

June EcoQuest – Delightful *Delphiniums*



Delphinium geyeri, [dlehle](#), some rights reserved, CC BY-NC.



Delphinium virescens, [bradwinkelmann](#), some rights reserved, CC BY-NC.

Spring is in full force! One group of plants that are currently popping on the landscape with their colorful, showy flowers are the *Delphiniums*. *Delphiniums* are members of the Ranunculaceae, or buttercup family, and as such have distinct carpels or pistils. There are nine species of *Delphinium* native to Colorado, and three of these can be found currently blooming in the greater metro area – *Delphinium geyeri* (Geyer’s larkspur), *Delphinium nuttallianum* (Nuttall’s larkspur) and *Delphinium virescens* (plains larkspur).

The name *Delphinium* comes from the shape of the flowers in bud – the ancient Greeks thought the shape of the flower bud and spur resembled that of a dolphin, and hence called these plants *Delphiniums* from the Greek word delphinion for dolphin. *Delphiniums* are also often referred to as larkspurs because the nectary at the base of the uppermost sepal resembled

a lark’s claw. Interestingly, the showy part of the *Delphinium* flowers are actually the sepals! The petals are small and inconspicuous, hidden within the colorful sepals.

Our *Delphinium* species are easily identifiable from each other. *Delphinium virescens* exhibits white flowers with a green spot on the sepals, while the other two species have blue or violet-blue flowers. The other two species can be a little trickier to distinguish between – *Delphinium nuttallianum* has few leaves on the stem and fewer, violet-blue flowers, while *D. geyeri* has many stem leaves and many bright or electric blue flowers.

See if you can locate some *Delphiniums* and help Denver Botanic Gardens by photographing as many plants as possible in the month of June. Post your findings to [iNaturalist](#) so they will automatically be added to the [Denver EcoFlora Project](#).

What is an EcoQuest?

EcoQuests, part of the Denver EcoFlora project, challenge citizens to become citizen scientists and observe, study and conserve the native plants of the City via iNaturalist, an easy-to-use mobile app.

How Do I Get Started?

1. Download the iNaturalist app or register online at [iNaturalist.org](#).
2. Take photos of the plants in bloom that you find on your daily neighborhood walk. It is ok if they are weeds! But avoid taking photos of cultivated plants in gardens or in your home.
3. If you are concerned about revealing the location of sensitive organisms or observations at your own house, you can hide the exact location from the public by changing the “geoprivacy” of the observation to “obscured.”

4. Post your findings on iNaturalist via the app.
5. Your observations will automatically be added to the [Denver EcoFlora Project](#).
6. You can add an identification to your photo when you post your findings on iNaturalist, or leave it blank for others to identify.

What is the Goal?

The EcoFlora project is designed to meaningfully connect citizens with biodiversity, and to assemble novel observations and data on the metro area’s flora to better inform policy decisions and conservation strategies.



Photo by Scott Dressel-Martin