Plant of the Month

***Krascheninnikovia lanata* – winterfat**
Synonyms: *Krascheninnikovia ceratoides ssp. lanata, Ceratoides lanata*

Family: Amaranthaceae, pigweed family

Habit: subshrub growing 15 – 50 cm tall; leaves narrow with edges curled inward; Flowers small, gray-green, male and female flowers typically on the same plant (monoecious), but sometimes on separate plants (dioecious); fruit surface covered in dense, white hairs creating a silver-white appearance.

Flowers May – July.

Habitat: Open slopes, plains, and in pinyon-juniper and sagebrush stands, 4,000-9,500 ft. Can be found on BCPOS properties such as Rabbit Mountain.

Winterfat is a woody subshrub with extensive taproots – reaching as far as 6 feet – and fibrous lateral roots 3 feet below ground. Its deep roots help the plant access moisture in dry climates, making it a good species for drought tolerance and erosion control. Winterfat is long-lived; the oldest documented individual was in Idaho at 136 years old! Leaves persist through the winter, dropping only when new growth appears in the spring or if the plant is water-stressed. The flower is inconspicuous, lacking petals and producing a bracted fruit, called a utricle.

Winterfat is a good forage for a wide range of animals, including deer, elk, cattle, bighorn sheep, cottontails, and birds such as the horned lark and loggerhead shrike. It is an important source of protein and helps browsers maintain weight during the harsh winter months, hence the common name, winterfat. The genus name honors the Russian botanist, explorer, and professor Ippolit Krascheninnikov. *Lanata* means woolly, referring to the fine hairs that cover the plant. *Krascheninnikovia lanata* is the only species of this genus found in North America, while only two other species occur worldwide.

Although winterfat tolerates moderate winter browsing, over-browsing can severely reduce or eliminate local populations. Responsible grazing practices require evaluating plant availability, monitoring the herd's consumption rates, and allowing rest periods for regrowth.


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