

Bitterroot

Scientific name: ***Lewisia rediviva*** Pursh

Common names: Bitterroot, Oregon bitterroot, Reviving lewisia

The flowers of Bitterroot are large and showy in comparison to its small basal leaves and short flower stocks. Each flower consists of 10 to 19 petals, ranging in color from pale to dark pink to lavender. The succulent leaves which appear early in the spring, start to dwindle as buds appear and are typically dried and gone by the time the flowers open in the late spring to summer. Flowers open under direct sunlight for 2 to 3 days.

Bitterroot has a thick, branching taproot that can grow up to 32 cm long. Native Americans gathered, ate and traded large amounts of Bitterroot each spring. The roots were dug before the plant flowered when the starch levels were highest and the roots were less bitter.

The genus 'Lewisia' was named for Captain Meriwether Lewis from his collection of this species in Montana in 1806. Despite being in a plant press for several months, one of his pressed specimens was planted and continued to grow after reaching Philadelphia in 1807. Because of its capacity to regenerate after being dried, this species was given the name 'rediviva', Latin for revive or back to life.

Bitterroot is a perennial forb native to the Western U.S. Wyoming and Montana mark the Eastern border of its range. Bitterroot is the state flower of Montana. The Bitterroot Valley, Bitterroot River and Bitterroot Mountains are named after this plant. *Lewisia rediviva* has the largest and most showy flowers of the two *Lewisia* species found in Uinta County. In our area, Bitterroot is most likely found in dry and rocky soils on exposed ridges or slopes. Specimens have been collected in the northern part of the Uinta County, north of Evanston.

