

May EcoQuest: Cowboy's Delight



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Scarlet globemallow, known charmingly as cowboy's delight, or scientifically as *Sphaeralcea coccinea*, is a beautiful prairie flower to look for this spring.

Cowboy's delight is in the Malvaceae, or mallow, family, which is composed of plants like hibiscus, hollyhock, okra and even cacao—where chocolate comes from! Malvaceae are mucilaginous plants with flowers that have numerous stamens fused into a central column (a great example is the hibiscus flower).

The genus *Sphaeralcea* is composed of perennial herbs with star-shaped hairs, and flowers that are orange to red, sometimes pink, and are commonly found in the western half of North America. The mucilaginous parts of the plant are known for their use in soothing burns, especially sunburns. In Colorado there are seven species in this genus, but *S. coccinea* is the most common and widespread—other

Sphaeralcea species are less common or located primarily around the edges of the state.

Scarlet globemallow is a low-growing perennial herb with deep orange to pink flowers. It is often found on sandy or rocky soil on roadsides or the prairie around 3,500-9,000 feet and is found blooming from May to September. The leaves are alternate, palmately divided and lobed.

It is grazed by sheep and pronghorn, but mostly inedible to domestic animals. The Lakota and Cheyenne had many uses for the plant, including as a salve for burns and a sweet-tasting medicinal tea made from the ground roots, stems and leaves.

Connect with your inner cowboy by finding this delightful flower on the prairie. Share to [iNaturalist](#) to contribute to our global understanding of this species!

What is an EcoQuest?

EcoQuests, part of the Denver EcoFlora project, challenge citizens to become citizen scientists and observe, study and conserve the native plants of the City via iNaturalist, an easy-to-use mobile app.

How Do I Get Started?

1. Download the iNaturalist app or register online at [iNaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org).
2. Take photos of the plants in bloom that you find on your daily neighborhood walk. It is ok if they are weeds! But avoid taking photos of cultivated plants in gardens or in your home.
3. If you are concerned about revealing the location of sensitive organisms or observations at your own house, you can hide the exact location from the public by changing the "geoprivacy" of the observation to "obscured."

4. Post your findings on iNaturalist via the app.
5. Your observations will automatically be added to the [Denver EcoFlora Project](#).
6. You can add an identification to your photo when you post your findings on iNaturalist, or leave it blank for others to identify.

What is the Goal?

The EcoFlora project is designed to meaningfully connect citizens with biodiversity, and to assemble novel observations and data on the metro area's flora to better inform policy decisions and conservation strategies.



Photo by Scott Dressel-Martin.