start seeing lots of them.

Plains flax is a spring-(occasionally fall)-flowering annual native to the southwest US, found throughout Arizona and New Mexico. It was used by Native Americans as eye medicine, to make yellow paint, and, interestingly, to "kill a swallowed red ant." (<http://naeb.brit.org/uses/search/?string=linum+puberulum>).

Make sure you look for these plants in the morning since the flower petals fall off by mid-afternoon. The plants have plenty of buds, so you'll get several chances to see these flowers over the next few days.

Plains flax is related to the Old World flax species (*Linum usitatissimum*) used to make linen, flaxseed, and linseed oil.



*Above:* A single plains flax, with 1 open flower and several buds and nearly invisible stems.



*Upper left:* Plains flax flower.

*Lower left:* The back of the flower. Look closely at the stem. It is puberulent (covered with fine, short hairs), a feature that gives rise to the plant's scientific name. Just keep enlarging the pdf until you can see the hairs.



*Center:* Thin stem and leaves of plains flax. The leaves curve upward toward the top of the plant.

