

Cushion Phlox

Phlox pulvinata



Along the rims above the breaks, Cushion Phlox is one of the earliest species to flower as temperatures warm in spring. Often the flowers cover the plant so thickly that it looks like a small patch of snow. Cushion Phlox is a classic example of the “cushion growth form” with a set of adaptations to the harsh, exposed conditions on the rims. By lying close to the ground, it is out of the wind where temperatures can be 10 degrees or more above air temperatures, an advantage early in the season. Its tightly packed, narrow leaves also lose less moisture to evaporation during dry summer conditions. Most of its biomass is located underground in a deep taproot that stores nutrients over the winter and anchors it in the erodible soils. These nutrients are mobilized in the spring to allow the plant to grow and flower quickly as soon as conditions are favorable and before the soils dry out.

Cushion Phlox is found throughout Utah and other areas of the southwest over a wide elevational range from sagebrush to alpine tundra communities.