



SARATOGA HORTICULTURAL FOUNDATION, INC.

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Eriogonum crocatum

The Saffron (or sometimes Yellow) Buckwheat is an endemic to California, it is found only in the coastal sage scrub community, where it is restricted to a relatively small area of rocky soil on the Conejo grade - along the north base of the Santa Monica Mountains, in Ventura County.

Because of its extremely limited geographic occurrence it is categorised as 'rare and endangered' and as such it should warrant some attempt at cultivation: however it is also a highly desirable plant in its own right. It has a compact habit, ornamental foliage and colourful flowers, which together with ease of cultivation, should make it a very suitable subject for the landscape. It should be considered as a valuable constituent of that palette of plants which is available to the gardener or landscaper, who may wish to develop a 'native' garden or who simply wishes to garden with drought tolerant plants and so reduce summer water consumption, or possibly even as a component of a grey foliage segment.

Although the Saffron Buckwheat would normally grow on a light free-draining soil and in a sunny position, it will succeed and even thrive in a heavy soil provided that the drainage is adequate and that virtually no summer water use is undertaken.

The plant will grow into a small, compact shrub to a height of eighteen inches and with a spread of one and a half to two feet. It has a tight and densely branched habit in which the white felted stems carry the silvery grey, slightly crinkled leaves on short internodes. The leaves are about one inch long by half an inch wide, are broadly ovate and taper towards the stem for the bottom third. Both surfaces of the leaves are deeply felted, so that the overall impression of the plant is of a neat, silver mound.

The flowers are produced abundantly from midsummer right through into the autumn, they are carried on stalks which stand about twelve inches above the foliage. The individual flowers are small and are carried in a rather dense, single, flat, intricately branched, terminal cyme; which may be between one and three inches across. Flower colour is variously described as 'saffron' or 'sulphur' and even 'chartreuse yellow' - all of which give an indication of the fine, clear and sunny colour which can be expected. If the flowers are left on the plant they

will mature and dry to a pleasing rust-red, although there is a school of thought which advocates 'dead heading', in order to encourage a longer flowering season.

Eriogonum crocatum will tolerate summer irrigation on well drained soils but this should be at ground level, as overhead watering is likely to cause scorch and attendant problems, as well as reducing the amount of felting and hence the silver effect. Summer irrigation will however be required during the season of establishment from the nursery container, but subsequent summer watering will only encourage faster, and possibly ranker, growth.

Despite its southern provenance this plant is remarkably hardy and will certainly tolerate temperatures as low as 20°F. If it can be given dry winter conditions, it would probably survive a further 5°F of cold.

Insect infestations do not appear, in general, to be a problem. Root rots however are likely to be a major hazard where soil conditions are soggy and the water mould fungi are thus provided with an opportunity to infect the plant.

As this plant is normally propagated from seed, it is to be expected that any population may vary about the norm, and as in any seedling population any one individual specimen could deviate in colour or habit, however despite this rider it is a remarkably constant species and variations are minor.

Eriogonum crocatum received an Award of Merit from the California Horticultural Society in 1975.

Sub-shrub; evergreen; grey foliage; flowering; low water usage.