

On the Wild Side – April, 2010
By Donna Thomas, Oasis Garden Club of IWV

Tagetes lemmonii – Mountain Marigold, Copper Canyon Daisy

Mountain Marigold is an herbaceous evergreen perennial or small shrub. It is native to Arizona, New Mexico and northern Mexico in oak and pine forests at elevations from 2,600 feet to 8,000 feet. It is a member of the Asteraceae or Sunflower Family. This plant is a multi-branched perennial with stems that are widely spaced rising from a semi-woody base. The leaves are dark green and divided into 7 to 9 leaflets pinnately arranged and tipped with oil glands. The flowers occur on tall thin stalks up to six inches over the finely textured foliage. Mountain Marigold blooms from July to November, and sometimes, in mild winter areas, even into the winter. The daisy-like flowers at the ends of the stalks are a stunning yellow-gold to yellow orange. Some describe the showy flowers as “electric,” providing intense fall color. This plant is among those that provide the finest golden fall flowers that are very attractive to butterflies. The late flowering is helpful for insects that migrate through the region. This aromatic perennial has a scent that is a blend of marigold, mint and lemon described as ranging from pleasant to pungent to rank. You may not want to plant it in high traffic areas because the oil glands and foliage might irritate the skin of those who brush against it. Rabbits and deer leave it alone because of the oil glands.

Mountain Marigold is cold hardy to five degrees Fahrenheit. It is root hardy, but mulching before winter will improve the cold hardiness. It grows fairly rapidly to 2 to 3 feet tall and wide. Severe pruning after flowering helps to keep the plant more compact. Plant in full or filtered sun and well drained soil. Water requirements are minimal once established. Water the plant moderately through the summer to encourage a longer flowering season. The plant may be propagated from seeds or cuttings. In her book, Mary Irish reports that the Lemmons, who were well known plant collectors and growers based in California, sent the seeds to England where the native species was “tamed” and sent back to the United States. Plants may be purchased through High Country Gardens or some wholesale native plant nurseries. The native plant sale sponsored by Desert Mountain RC&D and Oasis Garden Club often lists this plant on its order form.

Facts for this article were obtained from the following sources:

Cool Plants for Hot Gardens – Greg Starr

The Low-Water Flower Gardener – Eric A. Johnson and Scott Millard

Perennials for the Southwest – Mary Irish