The name “beardtongue” may bring strange images to mind, so perhaps that is why these WaterWise garden plants go mostly by their genus name, *Penstemon*, instead. The common name beardtongue refers to the hairy extension that sometimes protrude from the “mouth” of the flower. Many new varieties are being featured in the marketplace—these plants are indeed remarkable choices for Oregon gardens. Nearly all are drought tolerant. They are generally hardy and have spectacular blooming stalks that favor visits by many pollinators, including hummingbirds, butterflies, and bees. Some species can be short-lived in a garden, but their form, color, and drought hardiness, make them good candidates for replacement every few years.

The genus itself is local, at least in the broad sense. Most species are native to North America from the Rocky Mountains westward. Many penstemons do very well in Westside Oregon gardens, however, the colder temperatures and more porous soils east of the Cascade Mountains favor some species over others. One favorite recommended for Eastside Oregon gardens is the low-growing *Penstemon pinifolius*, pine-leaf penstemon, available in both red and yellow flowered forms. For Westside gardens, look for the Willamette Valley native *P. serrulatus* at native plant gardens, or cultivars like *P. digitalis* ‘Huksters Red’ with white flowers and reddish leaves, or the cultivars of the plant pictured, *P. barbatus*, with deep red flowers. For rock gardens, consider *P. cardwellii* or *P. rupicola*—both are dwellers of rocky outcroppings in the Cascade Mountains.