

## NATIVE PERENNIALS

### Penstemon, Shell Leaf

#### *Penstemon grandiflorus*

Native. A bumblebee favorite! Beautiful light pink flowers produced in early summer atop 2-3 foot stalks from a greenish-white rosette of leaves. Grows best on well-drained sandy or gravelly soil. May not be long-lived in the garden, but worth the effort!

**Description:** Shell-leaf penstemon is a fibrous-rooted, perennial forb producing one to a few stiff stems reaching 12 to 28 inches tall. Leaves are opposite, gray-green, thickened, waxy and smooth. The upper leaves are broad, often nearly round, and clasp the stems. This showy plant blossoms from May to July with large pink to lavender, two lipped, bell-shaped flowers 1 to 2 inches long in scattered clusters along the upper portion of the stem.

**Distribution/Habitat:** Shell-leaf penstemon is found in plains and prairies from Indiana and Wisconsin to north-central North Dakota and northeast Wyoming, across South Dakota and Nebraska, and south to northwest Missouri and central Texas. It frequents sandy soils of roadcuts and hillsides. Although seldom in great abundance, it's size and beauty make it one of the finest native flowers.

**Comments:** Shell-leaf penstemon is also called pink beardtongue. It is considered fair forage, probably best liked by sheep, deer and pronghorn. With grazing use, abundance of shell-leaf penstemon declines. It often makes its showiest displays in recent roadcuts before other vegetation becomes well established. It has high reclamation potential. Shell-leaf penstemon is used as an ornamental, but it is short-lived.

**Credit:** James E. Johnson & Gary E. Larson, Grassland Plants of South Dakota and the Northern Great Plains. SDSU, Brookings, SD. B-566 (rev.) August 1999. Page 232.

**Photo Credit:** Big Sioux Nursery, Inc., Watertown

