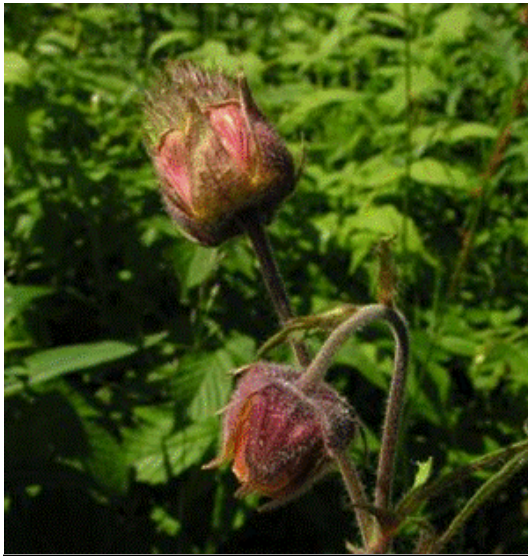


Ornamental Avens

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Many Newfoundland gardeners are familiar with the old-fashioned, orange-flowered perennial called avens, *Geum* 'Bourisii'. It is one of the many plants present in our Heritage Garden. But there are many other garden worthy avens you should consider growing.

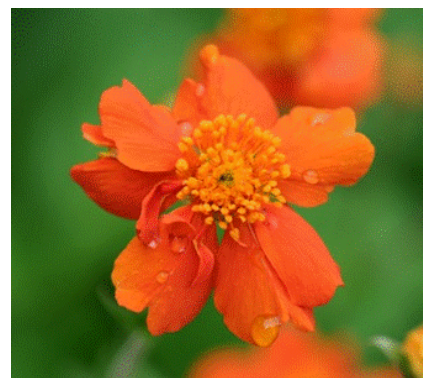


Geum rivale, a Newfoundland native

Let's look at *Geum* a little closer. *Geums* are members of the rose family. There are about 50 species found worldwide, primarily in temperate or montane regions. From thick rhizomes, plants form clumps of low-held, mostly evergreen leaves. Flower stems arise above the leaves and are topped with either solitary blossoms or loose clusters of flowers. Flowers are typically 5-petaled and come in white, yellow, orange or red shades. Spring to early summer is the normal blooming season although some of the larger hybrids can bloom off and on all season. All have seeds with plumes of some sort, allowing some to have very attractive seedheads. Plant heights vary from a few inches to nearly 3 feet.

In the wild, *Geum* grow in two main habitats; woodlands or alpine meadows. The woodland plants are generally taller and multi-flowering while the alpine varieties are typically low with either solitary or small clusters of flowers. Woodland types prefer a moist, highly organic soil. While dappled shade is best, they will withstand full sun if the soil remains moderately moist. The alpine types require well-drained soil and full sun and are best used in the rock garden. With the possible exception of *G. triflorum*, *Geum* prefers soil that is slightly acidic. Most are hardy to zone 4.

The most ornamental species are *G. chilense* (from Chile) and *G. coccineum* (from the Balkans) and hybrids between them. These are the tallest avens with flower stems held well above the foliage. Their long stems and somewhat clustered flowers make them suitable as cut-flowers. Many of the named cultivars have double flowers, adding to their attraction. There are many named cultivars with 'Mrs. Bradshaw' (double red), 'Lady Strathedon' (double yellow) and 'Borisii'; (semi-double orange) being the most popular.



Geum 'Bourisii'

The other woodland species that is reasonably popular is the water avens, *G. rivale*. This species occurs both in Europe and North America but the populations differ quite a bit. Both have nodding peach-apricot flowers but American populations form large plants with small flowers while European plants are more compact with much larger flowers. There are several named cultivars of the



Geum 'Leonardii' (left) and *Geum macrophylla*, (right: a Newfoundland native)

European *G. rivale* including 'Album' (white), 'Leonardii' (copper-pink) and 'Lionel Cox' (yellow tinted pink). There are a host of woodland avens with rather small unassuming flowers. These are suitable subjects for the woodland or wildflower garden. These include *G. aleppicum* (temperate Northern hemisphere, yellow), *G. macrophyllum* (North America, yellow), *G. canadense* (North America, white), *G. japonicum* (Japan, yellow) and *G. urbanum* (Europe, yellow).

There are several attractive alpine and sub-alpine species which are small enough to use in the rock garden. *Geum triflorum* (North America) has nodding maroon to yellow-pink flowers usually in clusters of three. After they bloom, plants produce very attractive feathery seedheads not unlike those of mountain avens (*Dryas*) or a miniature pasque-flower (*Pulsatilla*). You can see these in our rock garden. From the alpine regions of Europe comes *G. montanum*. This species has

reasonably large upward-facing yellow flowers. A lovely dwarf hybrid between *G. rivale* and *G. montanum* is 'Lemon Drop' which has nodding yellow flowers, not unlike a large-flowered *G. rivale*. Perhaps the choicest alpine avens are the European *G. reptans* and the North American *G. rossii*. The former has large yellow flowers that arise from deeply divided, almost fern-like leaves. Plants spread via stolons similar to a strawberry. Overall, this avens gives the impression of being more like a low, creeping potentilla. *Geum rossii* has the finest, most dainty and shiny foliage of any avens. They are also one of the few deciduous species. Like *G. reptans*, their flowers are yellow and reasonably large. These two are a little more challenging to grow in the garden as they dislike summer heat.



Geum rossii

If you currently do not grow any *Geum* in your garden, give them a second look. Their natural diversity makes them admirable additions to the garden, whether in a perennial border, woodland setting, wildflower garden or alpine garden.