

# PINK BEARDTONGUE

## *Penstemon australis*

Pink beardtongue (*Penstemon australis*) is a rather diminutive member of a widespread wildflower genus in the snapdragon family. Hundreds of penstemons are native to North America, but the vast majority are found in the arid west and southwest. Pink beardtongue is one tough plant. Native to well-drained sandhills and open woodlands, it is extremely drought tolerant and forgiving of low soil nutrients. It prefers full sunny locations, but can do well if given at least half a day of sunshine.

Beardtongues are deciduous and their basal rosette of elliptical leaves emerge in early spring. Shortly thereafter, they send up their flower stalks. The leaves of pink beardtongue are often edged in red. This distinguishes them from the common and noticeably larger white beardtongue that sometimes grows alongside it in nature. The flower stalks of pink beardtongue are only 1-3 feet tall, but individual plants produce several during the blooming season and the rosettes produce "pups" alongside the main shoot which also bloom. Over the course of a blooming season, each plant might therefore send up a dozen flower stalks or more.

Each flower stalk produces a dozen or more soft-pink blooms. Unlike the other Florida species, these are tightly tubular - not open at the mouth and very similar in structure to cultivated snapdragons. At the base of the flower is its "beard"; a strip of "hairs" that serve to guide pollinators to the nectar at the back of the bloom. Beardtongues are mostly pollinated by bees and wasps, though hummingbirds also stop by to use them.

