



## Common Paintbrush (*Castilleja chromosa*)

*Castilleja chromosa* stems from 18<sup>th</sup> century Spanish botanist Domingo Castillejo and species name, "chromosa." Also known as desert Indian paintbrush, this brilliant wildflower is a member of the Figwort family. Figworts are made up of 200 species that feature clusters of flowers that grow from their stems.

**Description:** Growing up to 2 feet tall, common paintbrush grows in clusters or individually. Common paintbrush is made up of clusters of bracts encompassing small green flowers. Bracts are vibrant in orange, bright red or crimson. The petals are so bright that they appear to look as if they were dipped in bright red paint. The bright colors protect the wildflowers from extreme solar radiation in high elevations. Roots are parasitic and often steal nutrition from nearby plants. Blooming occurs during spring.

**Location:** Common paintbrush grows in desert scrublands and woodlands of western North America. A desert plant by nature, common paintbrush thrives in dry places that are between 1,950 ft and 9,450 ft in elevation. It requires at least an average of 4.6" of rain per year.

**Uses:** *Castilleja* plants are hosts to many insects and humming birds. The adaptation of narrow tubular flowers allows for humming birds to collect pollen with their long bills. Historically, these plants have been used as both nutrition and as poison. Native Americans added small amounts of the flowers to their dishes for a sweet and nutritional flavoring. Those who consumed too much of the wildflower developed illness.

### Sources:

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