

August EcoQuest – Magical *Mentzelias*



(LEFT TO RIGHT) *Mentzelia decapetala*, [mlangemier](#), some rights reserved, CC BY-NC; *Mentzelia multiflora*, [sdymersk](#), some rights reserved, CC BY-NC; *Mentzelia speciosa*, [mlangemeier](#), some rights reserved, CC BY-NC

Mentzelias, commonly called blazing stars or stickleleaves, are a magical member of the local flora. You may walk down a trail in the daytime and never even notice these plants because their flowers open at dusk! These flowers remain open overnight into the early morning before closing, providing an important source of nectar for moths, as well as bees and butterflies. They are called stickleleaves because the leaves are covered with Velcro-like hairs which stick to nearly everything they encounter.

There are four species of large-flowered *Mentzelia* common in the Denver metro area: *M. decapetala* (ten-petal stickleleaf), *M. multiflora* (Adonis blazingstar),

M. nuda (bractless blazingstar) and *M. speciosa* (jeweled blazingstar). These *Mentzelias* can be found on sandy roadsides, shale slopes and open prairie. These *Mentzelias* are really not that hard to tell apart. The first character you can use to distinguish among these species is flower color – *M. decapetala*, *M. multiflora*, and *M. nuda* have white petals while *M. speciosa* has bright yellow petals. *Mentzelia nuda* then differs in having white or pale yellow stamens (giving the flower a nearly all-white appearance), while *M. decapetala* and *M. multiflora* have bright yellow stamens (giving the center of the flower a yellow appearance versus white). Lastly, *M. decapetala* has large flowers about the

size of the palm of your hand, while *M. multiflora* has much smaller flowers. Now you, too, can distinguish among the *Mentzelias*!

One of the most magical moments is watching hawkmoths visiting flowers of *M. decapetala* just at sunset – a frenzied event that lasts only about 15 minutes. See if you can locate some *Mentzelias* and help Denver Botanic Gardens by photographing as many plants as possible in the month of August. Maybe you can capture some pollinators too! Post your findings on [iNaturalist](#) so they will automatically be added to the [Denver EcoFlora Project](#).

July EcoQuest Results – Milkweeds and Monarchs

Wow, 497 observations of milkweeds were made in the greater metro area during the month of May! Additionally, eight different species of milkweeds were observed – *Asclepias speciosa* being the most commonly observed milkweed with 436 observations.

What is an EcoQuest?

EcoQuests are part of the Denver EcoFlora Project. These monthly quests challenge citizens to become citizen scientists and observe, study and conserve the native plants of the Denver – Boulder metro area via iNaturalist, an easy-to-use mobile app.

How Do I Get Started?

1. Download the iNaturalist app or register online at [iNaturalist.org](#).
2. Take photos of the plants in bloom that you find on your daily neighborhood walk. It is okay if they are weeds! Avoid taking photos of cultivated plants in gardens or in your home.

3. If you are concerned about revealing the location of sensitive plants 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. Sign up to be a member of the [Denver EcoFlora Project](#) on iNaturalist to receive updates and additional information.

What is the Goal?

The Denver 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