

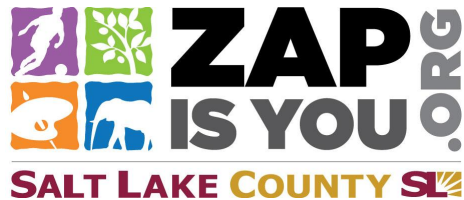
# ***Native Gardens***

By Karen Zacarías

Directed by Timothy Douglas

Jan 12 - 27, 2024

**SPOTLIGHT STUDY GUIDE**  
For Teachers and Students



Pioneer Theatre Company's Student Matinee Program is made possible through the support of Salt Lake County's Zoo, Arts, and Parks Program, The Simmons Family Foundation, and The Meldrum Foundation Endowment Fund.





**SETTING:** The back of two houses. Two back gardens. A disheveled wire fence with ivy divides them. One garden is beautiful: lush grass, very symmetrical garden beds, and flowers lining the fence. The other is unkempt: dying hydrangeas, crabgrass, a large oak tree, leaves, and acorns.

**SYNOPSIS:** In the suburbs of Washington D.C., a high-powered lawyer named Pablo and his very pregnant, doctoral candidate wife named Tania, have just purchased their dream home. It's a bit of a fixer-upper, but luckily Tania is a brilliant gardener and plans to transform their outdoor space into a beautiful native garden. Their new next-door neighbor, Frank, is a gardener himself and spends most of his time nurturing his non-native garden to win the annual gardening competition in the neighborhood. Frank and his wife Virginia have lived here for a long time and welcome Pablo and Tania with open arms. However, when Pablo invites his whole law firm over for a BBQ, Tania and Pablo set to work on building a fence and discover that their property line is 2 feet into Frank's beloved garden. This creates friction between the neighbors and an all-out border dispute erupts. The two couples show their true colors and it is unclear who will win the war. Can such different people from totally different backgrounds find a way to compromise? How can you love your neighbor when you're sure they're invading your space?

## CHARACTERS...

### Pablo & Tania Del Valle



**Pablo** is an ambitious and successful attorney trying to make partner by "fitting in" and hosting a BBQ for the entire firm in his unkempt backyard. He is smart, argumentative, generally tolerant, and willing to overlook a lot—until he is pushed over the edge by the Butleys.

**Tania** is a pregnant doctoral candidate who is determined to improve her fixer-upper with a native garden. Bright, energetic, and naturally optimistic, she wants to co-exist with the neighbors but is fiercely protective of her ideas and values.

### Frank & Virginia Butley

**Virginia** is an executive working for a large defense contractor in the DC area. Friendly and civil, her opinions are deeply ingrained and she will fight ruthlessly to protect her turf.

**Frank** is a gentle and sensitive soul who has devoted himself to his pristine English garden in his retirement. He wants to get along with the neighbors but cannot embrace a native garden next door.



# Meet the Playwright: Karen Zacarías

Playwright Karen Zacarías was under a tight deadline to deliver on a new play commission, and though ideas fluttered through her mind, nothing quite stuck. Then, while she was at a dinner party, friends suggested that she write a play about a dispute they were having with their neighbor. After other party attendees started sharing their stories of neighborly nuisances, Zacarías realized that most conflicts in the world could be boiled down to differences over property, taste, class, and culture. This planted the seeds for her comedy *Native Gardens*, which finds two couples, one white and one Latinx, at odds over property lines and best practices in gardening.



Karen Zacarias. Photo via Beverlie Lord

***You've written a few plays that deal with the foibles of suburban life. Where does that come from for you?***

As a Mexican immigrant in this country, I was very interested in having my Latinx characters be characters that you don't see a lot onstage. You don't usually get to have a Ph.D. candidate or a lawyer who's Latinx. For me, *Native Gardens* is always about, in a warm-hearted sense, undermining expectations — so the engineer in the play is a woman. We've seen this dynamic before, but there are different ways to approach it, so as the audience is laughing, they're also being challenged.

***In this comedy, these neighbors take their stakes — winning a gardening competition and making partner at a law firm — so seriously. But neither seems to have regard for how they're impacting the natural life around them or each other's lives.***

People are constantly making judgments, and sometimes they don't go on the generous side — they're assuming the worst of someone. The play ended up becoming a symbol of what's going on in our country, a way to be able to talk about important topics like entitlement, white privilege, and the border through the lens of horticulture and make it funny. It's been a really interesting sociological experiment to see what this play does to audiences across the country. Most communities can relate to what's going on no matter what side of the fence they're on.

***You write in the play that the difference between a weed and a flower is judgment. What is America's weed and flower to you?***

The idea that immigrants, who are the bedrock of this country, become the scapegoat for every single problem going on. This country goes through phases like that, like with the Irish, the Germans, and the Italians, but you'd think we would learn. This country's ability to reinvent itself and its diversity are what makes it beautiful. It's a country founded on ideas, and the idea that we are made up of many tribes and colors of people is what makes us beautiful.

***What do you want audiences to take away from the experience of seeing this show?***

You go in, and you're judging each couple and changing your mind about who's right, but at the end of the play, the person you're judging is yourself. My hope is that people will take a moment to ponder what it will take for them to be a better neighbor. I want simple things out of my plays. You can still laugh, have fun, and talk about hard things in a way where nobody's off the hook.

# Cultural Context

FRANK: Thank you for our new wood fence!  
PABLO: What is that American saying: Good fences make good friends?  
VIRGINIA: Good neighbors. Good fences- make good neighbors.  
FRANK: Amen.

- *Native Gardens*, Scene Two

What Pablo calls an American saying is really a quote from "Mending Wall," a poem by Robert Frost:

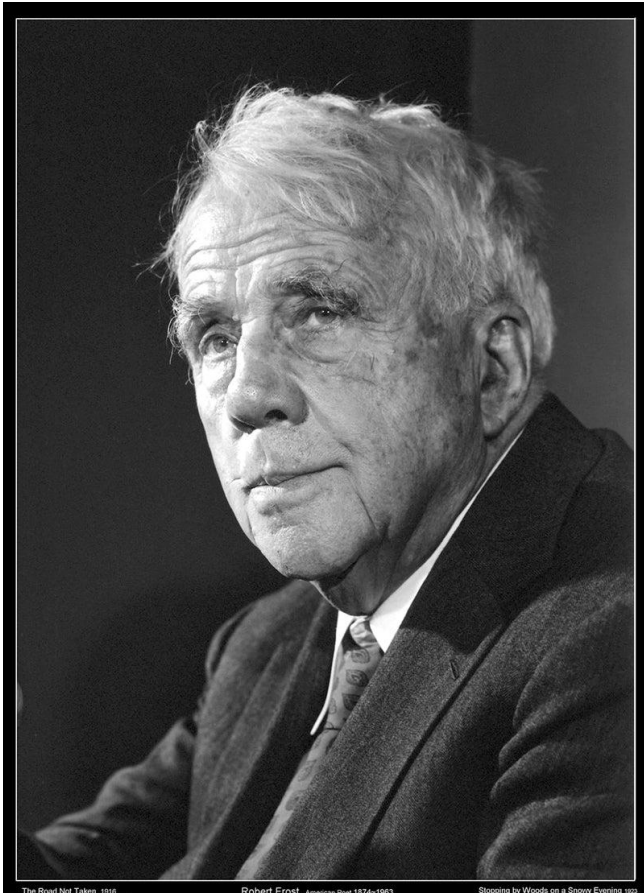
## Mending Wall By Robert Frost (1874 – 1963)

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,  
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;  
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.  
The work of hunters is another thing:  
I have come after them and made repair  
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,  
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,  
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,  
No one has seen them made or heard them made,  
But at spring mending-time we find them there.  
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;  
And on a day we meet to walk the line  
And set the wall between us once again.  
We keep the wall between us as we go.  
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.  
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls  
We have to use a spell to make them balance:  
'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'  
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.  
Oh, just another kind of outdoor game,  
One on a side. It comes to little more:

There where it is we do not need the wall:  
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.  
My apple trees will never get across  
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.  
He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'  
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder  
If I could put a notion in his head:  
'Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it  
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.  
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know  
What I was walling in or walling out,  
And to whom I was like to give offense.  
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,  
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather  
He said it for himself. I see him there  
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top  
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.  
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,  
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.  
He will not go behind his father's saying,  
And he likes having thought of it so well  
He says again, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'

*From The Poetry of Robert Frost by Robert Frost,  
edited by Edward Connery Lathem, 1916.*

# Cultural Context (cont.)



**Robert Lee Frost** (March 26, 1874 – January 29, 1963) was an American poet. He is known for his verses about everyday life in the countryside of New England.

Robert Lee Frost was born in San Francisco, California. His father died when he was 11, and afterward his mother moved the family to Lawrence, Massachusetts. Robert and his sister lived with their grandparents while their mother taught at schools around the northeast.

Frost became interested in poetry in high school. After graduating in 1892 he briefly attended Dartmouth College. He wanted to be a poet, though, so he soon left school. He worked at various jobs, including teaching and farming, while trying to get his poems published. He also married and started a family.

In 1912 Frost moved his family to England. There he met other poets. He learned from them and was able to publish two collections of his poetry. Many people praised his books. By the time he returned to the United States in 1915 he was well known.

Frost and his family settled on a farm in New Hampshire. There he continued to write. He also taught at Amherst College and the University of Michigan for many years.

During his long career, Frost won many awards and honors for his poetry. Frost is the only poet to receive four Pulitzer Prizes for Poetry. He became one of America's rare "public literary figures, almost an artistic institution". He was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in 1960 for his poetic works. He was asked to recite his poem *The Gift Outright* at the ceremony when John F. Kennedy became president in 1961. Frost died on January 29, 1963, in Boston, Massachusetts.

**Activity:** Robert Frost wrote, in his poem "Mending Wall," "Good fences make good neighbors."

- What do you think he meant by this?
- Do you agree that "good fences make good neighbors"?
- What does it mean to be a good neighbor?

# The American Dream

The “American Dream” is the ideal that the United States is a land of opportunity that allows the possibility of upward mobility, freedom, and equality for people of all classes who work hard and have the will to succeed.

The roots of the American Dream come from the goals and aspirations of the first European settlers and colonizers. Most of these people came to the North American continent to escape religious and political persecution, tyranny, or poverty. In 1776, their reasons for coming were captured by the Founders in the Declaration of Independence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” These lines have often been cited by groups seeking equal standing in American society.

While the idea of the American Dream may have originated well before 1776, the phrase itself was coined by American businessman and historian James Truslow Adams in his 1931 book *The Epic of America*. To Adams, the American Dream is about aspiring to be one’s best self and to rise above the station one was born into. It is not about simply acquiring wealth and material possessions.

PABLO: *They will love my scholarly and vibrant wife. They will see this fine historic neighborhood and the potential of this unfinished place and say, "Here is a man that understands smart risk. He is the American Dream - incarnate."*

- *Native Gardens*, Scene One

## DEFINING THE "AMERICAN DREAM"



## THE AMERICAN DREAM

The belief that anyone in American can succeed and achieve upward social mobility thanks to the nation's embrace of freedom, individual liberty, entrepreneurialism, and capitalism.

### FIVE PILLARS

The five pillars of the original American Dream are:

- 1 Democracy
- 2 Rights
- 3 Liberty
- 4 Opportunity
- 5 Equality

### EXAMPLES

- 1 Owning your own house
- 2 Raising a family
- 3 Starting a business
- 4 Immigrant success
- 5 Meritocracy
- 6 Freedom of religion
- 7 Upward social mobility

The American Dream means something different for each person. For some, it could be financial stability and for others, it could be building a family or career that can give them a satisfying life.

# The American Dream (cont.)

Kerry Wynn, Professor of History at Washburn, states that from an economic standpoint, many middle- and lower-class citizens— especially people of color— don't have an opportunity to seek out certain options like having a family or buying a house because it is not a sustainable dream.

She explains that while doors will be open for some, there will always be those who have more hurdles to conquer because throughout history, people in power seek to stay in power by keeping others beneath them. "Because of the way institutions are structured in the United States and because of systematic racism, it becomes much more difficult for people of color. They have a lot more barriers," Wynn said.

Ultimately, the "American Dream" is different for every person, but they all share a common factor— to be successful and happy.

## Dictionary

co·lo·ni·al·ist /kə'lōnyələst/ *noun*

plural noun: **colonialists**

people who support the practice of gaining political control over other countries and occupying them with settlers.

**FRANK:** So Tania has a problem with my plants because they are from somewhere else? - Because they are ...immigrant plants?

**PABLO.** (Beat.) No. Tania's problem is that your plants are ...colonialists with gross disregard for the indigenous population.

**FRANK.** I'm surprised that you of all people, Pablo, Would defend this type of...botanical xenophobia.

- *Native Gardens*, Scene Eight



Christopher Columbus set sail from Spain in 1492. In recent years, the story of this journey has evolved from an exciting tale of exploration to an event marking the beginning of violence against Indigenous populations in North and South America.

xen·o·pho·bi·a /,zənə'fōbēə, zēnə'fōbēə/ *noun*

dislike of or prejudice against people from other countries.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/American-Dream>

# Squatter's Rights

VIRGINIA: And she says there are certain provisions that "allow ownership for someone that has lived on and tended neglected land."

FRANK: Is she talking about invoking **squatter's rights**??

VIRGINIA: Oddly enough, it might be a legal recourse.

FRANK: **Squatter's rights**?

VIRGINIA: **Adverse possession** is the legal term.

FRANK: Are you insane?

*-Native Gardens, Scene Seven*

"Squatter's rights" is a term used to describe the rights of people who have taken physical possession of a property they do not own.

To settle on land without an owner's permission has been known as squatting since the 1700s. In many instances, squatting has become a way of acquiring legal title to land and buildings long considered to be abandoned. Today, the legal term for taking ownership by squatting is known as "adverse possession."

## Neighborly Squatters

Oftentimes courts will have to sort disagreements over property lines which are not clear to the naked eye. Some may not realize that a neighbor's driveway, fencing, or other structure has crossed property lines. But problems can come up when a new owner of a property realizes that their neighbor has crossed a boundary and is possessing a portion of their property. Sometimes this will result in the tearing down of structures found to be encroaching on another's property. In other cases, however, property lines are redrawn to reflect a new understanding of land boundaries between both owners.

<https://thelawdictionary.org/article/squatters-rights-adverse-possession/>

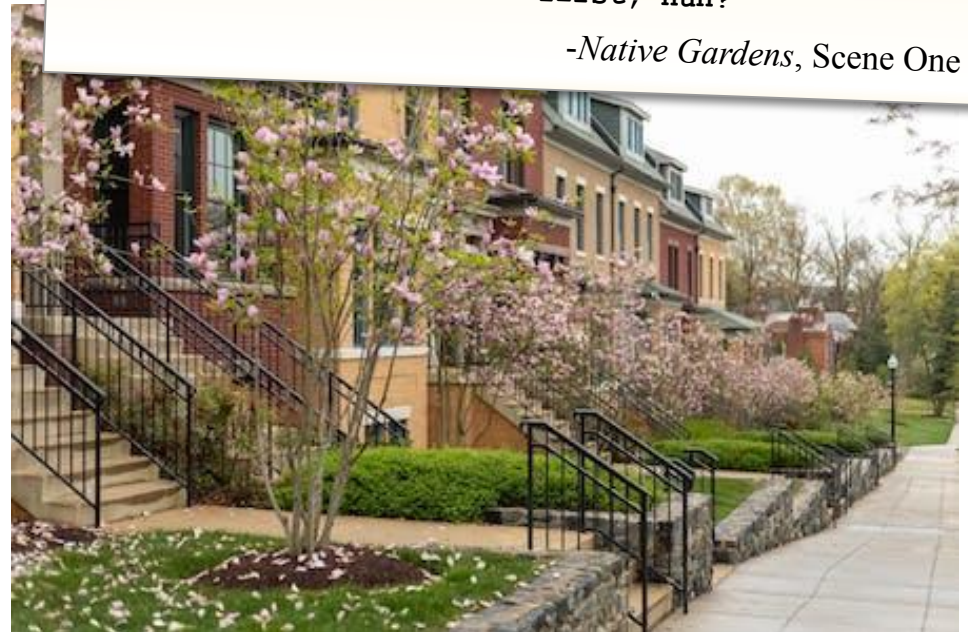
# Making Partner

What does it mean for a lawyer to "make partner" in a law firm?

To make partner means to be given a promotion in the job from an associate position to an ownership position. A good way to think of the partner role in a law firm is a lawyer who also manages other lawyers, and has a bit of ownership in the company where they get to share in the profits. There is more responsibility but there is also more money in payment. The process of becoming a partner varies by firm and can take several years of hard work and dedication.

PABLO: But Tania, this could be bigger than Steven Johnson's Martini Happy Hour... I could become the first Latino to **make partner** in this place. Maybe one day, they'll add DEL VALLE to the letterhead. That would be a first, huh?

*-Native Gardens, Scene One*



<https://www.howtomakepartner.com/make-partner-what-does-it-really-mean/>



# What Really Is Native Gardening?

Natural landscaping, also called **native gardening**, is the use of native plants including trees, shrubs, groundcover, and grasses which are local to the geographic area of the garden.

## WHAT IS CONSIDERED A NATIVE PLANT?

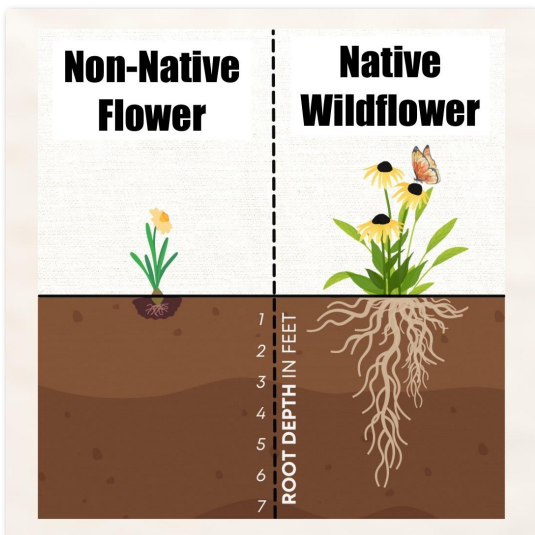
Native plants are based in a particular area, having grown there long before human habitation. These plants evolved and adapted to the local climate and growing conditions, becoming an integral part of the ecosystem.

## WHY ARE NATIVE PLANTS SO IMPORTANT?

These important plant species provide nectar, pollen, and seeds that serve as food for native butterflies, bees, insects, birds and other animals as well as shelter for the regional wildlife. Native plants also help to restore soil health, reduce erosion, and improve water quality. Because industrial farming and development has destroyed large swaths of habitat, home gardeners can help by creating natural landscapes that provide a safe haven for wildlife and benefit the environment.

## WHY ARE NATIVE PLANTS BETTER?

Native plants are easier on the environment, as they eliminate the need for fertilizers and pesticides, and require little or no supplemental water. Gardeners can reduce their carbon footprint by creating a landscape that is easier to maintain and helps restore balance to the ecosystem. Natives are easier to grow than non-native ornamentals, as they are adapted to that area.



**FRANK:** You mean, weeds? You are planting weeds, on purpose?

**TANIA:** A lot of plants we think of as weeds are actually **native plants** and they have a purpose

- Native Gardens, Scene Two

# What Really Is Native Gardening? (cont.)

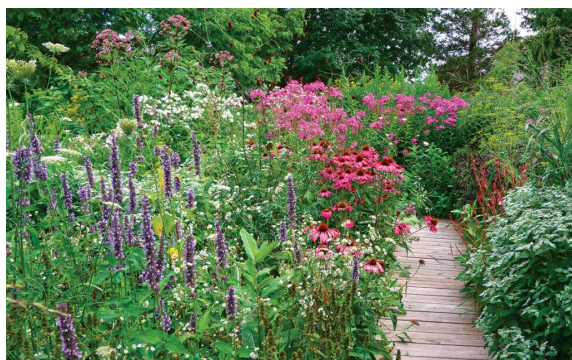
## HOW TO PLANT YOUR OWN NATIVE GARDEN:

Adding even just a few native plants to your landscape can go a long way towards supporting wildlife. Even if you only have a small yard, patio or apartment balcony, you can grow natives in a container.



### 1) Determine which plants are native to your area.

If you aren't sure which plants are native to your geographic region, simply search online. A plant listed as native to the US may grow just fine in Missouri, but not southern California.



### 2) Find the right location.

Once you have an idea of which native plants you'd like to grow, look at your landscape for spots where your native garden can receive the appropriate amount of sun and shade.

### 3) Prep the soil.

Before actually planting your native varieties, first remove any weeds from the bed before planting. Adding food compost or scraps to the area to create a nutrient-rich soil without the need for potentially toxic fertilizers.



### 4) Plant a diverse selection.

To ensure your native garden supplies an abundance of nectar and pollen all year long, plant a variety of plants that bloom one after another, including early spring, spring, summer, and fall. This is more interesting for you, and for pollinators. Different insect species rely on plants for food in all four seasons and a diverse garden will provide that.

### 5) Group similar plants together.

This helps the garden be attractive to look at.



### 6) Place your native plants close together to prevent weeds.

When planted densely in your backyard, native plants can naturally crowd out weeds once they have matured, so you won't need to rely on chemical-based killers that could potentially harm local wildlife.

<https://www.gardendesign.com/plants/natives.html>

<https://www.marthastewart.com/8117751/native-plant-garden-tips>

[https://www.fs.usda.gov/wildflowers/Native\\_Plant\\_Materials/Native\\_Gardening/index.shtml](https://www.fs.usda.gov/wildflowers/Native_Plant_Materials/Native_Gardening/index.shtml)

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- PEAR
- IVY
- SWEETSPIRE
- OAK
- KUDZU
- HONEYSUCKLE
- HYDRANGEAS
- FERN
- PEONIES
- AZALEA
- GRASS
- CREEPER
- SILVERBELL
- MULBERRY



*Blue-select-Hydrangeas*

**YOU ARE THE PLAYWRIGHT:**  
 "Writing a Scene with Conflict"

Choose:

- One prop. (Can be a food item, hand prop, such as a lighter, wallet, a cup, flower, or calculator; or a larger prop such as a computer, coffee maker, or framed picture. No weapon or gun.)
- And one specific setting

Now write a short scene between two characters where the conflict is all about the prop you chose. Try and come up with different reasons why that prop is important to both characters. The end of your scene should have one of your characters with that prop.

What are a few ways that people can best discuss important issues when they disagree?



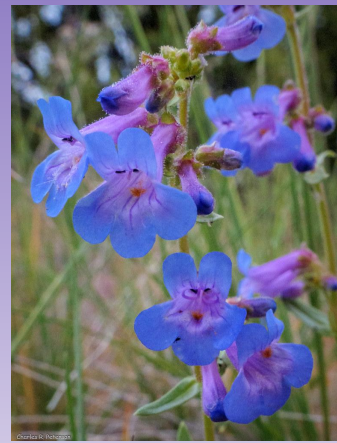
*Oak tree*



*Peonies*



**The Butterfly Weed**, (*Asclepias tuberosa*) is a perennial plant with vibrant orange flowers which form in big and flat-topped clusters, as well as dark green, lance-shaped leaves that accentuate the bright orange hue of the flowers. There are also red and yellow hues, but they are considered a rarity. It's also known as Orange Milkweed, Chigger Flower, and Pleurisy Root. The tough root was used by the Indians for medicinal purposes, mostly for treating pleurisy and other pulmonary ailments. It can grow up from 1 ½ to 2 feet.



**Wasatch Penstemon** (*Penstemon cyananthus*) is described as having smooth, tubular, and blue-violet to lavender flowers adorned with several leafy stems & lance-shaped leaves. This perennial herb can grow up to 1-2 ft in height. This plant goes by other names, such as fuzzy tongue penstemon and crested beardtongue, due to its bearded stamen with yellowish hairs. It requires little watering and full sun/shade as part of its growth requirements.



**Fragrant Sand Verbena** (*Abronia fragrans*) has a fresh and sweet vanilla scent with 25-70 funnel-shaped flowers with different hues such as white, green, lavender, and pink. It is accentuated with green, wavy-like, hairy leaves. What's interesting about this perennial is that its flowers open only in the late afternoon & evening. This plant can grow up to 1-3 ft. in height and width. It requires low maintenance from sunlight and water, and attracts butterflies.

**The Desert Marigold** (*Baileya multiradiata*) is known for its bright yellow-colored flowers and leafless stems. It is an herbaceous plant and it can live for only two seasons (it blooms in spring and continues to grow by summer). The Desert Marigold is also dubbed as "paper daisy" because of its paper-like texture and a strong resemblance to a daisy. This plant can grow in any weather & soil conditions, making it the ideal flower for anyone who wants to start their own garden. It has no need for constant watering, but with proper gardening care, its flowers will bloom faster and propagate nicely. It can grow up to 1-2 feet in height and 2 feet across.

**The Yarrow plant** (*Achillea millefolium*) is a flowering perennial plant known for being a hardy plant with gorgeous flower heads and ferny foliage. If looked at closely, it is composed of a bunch of small flowers that may range from yellow, pink, red, or any hue in between. It can grow from 2 to 4 feet in height, but be careful as it is an invasive grower around the garden. This aromatic herb has many healing properties that are beneficial for your health. Yarrow can be used as in ointment for wounds, to ease digestive issues, to help treat the symptoms of anxiety and depression, and many more. It's also pest-resistant, drought-resistant, and attracts butterflies when in full bloom.



<https://ashleylindseyhomes.com/blog/the-best-native-spring-plants-in-salt-lake-city/>

# 5 Native Wildflowers in Utah

These 5 native plants are as equally beautiful as tropical plants, plus they are far more suited to the Utah weather because they are native.

# Meet the Cast

\*Members of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States



**KATYA COLLAZO\*** (Tania Del Valle) is making her debut at PTC. Off-Broadway: *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (Mrs. Warren u/s & Vivie Warren u/s, Gingold Theatrical Group), Regional: *The Da Vinci Code* (Collet/Sophie u/s, American Premiere starring Michael Urie, Ogunquit Playhouse); *No Child...* (Solo Performer, Kitchen Theatre Co.), *Nina Simone: Four Women* (Sephronia, Arizona Theatre Co.), *Possessing Harriet* (Harriet Powell, Franklin Stage Co.), *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Nurse Flinn/Sandra, Playhouse on Park), *The Resolute* (Grace, Wyoming Theater Festival), *The Winter's Tale* (Perdita, South Dakota Shakespeare Fest.), TV: *Special Ops: Lioness* (Paramount+), *The Blacklist* (NBC), *Dietland* (AMC). For my family. KatyaCollazo.com @katyacollazo

**MICHAEL KOSTROFF\*** (Frank Butley) is an established stage and television actor best known for his five seasons on HBO's *The Wire*. His long list of TV and film credits includes *Platonic*, *Billions*, *Law & Order: SVU*, *The Blacklist*, *NCIS*, *Molly's Game*, *Wizard of Lies*, and *The Plot Against America*. Kostroff toured with *Les Misérables* (Salt Lake City audiences may remember him as the comic villain, Thénardier) and *The Producers*, and has appeared at regional theatres all over the country—most recently in the Pasadena Playhouse's *Inherit the Wind* starring Alfred Molina. Kostroff is the author of *Letters from Backstage*, *Audition Psych 101*, and *The Stage Actor's Handbook*. He's an instructor, mentor, and frequent guest speaker at colleges and universities. *Native Gardens* marks his Pioneer Theatre Company debut.



**TITO LIVAS\*** (Pablo Del Valle) Regional: The Old Globe: *Destiny of Desire*; Pioneer Theatre Company: *Fireflies*, *A Christmas Story: The Musical!*, *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, *In the Heights*; Idaho Shakespeare Festival: *Macbeth*, *As you Like It*. SPT: Salt Lake Acting Company: *Sleeping Giant*, *Mercury*; Tours: Theatreworks, Idaho Shakespeare Festival, National Theatre for Children. Princess Cruises, Holland America Line, Walt Disney World. Film/TV: Hallmark: *Love at First Glance*, *Sister Swap: Christmas in the City*, *Sister Swap: Hometown Holiday*. Lifetime: *The Holiday Stocking*, *Picture Perfect Holiday*, *Wrapped up in Christmas*. @livastito on Instagram.

**KELLY COFFIELD PARK\*** (Virginia Butley) "I had the great fortune of being born in New York, to a family of avid theater goers. I have been acting professionally since I was 15. I have been in productions Off-Broadway at the Perry Street Theatre, Second Stage, the Vineyard Theatre and the Women's Project; and regionally at the Goodman Theater, Seattle Rep, and the Actors Theatre of Louisville. I am honored and grateful for this opportunity to perform at Pioneer Theatre Company. It is as thrilling to me now as it was when I was 15."

